

The Topos of the Attack on Courtly Banquets

There is a considerable number of passages in medieval literature where the court while feasting in the banquet hall is confronted by an unknown intruder. By any yardstick, a stranger arriving abruptly at a banquet to challenge the guests is a compelling story. Make this stranger supernatural or mysterious, and the scene becomes explosive. It affords a wide variety of narrative possibilities like the splendour of the dinner and the court, the beauty and excellence of its members and their elegant diversions, the outlandishness of the challenger and the courtiers' reaction. From another perspective, the setting allows the writer, and the readers, to rethink the boundaries between the enclosure of the court and the outside world. The court is traditionally marked out as a protected and privileged space: the invader, then, comes forth as a force of change for good or bad, which resets the balance between the court and the world.

And yet the motif has not been recorded either in literary criticism or motif indexes. The sole purpose of this article is to establish the topos of the attack on courtly banquets, which seems to have a strikingly international valence. For reasons of space, our primary focus is the period from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, which extends backwards in time (to include influential anterior tradition, that is, the classics, Hebrew and what is likely the initial occurrence of the topos in Babylonian), as well as forward (to add post-medieval romances and a single scene from Shakespeare). No attempt is made to list every occurrence of the motif. Only those examples are recorded which are deemed more representative of the history of the topos. We only sample literatures which were read in the original (the two exceptions being Babylonian and Japanese, which were included in order to show how the popularity of the motif expands in time and place). The examples belong both to the learned and the demotic register of all languages, and are drawn from wildly divergent cultural backgrounds.

Due to this extreme separation, we will not here offer a cohesive narrative of possible mutual influences of these traditions, other than a sustained discussion of each example's contribution to the evolution of the motif. We will not examine now how these traditions became interrelated, or the ways in which the motif was adapted to different purposes according to such criteria as genre, cultural context, relationship to previous models, political or ideological tenor of the texts etc. Such considerations will have to wait for a future study, and the inquiry, we are confident, will be handsomely rewarded. At this stage, the

exclusive concern of the article is to prove that the motif existed in an unusually wide range of traditions.<sup>1</sup>

### I. BABYLONIAN LITERATURE

The advent of the theme could scarcely have been earlier: it appears in the Standard Babylonian version of the epic of *Gilgameš* from the second millennium BCE. King Gilgameš of Uruk is ravishing and superlatively wise. But he abuses his power. He terrorises the young men, and the women persistently complain to the gods who create from clay Enkidu, Gilgameš's counterpart, in order to curb the latter's harsh rule. In the beginning, Enkidu lives in an animal state with a herd of gazelles until he is seduced by a prostitute. The first assertion of his emergent humanity is to say that he intends to overthrow Gilgameš. To do this, he arrives at a wedding where everything is ready, and all are waiting for Gilgameš who habitually enjoys the privilege of *ius primae noctis*. Enkidu causes instant sensation among the townspeople with his looks which are comparable to the king's. When Gilgameš arrives, Enkidu blocks his path, and they wrestle.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the two heroes become intimate companions in their adventures.<sup>3</sup>

Already in this early manifestation of the motif there appears a frame. An outsider defies the court at a feast, and both sides are fiercely symbolic in their separate ways. Nevertheless, *Gilgameš* is atypical of the following instances in that this challenger's is a very real, albeit finally abandoned, threat—he outright wants to overthrow the king. This is no small matter: as the text makes explicit (I. 240-241), attacking the incumbent is an act of blasphemy. The outspoken irreverence will not be repeated in the next 3,600 years with almost exceptionless regularity.

### II. CLASSICAL TRADITION

The motif is moulded to the characteristics which will make it distinctive in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance by Homer and Virgil. In the *Odyssey*, Book 22, the eponymous hero returns and takes on the Achaean princes who are suitors of Penelope, his wife, in the hall of the palace of Ithaca. In an intriguing reversal of roles, the suitors are the outsiders who have occupied the court, while the legitimate king is displaced, and fights his way back in.

The suitors usurp Odysseus's household: they hold extravagant nightly banquets in the main chamber, which Penelope and her son, Telemachus, are too weak to stop. The long-absent king appears, unknown to all, disguised as a shabby old beggar: ἐδύσετο δώματ' Ὀδυσσεύς, / πτωχῶ λευγαλέῳ ἐναλίγκιος ἠδὲ γέροντι, / σκηπτόμενος· τὰ δὲ λυγρὰ

περὶ χροῖ εἵματα ἔστο (17. 336-338). [Odysseus entered the palace / in the likeness of a woeful and aged beggar, / leaning on a staff, and miserable were the clothes he wore about his body].<sup>4</sup>

He goes round the tables to collect in a pouch food thrown to him. In two feasts, where the princes entertain themselves sumptuously, he is reviled and abused by the revellers until, in one of the most memorable scenes in world literature,

ὁ γυμνώθη ῥακέων πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,  
 ἄλτο δ' ἐπὶ μέγαν οὐδόν, ἔχων βίον ἠδὲ φαρέτρην  
 ἰῶν ἐμπλείην, ταχέας δ' ἐκχεύατ' οἴστοις  
 αὐτοῦ πρόσθε ποδῶν (...)  
 καὶ ἰθύνετο πικρὸν οἴστον (22. 1-4, 8).

[<R>esourceful Odysseus stripped off his rags,  
 and sprang to the broad threshold with the bow and the quiver  
 full of arrows, and poured out the swift arrows  
 there before his feet (...), and aimed a bitter arrow].

Ridding the palace from the suitors is central to the *Odyssey*. The young princes of Achaea and Ithaca (probably 108 of them) have set up a state of affairs which deprives the hero of his standing, and would make nonsense of his return. They prey on his property which dwindles by the day (14. 17-19), they deprive his son of his rightful place (16. 122-128) and they heap shame on his house (1. 232-233) with their immoderate dinners (1. 225-229), by tempting Penelope to marry again (1. 249-250), by seducing some of the maids (20. 318-319) and by being disrespectful to the poor and helpless guests of Telemachus's (20. 299-300, 374).

Two points will have an impact on the later development of the motif. The first is that, unlike *Gilgamesh*, the occupants of the court are a fellowship. Although there are differences between individual princes, Homer often emphasises that they are an undifferentiated group.<sup>5</sup> They share an ethos—one of hubris and insolence at that (1. 254). They act as a body sitting together at the Ithacan assembly, and they refuse membership to anyone who is not already among their numbers (16. 361-362). They take common action in an ambush to kill Telemachus (4. 663-674). They are actually called “fellows” (18. 350, ἐτάροισιν).

The other factor that configures our topos is that Homer consistently uses the settings of eating and banquet to portray the suitors as hubristic and insolent. As early as Book 1, the suitors are introduced by means of Athena's resonant disapproval of the fact that they αἰεὶ μῆλ' ἀδινὰ σφάζουσι καὶ εἰλίποδας ἔλικας βοῦς (1. 91-92) [they continue to slay his [Odysseus's] thronging sheep and his spiral-horned shambling cattle]. A little later,

Telemachus embarrassed by the undignified noise and arrogance of the diners sets a table for his guest (Athena disguised as a man) away from the others lest he (that is, the goddess) find the meal unpleasant (1. 132-134). Time and again, the suitors are identified as shameless eaters who parasite the missing lord's food (1. 160; 17.530-538; 20. 390-394; 21. 68-70). Their impudence is rendered by descriptions of excess and overindulgence (2. 55-58; 14. 248-256). Their immodest laughter is connected to lurid details of the food they devour:

μνηστήρσι δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη  
 ἄσβεστον γέλω ἄρσε, παρέπλαγξεν δὲ νόημα.  
 οἱ δ' ἤδη γναθμοῖσι γελοίων ἀλλοτρίοισιν,  
 αἰμοφόρυκτα δὲ δὴ κρέα ἤσθιον (20. 345-348).

[among the suitors Pallas Athene  
 Aroused unquenchable laughter, and turned their wits awry.  
 And now they laughed with lips that seemed not theirs,  
 And all bedabbled with blood was the meat they ate.]

The backdrop, nevertheless, is a proper courtly banquet flanked by games and singing. Before the hall, “μνηστήρες δὲ πάροιθεν Ὀδυσσεύος μεγάροιο / δίσκοισιν τέρποντο καὶ αἰγανέησιν ἰέντες, / ἐν τυκτῷ δαπέδῳ, ὅθι περ πάρος ὕβριν ἔχοντες” (17. 167-169) [And the suitors meanwhile in front of the palace of Odysseus / were making merry, throwing the discus and the javelin / in a levelled place, as their custom was, in insolence of heart]. Afterwards, “αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο / μνηστήρες, τοῖσιν μὲν ἐνὶ φρεσὶν ἄλλα μεμήλει, / μολπή τ' ὀρχηστὺς τε· τὰ γὰρ τ' ἀναθήματα δαιτός” (1. 150-152) [Now after the suitors had put away the desire for food and drink, / their hearts turned to other things / to song and to dance; for these things are the crowns of a feast]. And again, “οἱ δ' εἰς ὀρχηστὺν τε καὶ ἱμερόεσσαν αἰοδὴν / τρεψάμενοι τέρποντο, μένον δ' ἐπὶ ἔσπερον ἐλθεῖν” (18. 304-305) [But the suitors turned to dance and heart-stirring song / and made merry, and waited till evening should come].

Foreshadowing the symbolic geography of the medieval court, these banquets become the semiotic space of privilege and a shared spirit which is not meant to be upset. Melanthous, the goat-herd, and Antinous, the chief rogue among the princes, bristle with anger when they fear that a beggar (the disguised Odysseus, in fact) might spoil their feast (17. 220 and 377, δαιτῶν ἀπολυμαντήρα-ες, and again in 17. 446, δαιτός ἀνίην). Participation in these revels is an honour to be earned: when the suitors improvise a cruel fight for their amusement between two wretched beggars (one is Odysseus under cover) the premier prize is that the winner “αἰεὶ αὐθ' ἡμῖν μεταδαίσεται” (18. 48) [he shall always feast with us]. Protected spaces are usually constructed around a principle, and it is made

abundantly clear that the suitors' is out-and-out shallow: νῦν δὲ περὶ πτωχῶν ἐριδαίνομεν, οὐδέ τι δαιτὸς / ἐσθλῆς ἔσσεται ἡδός (...) (18. 403-404) [But now we are brawling about beggars, nor shall there be any joy in our rich feast], somebody complains when the joke with the beggars' fighting goes a tad too far. Throughout, Odysseus stands opposite the suitors as a paragon of honour and dignity: the notion of shame is mentioned but once in relation to these feasts, and it is by him (19. 12-13).

The pattern that comes into view will prevail until the end of the Middle Ages. An outside warrior in disguise appears at the court while a banquet is in progress. The single interloper faces the insiders in hostility. Both he and the court have a distinct set of values.

Virgil's *Aeneid*, a work more known to the Western Middle Ages than the *Odyssey*, retains the plot structure, but introduces two differences that will be centralised in the Middle Ages. The first is that in Virgil there is manifest religiosity, which was not the case in *Odyssey* despite Athena's presence. A religious feeling, it could be argued, brings the motif a step closer to the idea of the Arthurian court strung together in its mission to excel in chivalry which partly comprises the Christian faith in an often inimical world.

When the foremost princes of Latium want to fight Aeneas and his comrades, the god of the river Tiber comes to the hero in a dream, and advises that he enter a pact with the Arcadians who, under king Evander, have been in relentless war with the Latins. Aeneas sails in two ships, and interrupts Evander who in front of the city together with his son and senate is paying a yearly tribute to Hercules and the gods. Awed by the unexpected sight of foreign ships, the Arcadians rise at once and abandon the feast tables. Pallas, Evander's son, hastens to confront the intruders.

ut celsas videre rates atque inter opacum  
adlabi nemus et tacitos incumbere remis,  
terrentur visu subito cunctique relictis  
consurgunt mensis. audax quos rumpere Pallas  
sacra vetat raptoque volat telo obvius ipse (...) (8. 107-111).

[When they saw the high ships, saw them gliding up between the shady woods and noiselessly plying their oars, they are alarmed by the sudden sight, and rise up as one, quitting the feast [tables]. But Pallas, undaunted, forbids them to break off the rites and, seizing his spear, flies to meet the strangers himself (...)].<sup>6</sup>

Pallas and Evander will eventually offer Aeneas something he is not used to, their friendship.<sup>7</sup> The banquet is resumed and described in some detail:

[Euandrus] dapes iubet et sublata reponi  
pocula gramineoque viros locat ipse sedili,  
praecipuumque toro et villosi pelle leonis  
accipit Aenean solioque invitat acerno.

tum lecti iuvenes certatim araeque sacerdos  
 viscera tosta ferunt taurorum, onerantque canistris  
 dona laboratae Cereris, Bacchumque ministrant.  
 vescitur Aeneas simul et Troiana iuventus  
 perpetui tergo bovis et lustralibus extis.

Postquam exempta fames et amor compressus edendi,  
 rex Euandrus ait... (8. 175-185).

[he [Evander] orders the repast and cups, by now removed, to be replaced, and with his own hand ranges the guests on the grassy seat, and chief in honour he welcomes Aeneas to the cushion of a shaggy lion's hide, and invites him to a maple throne. Then chosen youths, and the priest of the altar, in emulous haste bring roast flesh of bulls, pile on baskets the gifts of Ceres, fashioned well, and serve the wine of Bacchus. Aeneas and with him the warriors of Troy feast on the long chine of an ox and the sacrificial meat. When hunger was banished and the desire of food stayed, King Evander spoke (...)].

The passage owes much of its force to the novelty that was for Aeneas to be introduced to Evander's religion, a particular cult fusing Greek and Roman worship.<sup>8</sup> Evander's notionally beleaguered royal company is, among other things, a religious group that disseminates its truth to the outside world which is personified by Aeneas.

Virgil's second novelty presages the psychological subtlety with which some medieval writers will express the theme at hand. The *Aeneid* creates a space that allows us to imagine the metamorphosis of the feelings and thoughts of the heroes when things end up being not what they seemed, and the distinctions between enemies and friends collapse. There is never any attempted attack on the court. The outsiders come in peace, but their intentions are initially misconstrued by those inside who, after the first pang of fear, spring to defend their land. The misunderstanding is resolved, and the two parties form an earnest alliance. They do not have opposing values and interests, quite the contrary.

### **JEWISH SOURCES**

Three constituents of the theme are standardised in the Bible, in assorted rabbinical parables, and in mystical/cabbalistic texts: the feast, which is now mostly a wedding or a celebration; the challenger, who is almost always Satan or the Angel of Death; and the disguise, which takes the form of a beggar (occasionally, a woman). On the other hand, the Jewish tradition departs from Greco-Latin literature on two accounts: the martial content is removed, and the banquet becomes intensely allegorical. In the examples that follow, eating and drinking signal the fallibility of this world (which can be counteracted by charity to the poor and humility). The opulent feast comes to be the obvious allegory

for such self-indulgence, and the faithful are tested by outsiders in tales of unmistakable didacticism.

Intertwined with this eschatology, although less directly involved with the development of our motif, is another potent theme of apocalyptic Jewish literature, the positive depiction of the “Messianic Banquet.” This is a widespread symbol of the joys of the new age that binds the participants in a fellowship of the elect. Examples ranging from early Jewish to early Christian literatures include the non-canonical 1 Enoch 60:24 and 62:14, and the Rule of the Community at Qumran (particularly 1QS 6:1-23), as well as Exodus 24.11, Isaiah 25:6, and, in the New Testament, Matthew 8:11-12; 22:1-4, and the Last Supper in Luke 22:14-30.<sup>9</sup>

Both narrative lines decisively heightens the religiosity of Virgil (and especially Homer) which appears more worldly by comparison. The combined weight of the double Jewish tradition makes a crucial contribution to the anagogical symbolism of medieval thought that makes the court an allegory for perfection.

Perhaps the best-known case of a deadly threat delivered at a banquet is the Writing-on-the-wall episode in Daniel 5. When God decides to take revenge on Babylon, he uses the Persian kings Darius and Cyrus as his instruments. The Persians pit war against the hated Chaldeans whose king is Belshazzar. To celebrate a victory, Belshazzar gives a great banquet לְרִבְרֵבָנֵיהֶי אֵלֶּךָ (“for a thousand”, or possibly “thousands”, “of his lords”). The inebriated king orders that the servants bring out the vessels which Nabuchadnezzar took from the Temple of Jerusalem, so that his men and concubines drink in them. While Belshazzar and his guests are carousing, an angel writes on the wall the ominous מְנֵא מְנֵא תִקֵּל וּפְרָסִין (Mene, Mene, Tekel and Parsin) in red ink. The words are unseen by all but the king who, shaken, seeks Daniel’s advice. The prophet explains that Belshazzar’s days are numbered. That night the king is decapitated by an old servant who is exasperated at the desecration of the vessels.<sup>10</sup>

In a recast of the topos of the attack dated between the fifth and tenth centuries CE, Rabbi Reuben is notified by the מלאך המוות (Angel of Death) that his only son will die.<sup>11</sup> The rabbi is resigned, and only asks for a thirty-day respite in order to marry the young man. On the twenty-ninth day, the son meets the prophet Elijah who tells him that the Angel will appear at the banquet as צואין סמרטורין בגדים [one more man wearing dirty ragged clothes, p. 98, l. 28], and advises the groom to receive him well. Disarmed by the love shown the groom by his young wife-to-be, the Angel grants each family member seventy more years to live.

The Angel of Death, “messenger of the Omnipresent” in the original (שְׁלוּחוֹ שֶׁל מְקוֹם), appears again in a much-later cognate version of this parable.<sup>12</sup> A beautiful and pious woman has already lost three husbands on their respective wedding days. When a cousin

wants to marry her, he is warned by Elijah at the wedding dinner that he will be approached by a stranger:

בֵּא אֱלֹהִי עִנִי לְבוֹשׁ בְּגָדִים שְׁחֹרָיִם וְקַרְוָעִים, יַחַף תֵּיגַע, שְׁעָרָי כִּמוֹ מַסְמָרִים, עֵנִי שְׂאֵף כְּמוֹהוּ בְּכָל הָעֹלָם.

[a pauper will come to you, dressed in torn black clothes; he will be barefoot and weary and his hair will look like nails. He will appear to you as if he is the poorest man in the world.<sup>13</sup>]. The Angel soon makes his demand on the groom's life, but the bride, with a clever interpretation of the Torah, according to which newly-weds are spared all duties for a year, including yielding to Death, makes the Angel leave without success.

In another parable of the end of the thirteenth century, Satan, "Accuser" in the original (מקטרג), turns up uninvited at the feast given by Abraham when his son Isaac is weaned. This is a magnificent function where kings and princes are present. The Accuser, who always goes to feasts to punish the hosts who are too selfish to provide for the poor, is now disguised as a poor person [כגוונא דמסכנא], and poses as a well-wisher. Despite Abraham's proverbial hospitality, the Accuser/guest remains unattended, because both Abraham and Sarah are otherwise occupied (he with taking care of the guests; she with trying to convince their wives that Isaac is her genuine child). That a needy guest is not served is a breach of the law, and Satan goes on to accuse Abraham before God, who reluctantly succumbs and decrees that Isaac be sacrificed and Sarah die of her anguish.<sup>14</sup>

### *MEDIEVAL WEST*

The topos is extensively employed in Western literature. For reasons of economy, in this section we shall focus on courtly and Arthurian literature from the twelfth century until the late fifteenth in composite romances, i.e. demotic works cast in courtly discourse. From the start, four staples are observed. First, the court is presented as resplendent whether it is described in some detail, or sketched out in formulaic *loci*. Second, the challenge delivered by the intruder is to a central principle that brings the fellowship of the court together. Third, the element of the fantastic, which may or may not include magic as such, is emphasized. Last, provoking the court triggers further adventures, often along a narrative course which is completely different from the one followed to that point.

This last characteristic, that is, the way the attack delivers the plot change, becomes a marker for the division between the imaginative and the standard uses of the topos. The attack on the court is constantly reinvented by writers who cater for demanding audiences that appreciate departures from the expected quality of themes. From early on in its career, however, interspersed are the uses of the topos as a device which seems to serve no other purpose than to facilitate a change of scenes. For the sake of clarity the following presentation will conform to this division.



## A.

Our earliest example of the sophisticated application of the motif is from the twelfth century: Chrétien de Troyes opens “Lancelot” with a description of an attack on a courtly feast. Of note here is the anonymity of the challenger (only much later will it become known who he is). This, of course, is seen repeatedly in courtly romances, but as employed by Chrétien it helps reset the topos by rendering the enemy impersonal and a symbolic figure, a pure metaphor for challenge from without.

On Ascension Day Arthur holds a dazzling court. Many noble companions are in attendance and the queen is accompanied by many ladies “Bien parlant an langue françoise” (l. 40).<sup>15</sup> While the court is still dining,

A tant ez vos un chevalier  
Qui vint a cort molt acesmez,  
De totes ses armes armez (ll. 44-46).

The knight discourteously offers no greeting to the king. He says that he holds in captivity many knights and ladies of the court, but he is not there to return them. Instead, he punctures the court’s consciousness of self. Is there a single knight, he asks, whom Arthur trusts so much as to entrust him with the care of none other than the queen who must meet the challenger in the woods? The stranger will wait for them there, and he will return the prisoners if the king’s champion is able to defend the queen (ll. 70-9). Arthur cannot but accept. Kay takes the mission, and Guinevere is later lost. Her disappearance causes the frantic search by another anonymous knight, the “Chevalier de la Charrette”, the hero who will later be revealed to be Lancelot.

Chrétien repeats the motif later in the same romance. Lancelot, still unidentified, is on his way to the perilous adventure of the Pont de l’Espee when he is enjoying the heart-warming hospitality of the knight from Logres and his family. Their supper is suddenly interrupted by a proud knight armed to the teeth who rudely approaches Lancelot, and hurls abuse at him (ll. 2632-2641). He offers to help Lancelot cross the dreaded bridge at the preposterous price of cutting his head once he is on the other side of the water. If Lancelot does not accept, continues the challenger, they should do battle there and then. They go out, Lancelot wins, but shows mercy and does not kill his opponent until a lady appears and demands the vanquished knight’s head. Lancelot finally obliges.<sup>16</sup>

Action here is sparser than in the previous scene, and the sharper focus on a single hero transforms the symbolism: with distant echoes of the Last Supper, Lancelot becomes a Christ-like figure who is due to suffer before he saves the queen (as indeed he does while crossing the bridge). The attacker, tempting the hero as, *mutatis mutandis*, Satan tempted Christ (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13), is now sheer evil and not just a chal-

lenger to courtly etiquette like the earlier intruder. Chrétien's penchant for nuance offers two fresh versions of the motif in quick succession.

From the second half of the twelfth century, there comes another powerful example. In a brilliant piece of *merveilleux*, the literature that thematises supernatural and fantastic elements, Marie de France fuses the distinction between being inside and outside the court, and ultimately deflates our reliance on pre-conceived categories. In the *lai* called "Bisclavret", the attacker is a member of the court, though he could hardly be any stranger.<sup>17</sup> The eponymous baron of Brittany, who "Beaus chevalers e bons esteit" (l. 17), has a closely-guarded secret: he is a werewolf by night. When his wife finds out, she convinces him to tell her where he hides his clothes while he is transformed, which are the only means for him to become human again when he puts them back on. The wife has her lover steal the clothes, and the baron remains a wolf, endlessly wandering in the woods. While hunting, the king finds the beast, is impressed by its nobility, and takes it to court where it is loved by all, and, of course, never harms anyone. One day,

A une curt ke li rei tint  
Tuz les baruns aveit mandez,  
Ceus ki furent de lui chaisez,  
Pur aider sa feste a tenir  
E lui plus beal faire servir (ll. 186-190).

Among them, "Richement e bien aturnez" (l. 192), arrives the wife's lover, and is immediately attacked by the baron/wolf (De plain esleis vers lui curut; / As denz le prist, vers lui le trait, ll. 198-199), only to be saved by the king at the last minute. Everybody is puzzled by the kind wolf suddenly turning violent. Later, Bisclavret's wife throws in a grand appearance, but

Quant Bisclavret la veit venir,  
Nul hum nel poeit retenir;  
Vers li curut cum enragiez.  
Oiez cum il est bien vengiez!  
Le neis li esracha del vis (ll. 231-235).

A suspecting courtier prompts the king to question the wife, and the truth is revealed. The clothes are produced, Bisclavret is reinstated, the adulterous couple is banned, and their offspring are stigmatised: they are born noseless to resemble their punished mother (l. 235).

In the thirteenth century there is a profusion of cases of attacks on courtly feasts. One of the oldest must be Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, written in Middle High German before 1200-1210. Wolfram draws on Marie's supernatural, but he stretches it towards absurdity in a string of related episodes. A damsel comes to court riding a mis-

erable-looking mule on an expensive bridle. She is called Cundrie the *surziere*, speaks all languages, and masters dialectics, geometry and astronomy. She looks utterly peculiar: her ears are ursal, her nose is canine and her teeth resemble a boar's. Cundrie tells Arthur that admitting Parzival to the Round Table is shameful, because the knight is guilty of many sins. While all ladies are distressed over the accusation, a sorrowful knight, Kingrimursel, carrying his sheathed sword, rides up to Arthur and Gawan [sic], and accuses the latter of treacherously murdering his lord. Gawan has to fight Kingrimursel to disprove the allegation which, if true, would disqualify him from the Round Table. The narrative veers off thereafter.<sup>18</sup>

Another German work of Arthurian literature is *Die Krone* composed in the Bavarian-Austrian dialect by 1225, and customarily ascribed to Heinrich von dem Türlin. It is a treasure-trove of resourceful revisits of well-worn commonplaces. In one adventure, Arthur is dining with his court on Christmas day. As the habit is, all are expecting something unusual to happen, and are delighted when an unknown rider arrives. He is extremely short and clad in fine wool and silk "nah der franzoiser sit" (l. 953).<sup>19</sup> His looks are extravagant, and Heinrich rams the point with an extensive description:

Sein antlütz was niht gestalt	Breit zweir spanne bloz.
Sam ander anplike.	Div nase was churtz vnd groz,
Sein vel, daz was dike	Vorn preit, enmitten flach.
Erwachsen von squamen.	Seins houptes obdach
Mir ist von seinem namen	Was har sam vischflozen.
Niht div warheit chvnt.	Jm warn auz gedozen
Dik, weit was sein mvnt.	Zwei orn breit vnd hoch.
Den dachten gran hie vnd da.	Ein vrömdiv varbe überzoch
Seiniv ougen waren eisgra,	Swartz, gra vnd ysenfar
Groz sam in strauzes ey.	Hend vnd antlütz gar,
Sein winbra schied entzwei	Oder swa sein iht des leibes blaht,
	Daze ez div wat niht daht (ll. 957-979).

[His skin was hidden by scales; his mouth was wide with thick lips that were covered here and there by a sparse moustache. His icy gray eyes were as large as ostrich eggs and were framed by lashes that extended to two spans of breadth; the nose was short and large, broad at the end and flat in the middle; the hair of his head was like fish fins; his ears protruded high and wide; and the coloring of his face, hands and whatever else his clothes did not hide was unusual, ranging from light gray to black].<sup>20</sup>

His steed is unreal too. It resembles a seal from the front and a dolphin from the back. Despite his appearance, the stranger addresses Arthur courteously, "en franzoys" as the text notes again (l. 1007), and says he is a messenger of King Priure. He brings a magic

tankard which can refuse people its services. Would Arthur allow his court to try? Far from a jolly pastime, it quickly becomes obvious, the game is nothing short of an assessment of one of the court's basic principles: the tankard will reveal which members are untrue (ll. 1163-1179).

The ladies take the test first, they try to drink but the tankard spills its contents, and they are all found wanting. Arthur and his barons are alarmed, though, in a perfect courtly fashion, they pin the blame on an outsider, the maker of the tankard, while the failed courtiers are not seriously reproached (ll. 1863-1874). Then, it is the gentlemen's turn. Arthur passes comfortably, but all other knights are unsuccessful, including Gawein and Lanzelet (Lancelot). Keii (Kay) summons the incomer to a duel which he loses. The messenger leaves the tankard with Arthur who can in the future play a similar drinking game that pays homage to the insularity of the courtly ideal: if a member cannot manage to bring the tankard to their lips, their shame will always be hidden. But should a stranger be unsuccessful, the blemish will be revealed (ll. 2589-2631).

Not all challengers are disguised or supernatural or even strange. The knight who defies the Arthurian court in the section of *Die Krone* known as "Das antern Gawein" is not extraordinary at all, just crude. Further, it is the court that at the aftermath of his visit proceeds to an extraordinary act.

In the preamble to the adventure proper (ll. 16497-16712), Gigamec cuts a dark figure. He wrongfully kills a knight and later in a scandalous display of uncourtly behaviour beheads Sir Aamanz (otherwise known as "Das andern Gawein" because of his resemblance to the famed hero). But there is no blood-curdling portrayal when he barges into the courtly feast –the unlawful decapitation is disapproved of as boorish, not really horrible. Gigamec appears at the court, now held in the Karadas castle in Karidagan, on the second day of the hunt for the White Stag, a very joyous function (there is also a contest to crown the most kissable of the ladies in attendance, ll. 16727-16735). Gigamec walks in as Arthur is enjoying fine entertainment, but, unlike other occasions when the approaching adventure is much anticipated, now the crudity of an intruder carrying the head of a Round Table knight destroys the festive mood. Gigamec announces that he defeated "Das andern Gawein". If anyone wants to avenge him, continues Gigamec, he will wait outside. He drops the head on the table, and exits. A protracted series of mourning scenes follows which is as striking as it is rare in a courtly context. In an intense moment, Keii, who leads the lamentations, blames God for allowing such a tragedy to happen (ll. 16967-16995). Everything is changed in the court now, and all celebrations cease. The courtiers tear their clothes and bodies, dishevel their hair, and beat their breasts (ll. 16996-17311).

*Gui de Warewic* is an Anglo-Norman romance of just under 13,000 lines of the early thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> It is important not only because it spawns a powerful tradition, but

also because it reconfigures many of the older conventions of romances. *Gui* brings two novelties to the topos of the attack. The intruder is the hero whom readers are likely to identify with, and he unleashes unprecedentedly raw energy in one of the most dramatic scenes of a raid on a royal feast.

Gui is the cup-bearer to Earl Roalt, and in love above his station with the earl's beautiful daughter, Felice who declares that she will rebuff him until he becomes the best knight in the world. In search of renown, Gui goes abroad, and hears that the Byzantine emperor, Hernis, is hard pressed by the sultan of Konya. With a hundred men he goes to Constantinople, where he is received warmly by the emperor, but the seneschal, the Greek baron with the improbable name of Morgadour, plots Gui's ruin. The seneschal convinces Hernis to send a single messenger to the sultan. Gui accepts the mission and dashes off. On horseback he enters the sultan's tent and finds him and his court assembled for dinner:

El trief a cheval entra,  
 Le soldan areisona;  
 Trové l'at el tref mangant,  
 Od lui sa compaignie grant,  
 Od set reis qui i mangerent,  
 Qui l'empereur mult manaserent (ll. 3895-3900).<sup>22</sup>

There are no two ways in putting how insulting he is:

Icel seigneur qui maint en halt,  
 Qui fait le freit e le chaut  
 E se leissa en croiz pener  
 Pur nus pecchurs d'enfern jeter  
 E qui en la mer fist l'esturgun,  
 Celui vus doinst sa maleiçun  
 E tuz iceles qui çaeinz vei  
 E qui creient et ta false lei! (ll. 3903-3910)

The sultan orders that Gui be arrested, but he,

Puis ad trait le brant d'ascer,  
 Des esperuns fiert le destrer.  
 "Soldains, dist il, vus le comparez,  
 Tut li premer la teste perdrez."  
 De la chaere d'or, la u il sist,  
 Le chef sur la table voler en fist,  
 De la main senestre le chef saisi,  
 Errament del paveillon eissi (ll. 3961-3968).

The Saracens hot on his heels, Gui returns to Hennis, parades the sultan's head on a lance amid general jubilation and has a marble pillar built to display the head, while the emperor "Plus de cent feiz l'ad beisé" (l. 4089).

Girart d'Amiens's *Escanor* (end of the thirteenth century) offers a shaded take on the topos of the attack on banquets. If in Marie, as we saw, the distinctions between belonging and not belonging to the court are blurred, here they implode, particularly as readers' attention is not distracted by supernatural elements. The interloper is not a member of the Round Table, but he is a consummate knight, and he is invited to reside, albeit temporarily, at the Arthurian court in which he fits perfectly, and of which, under other circumstances, he could be a member. At another angle, Girart's treatment is unique because it is the first time that the perfection of the courtly ideal is called into question. The challenger does not violate or interrupt the courtly routine as his predecessors did. He abides by the protocol, only he grows weary of it, and withdraws.

For Pentecost, Arthur hosts a grand feast with a jousting exhibition tournament at Karadigan, "Et tint cort riche et plentiveuse, / Bele, noble, large et joieuse" (ll. 6915-6916).<sup>23</sup> At dinner a handsome knight, presently unknown but later to be identified as Escanor, lord of the Blanche Montaigne, arrives. He goes straight to the king, and accuses Gavain of having killed his cousin by deceit (ll. 6973-6975). He wants to take revenge. A duel is the proper course of action, but Gavain is absent. Lancelot speaks in Gavain's behalf, and is followed by a number of other peers. The knight insists (ll. 7106-7110). Arthur invites him to stay at the court for as long as he pleases while waiting for Gavain, and he does so, but, bored with inaction, finally leaves (ll. 7120-7198). The court is left angry at the slight passed on Gavain's honour, and we are left wondering if they also feel bruised by the snub administered to them.<sup>24</sup>

*Kyng Alisaunder*, written in the early fourteenth century, includes a fantastical attack on the court – a magical beast takes on the diners. The break with anterior tradition is that *Alisaunder* casually accepts the supernatural which it transforms into action, and is not in the least interested in moralising. King Philipp is having a feast whose description has recourse to accounts that must be well known to its readers:

A day it fel þe kyng a feste  
 Wolde helden, swiþe honeste,  
 Of dukes, of princes, of barouns,  
 Of kniȝttes of his regiouns [...]  
 Þai comen to þe kynges sonde,  
 Gentyl men of fele londe.  
 To þe mete þay weren ysett,  
 Ne miȝtten men ben serued bett,  
 Noiþer in mete ne in drynk (ll. 531-534, 537-541).<sup>25</sup>

Suddenly, a dragon “þere com jn fleen” (l. 545):

His tayl was fyue fadem lang;  
 Þe fyre out at his nose-þerles sprang.  
 By þre, by foure, myd þe tayle  
 To þe grounde he smoot saunz fayle.  
 Wiþ þe mouþe he made a beere  
 So al þe halle shulde ben a-ferre.  
 Þe kyng had wel grete hawe;  
 All his barouns to chaumbre drawe (ll. 547-554).

The spectacle will turn out to be the product of the sorcerer Neptanabus who in the past was able to trick Olympias, Philipp’s wife, into sleeping with him. The king is upset, but is placated when his trusted clerk Antyfon interprets the apparition as an omen that Olympias will give birth to a son who will conquer the world.

A relatively underappreciated Middle High German Arthurian romance is the *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* by Clauss Wisse and Philipp Colin, firmly assigned to 1331-1336. This is a 63,000-line emendation of Wolfram’s *Parzifal* and Chrétien’s *Lancelot*, notable for the way the two compilers secularise the French and German *Parzifal* tradition.<sup>26</sup> The *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* features two instances of our topos.

In the first, magic, a standard component of romance, is employed to draw an entirely originary breath-stopping episode which anticipates one of the most famous scenes in medieval literature in the later *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to be discussed below. Arthur is celebrating Whitsun at Karidol. At the dinner, he refuses to drink water until there is an adventure. The necromancer Sir Elyafres, fabulously attired in ermine with a chaplet and a golden circlet on his head, rides his white horse up to the royal table, and proposes a game: one of the knights in attendance will cut his head, and, in turn, have his own head struck off. Everyone declines, and the wizard scorns them, but the newly knighted Karados, who is unknowingly Elyafres’s son, decapitates the challenger. Without delay, the sorcerer restores the head, and Karados agrees to meet him a year later. Arthur and his knights depart outraged.<sup>27</sup>

The second challenge to the court assembled at dinner in the *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* is reminiscent of the tankard test in *Die Krone* which was presented above. It deserves attention because it stays away from a conventionally glorified picture of the court, and gives a glimpse of daily squabbles and personal tensions. At Whitsun, King Karados and Queen Gyngenier attend Arthur’s feast at Karliun. Arthur refuses to drink water, because, again, he is waiting for an adventure to happen. A knight in red carrying a sword and an ivory horn appears. The horn, named Bonet, is magic, and will not allow a man with a faithless wife to drink without spilling its contents. Arthur accepts the challenge, although his

queen tries to dissuade him. He fails, as all his knights do with the exception of Karados. This arouses the jealousy of many, and Gyngenier is sent home for safety. Karados remains at Karliun to pursue other exploits, and the narrative changes path.<sup>28</sup>

In the *Gests of King Alexander of Macedon* (1340-1370), Philipp “made of folke a feaste full ryche” (l. 975).<sup>29</sup> Olympias is present, when “Nectanabus by nigremauncie neew hym attires / And in a dragounes drem hee dreew to þe halle” (ll. 981-982). The scene is remarkable for bordering on being *risqué*:

þan farde hee forthe too þe faire queene  
And hee holdes his hed right in hur lappe  
And kisses þat cumly in knoweing of all (ll. 987-989).

To leave, “þe dragoun dreew him awaie with drift of his winges” (l. 998).

A celebrated case of the motif appears in the late-fourteenth-century romance that we call *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (SGGK). The narrative does not differ largely from the analogue in the earlier *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* already discussed, but the alliterative SGGK manages to capture magnificently the shock of the decapitation.

It is Christmas at Camelot, and Arthur celebrates with the best knights and the most wonderful ladies to have walked on earth. The feast lasts fifteen days: they play games, and, when they retreat to the hall, conversation is intelligent, food and drink are exquisite, dancing is superb. The king is the best looking, but he does not eat or drink, unless, typically, he either hears a story, or (in an affirmation of the popularity of our topos by this time) one of his knights is challenged by an outsider (ll. 96-99).<sup>30</sup> Then, a frightful sight crops up: a massive man appears at the door. He is green from head to toes including his garment. His horse, too, is all green with some gold in the mane. He has no helmet or hauberk on, but holds in one hand a sprig of holly and in the other an impressive axe. The knights are petrified: “al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten / In a swoghe sylence þurȝ þe sale riche” (l. 242-243). When the Green Knight speaks, he clearly threatens their existence. I am here, he thunders,

for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyȝe,  
And þy burȝ and þy burnes best ar holden,  
Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,  
þe wyȝtest and þe worþyest of þe worldes kynde (ll. 258-261).

The formidable challenge is unleashed. Any one knight present can strike once, unopposed, the newcomer with his axe; twelve months later the same knight must receive the return blow. Gawain accepts, beheads the giant, who nonchalantly picks up his severed head, repeats the terms of the contest, and departs. Gawain consequently embarks on one of



the most unforgettable sets of adventures in medieval literature which are both personal trials and tests of the chivalric ideal of the Round Table.

Two further examples emerge in the English *Awntyrs off Arthure*, ascribed to 1400-1430, which is justifiably valued for its stanza form, one the most demanding rhyming alliterative verses in the English language.<sup>31</sup> Scholarly interest has also been attracted to the romance's enigmatic bipartite structure. The *Awntyrs* are a diptych of stories which seem to be loosely related. Far from offering concrete moral teaching, the poem invites the reader to discover "a potentiality for meaning" by making sense of the two disjoint plots: it is entirely open to interpretation how the unresolved conflicts of principle in the first part bear on the single combat in the second.<sup>32</sup>

The former section is an adaptation of a popular tale of religious devotion.<sup>33</sup> For the first time the outlander is not a fighter but the ghost of an old lady; this makes her operate entirely at the level of the heroes' consciousness: she is speaking to their minds as it is. The intruder takes further the mild disapproval of the court practices voiced in Girart d'Amiens's *Escanor*. In a harangue, she castigates the court's ethos of self-indulgence which is a founding principle of that fellowship: up to that point there are no descriptions of it other than in terms of gratification. That the author takes issue in a robust and unequivocal way with nothing short of the court as such is underlined by the way the court reacts to the ghost's criticism. It resorts to the function which best typifies its imperviousness to the outside world: it throws a feast.<sup>34</sup> The effect is much enhanced by the fact that the poet does not take an obvious side in the moral debate he sets up.

The scene opens with a show of courtly grandeur. Arthur is at Carlisle with his dukes and legendary companions. They hunt and are splendid in their robes.

Whan he to Carlele was comen, that conquerour kydde,  
 With dukes and dussiperes þat with þe dere dwelles;  
 To hunte at þe herdes þat longe had ben hydde,  
 On a day þei hem dight to þe depe delles,  
 To fall of þe femailes in forest were frydde,  
 Fayre by þe fermyson in frithes and felles.  
 Thus to wode arn þei went, þe wlonkest in wedes,  
 Bothe þe kyng and þe quene,  
 And al þe doughti bydene (ll. 3-11).<sup>35</sup>

Gawain escorts Queen Gaynour (Guinevere). There follows a vivid description of the queen's clothes, and their carefree hunting. Suddenly, "Fast byfore vndre þis ferly con fall / And þis mekel mervaille þat I shal of mene" (ll. 72-73). The day becomes dark, the king is distressed (a portent of impending misfortune) and a storm breaks out (ll. 75-78, 81). In this foreboding setting, the "grisselist goost" (l. 99) appears.

In the lyknes of Lucyfere, layetheste in Helle,  
 And glides to Dame Gaynour þe gates full gayne,  
 zauland zamerly, with many loude zelle.  
 Hit zaulles, hit zameres, with wannynge wete,  
 And seid, with siking sare,  
 “I ban þe body me bare!  
 Alas, now kindeles my care;  
 I gloppen, and I grete” (ll. 84-91).

The poet does not spare effort in dwelling on how hideous the ghost looks:

Bare was þe body and blak to þe bone,  
 Al biclagged in clay vncomly cladde.  
 Hit waried, hit waymented, as a woman,  
 But nauthyr on hide ne on huwe no heling hit hadde.  
 Hit stemered, hit stonayde, hit stode as a stone;  
 Hit marred, hit memered, hit mused for madde.[...]  
 Al glowed as a glede þe goste þere ho glides,  
 Vmbeclipped in a cloude of cleþyng vnclere;  
 Serkeled with serpentis þat sat to þe sides (ll. 105-110, 118-120).

She is none other than Guinevere's mother. The reason she is suffering now is the sins of flesh she committed when she was alive (Þat is luf paramour, listes and delites, l. 213). She is also guilty of pride and avarice (Pride with þe appurtenaunce, as prophetez han tolde, l. 239). The spectre cauterises the behaviour of the royal circle at feasts (With riche dayntés on des þi diotes arn dizt, l. 183). She prophesises Arthur's downfall on moral grounds, “Your king is to couetous” (l. 265), and advises, “Haue pité on þe poer” (l. 173). The ghost passes, the sun shines (ll. 326, 329). The royal company gather around the queen (l. 332), she tells all about the apparition, and they adjourn to sit to another feast (ll. 335-338).

This is where the second episode, the more conventional of the two, takes place. The banquet is sumptuous (ll. 339-342). All of a sudden, a beautiful lady, radiantly dressed, arrives, leading a “riall renke” (l. 460), a princely warrior. He is well dressed, impeccably armed and good-looking (ll. 352-359, 378-397). The king gallantly welcomes the knight (ll. 361-364). The newcomer lifts the visor, and composedly challenges Arthur:

“Whether thou be cayser or king, her I þe becalle  
 Fore to finde me a freke to fight with my fille.  
 Fighting to fraist I fonded fro home” (ll. 410-412).

He accuses the king of treacherously usurping his lands: “Þou has wonen hem in werre with a wrange wile / And geven hem to Sir Gawayn - þat my hert grylles” (ll. 421-422).

Epitomising chivalry, Arthur invites the knight to stay the night before he asks for his name. The king promises the knight, Sir Galoron, a match with a champion the next day.

In the meantime, Galeron is lavishly put up care of Gawain (ll. 439-459) who takes up the challenge over Arthur's objections. In a vehement fight, which is described in detail (ll. 495-618), they both prove to be extremely brave. In the end, Galeron concedes defeat (ll. 639-641), the two exchange fiefs (ll. 664-685), and are created dukes (l. 695). Galeron joins the Round Table (ll. 700-702), while the reader is left to consider whether the superb chivalry of the second half is really part of the fallibility lambasted in the first.

In *Torrent of Portugal*, a Middle English popular romance of the fifteenth century, the episode is typical: the banquet is the *locus* where glaring injustice is being redressed.<sup>36</sup> Torrent bursts into the Hall where the King of Portugal is marrying his daughter Desonell to the prince of Aragon, although he promised Torrent he would be the groom if he accomplished a number of deeds, which he achieved with dedication.

He wold not in passe,  
Till at the myd mete was  
The kyng and meny a knight;  
As they satt at theyre mete glade,  
In at the hall dur he rade  
In armes ffeyre and bryght,  
With a squire, that is ffre;  
Vp to the lady ryduth he,  
That rychely was i-dight.  
“Lordys,” he said, “among you all  
I challenge thre coursus in the hall,  
Or Delyuer her me with right!” (ll. 1140-1151)

The prince of Aragon accepts, only to lose pitifully in the lists, and is carried indoors “with littul worship” (l. 1183). Torrent will press his case, but not before everybody is assembled at hall for supper: “He wold not in passe/ Till they at myd mete was / On the other day at none” (ll. 1188-1190). The King of Arragon takes offence, a fight between the two champions is arranged, and the story veers off.

Dating to the end of the fifteenth century, *Lancelot of the Laik* is a Scottish metrical romance which adapts a part of the much longer French vulgate *Lancelot*.<sup>37</sup> In a certain respect, *Lancelot of the Laik* is comparable to *Escanor* and *Awntyrs off Arthure*: the ways of the king are deeply flawed. Unlike the older romances, however, here the challenger instigates a chain reaction which results in rectifying the royal defects, and the poet is unambiguously supportive of the courtly ideal.

King Arthur, “wiche had of al this worlde the floure / Of chevelry anerding to his crown” (ll. 344-345), is in Carlisle one perfect early April. Under the veneer, the fellowship is ill-at-ease for lack of adventures. Vexed by two terrible dreams, Arthur returns to Camelot

where ten of his best sages predict that he will be deprived of all honours. For diversion, Arthur hunts with his knights. When they are having their meal,

So cam therin an agit knyght; and hee  
Of gret esstat semyt for to bee,  
Anarmyt all, as tho it was the gyss,  
And thus the King he salust on this wiss (ll. 543-546).

The message he brings is that King Galiot, who is the tallest knight, wise, liberal, humble, courageous and not yet twenty-four, demands that Arthur surrender to him. A war ensues, in which Arthur's men fail him repeatedly. In a very interesting part of the romance, the longest digression from the French original, Arthur's trusted wise man, Amytans, offers extensive advice to the king. He is losing, Amytans warns him, "And the quhy stant in thyne awn offens" [your own offence is why they [your people] fail you, l. 1497]. One of the major faults of Arthur is that he let King Ban down (his vassal and Lancelot's father). Amytans gives Arthur advice on how a good king should deport himself. In the course of the war, Arthur follows Amytans's instructions, and this changes his warriors who now "Rathar to dee than flee, in thar entent" (l. 3361). The romance incompletely stops at line 3,487, but this much is clear –Arthur's change is catalysed by the war with Galiot. The result of the mysterious challenger, then, amounts to saving the perfect and ideal king who, in turn, guarantees the perfect and ideal fellowship.

## B.

Interchangeably with its more complex variants the theme of attacking the court at a banquet is found in texts which seem to be only interested in starting a new plot line. The earliest of the examples to be presented in this article is *Beove*, one of the most successful tales of exile and return in the Middle Ages. The Anglo-Norman version was probably written in the last decade of the twelfth century.<sup>38</sup> The titular hero is born to the ageing count Gui of Hampton and the daughter of the king of Scotland. His mother prefers Doon, the emperor of Germany, to his father and conspires to have Doon kill Gui. She also attempts unsuccessfully to have her son murdered. The young hero escapes and secretly grows up as a shepherd in a distant place, but is aware of his true identity. In the fullness of time, he arms himself and returns to Hampton. The three major recensions, French, Anglo-Norman and English, vary noticeably but the attack of the disguised Beove on the court remains stable.<sup>39</sup>

As the French *Beove* puts it,

Li enfes Bueves trestout sentrecanga,  
Des fieus Sobaut [Beove's tutor] une robe enprunta,

De laiens saut, un grant baston porta;  
 Dieu a juré qui le monde forma  
 Que a Doon un si grant caup donra,  
 Que ja a tant nus mires n'i venra;  
 Vers le palais contre mont s'adrecha,  
 Quant fu a l'uis, un petit aresta  
 Et voit la gent qui le mengier porta  
 Si est entrés, onques ne redouta,  
 Envers Doon si tres pres s'aprocha  
 Que le connut a la table u menga,  
 Les lui sa mere, qui sovent l'acola,  
 Onques por honte de la gent nel laisa (ll. 382-395).<sup>40</sup>

The description of the grand hall is the most elaborate in the history of the motif, replete with a valet, musicians, a minstrel and a *jougleor* who advises Doon not to fear Beove, “Cil la est Beuves vos parens que voi la, / Un grant baston par derier son dos a” (ll. 420-1). Nevertheless, at the right moment, Beove bolts across the hall shouting, “Mavais trâitres” (l. 441), and:

Lors le fiert si del baston qu'il porta  
 Parmi le front que tout li esquassa,  
 Le quir li ront et li os en brisa,  
 Por un petit li cerveus n'en vola (ll. 443-446).

Before the five guards flanking the emperor realise what has happened, Beove disappears. Aside from this core narrative, the slightly earlier Anglo-Norman archetype contains an extra confrontation which is also part of the attack. Beove, unrecognisable in his shepherd's clothes, announces to the palatial porter:

“Porter”, ceo dist li enfes, “si deu vus beneie,  
 lessez moi entrer, ne me deneiez mie,  
 a l'emperur parlerai devaunt sa baronnie” (ll. 268-270).<sup>41</sup>

The porter refuses with disrespect, upon which Beove

Hauce sa massue, a ferer pas ne faut,  
 la cervele li espaunt, honi seit ke en chaut!  
 “Reposez vus”, fet le emfes, “vus avez trop grant chaud” (ll. 284-286).

And then, “A donkes mounte li emfes en le paleis en haut, / a l'emperur devaunt touz il parla com baud” (ll. 287-288).

Similarly, in the Middle English analogue of c.1324, Beove “smot þe porter on þe hod (...) And forþ a wente wiþ þat leue / In to þe hall” (ll. 416, 419-420), but the description thereafter is curtailed compared with the other witnesses.<sup>42</sup>

In *King Horn*, written in the last part of the thirteenth century, King Thurston and his son Berild receive Horn, who goes by the assumed name of Cutberd. At Christmas the king is having a feast, when suddenly

A geaunt swthe sone,  
larmed fram paynyme  
And seide thes ryme:  
“Site stille, Sire Kyng,  
And herkne this thything (...)” (ll. 808-812).<sup>43</sup>

He challenges the king’s knights to a fight, any three of them against him alone. The king chooses his three champions, one of whom is Horn/Cutberd. Next day, Horn dresses for battle and excels. In appreciation, the king offers him his kingdom and his daughter’s hand.

Also of the end of the thirteenth century is Albrecht von Scharfenberg’s Middle High German *Jüngerer Titurel* which was written before 1272-1294. Albrecht adapts in a coherent narrative the fragmentary *Titurel* by Wolfram von Eschenbach whom we have seen as the author of *Parzifal*. In *Jüngerer Titurel* Arthur prepares a fine May feast which lasts two weeks. He is superbly generous to his guests, and in turn receives excellent gifts from them. The feast is interrupted by a herald bringing bad news: a vassal is besieged by two enemies, Lehelin and Orilus. Arthur immediately sets out to defeat them, and succeeds.<sup>44</sup>

Two more examples of the motif as a scene-changer appear in the *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* (1331-1336) which has already been discussed for another two complex instances. In the first, the emphasis is on the outcome of the subsequent fight, not the attack itself. Arthur sits at his table which he shares with the best of knights (the rest are seated on the ground like commoners). He is absent-minded, as he is often in the romance, now because of Parzifal’s absence. At this point, Sir Bagumades comes to court and greets everyone but Keie (Kay) whom he accuses of dishonesty, and challenges to a duel. Despite Arthur’s warnings, Keie accepts. When he is about to be defeated, Arthur stops the fight. The court is pleased with Keie’s shame, because he is notoriously sarcastic to everybody. With the queen’s intervention the two knights become friends. Next, the court remembers Parzifal, and forty knights set out to find him.<sup>45</sup>

The second example again merely frames an adventure. Gawan, after a lengthy effort to find the Grail, has returned to the court, and is seated next to the queen, when a maiden on a mule with a precious saddle rides up to them, and wants to speak to him. She identifies herself as the sister of a slain knight in Gawan’s company, and puts the blame for Gawan’s failure to retrieve the Grail on his sins. She urges him to accompany her, and find the Grail. Gawan consents, and they depart immediately.<sup>46</sup>

The Middle English romance *Sir Ferumbras* has been dated to c.1380. The anonymous author is aware of the resonant earlier tradition of the topos –he opens *Ferumbras* with it just as Chrétien opened “Lancelot” (see above, p. 13), although he does not make claims to writing daring literature. On the contrary, what is notable in his handling of the attack is the way he reverts Marie de France and Girart d’Amiens’s experiments with fused categories. His is a return to comfortable divides, Muslims v. Christians, and French v. English, and we should bear in mind that he is writing in the middle of the Hundred Years War.

*Ferumbras* opens in a spectacular way. The morning after a difficult battle Charles and his barons listen to mass,

Wan cam þer a Sarsyn þere, byfore is host alone:  
Of such anoþer herde 3e nere, nowar þar 3e han gone,  
Of Strengþe, of schap, of hugenys, of dedes of armes bolde (ll. 50-52).<sup>47</sup>

Promptly, the Saracen presents himself boastfully, which serves to alienate him from everybody, the readers included. Alexandria is his, and all lands from Babylon to the Red Sea; Apulia, Palermo and Russia are his subjects. He has slain the Pope, and destroyed Rome. He is the lord of Jerusalem, he has fought Turks, Persians and Arabs. Now he is here to annihilate Christians. He knows the king is here, and swears to slay him. *Ferumbras* is the name. He will wait under a tree outside until Charles sends his best knight. If two are afraid to fight him, he will take on three; even if twelve come, he promises to pound them to dust. He has slain ten kings already, and the same fate is awaiting the emperor, he threatens. Naturally, “Wan þe frensche i-hurde þys, sore þay wern afrizte” (l. 138). Even the great Roland refuses to fight under some pretext. Finally, the wounded Olivier acknowledges the challenge. Following a ferocious fight, he subdues *Sir Ferumbras* who pledges loyalty and, after many plot twists, is baptised.

By c.1500, when it is committed to paper, the *Turke and Gowin* presumably circulated orally for some time if the simple versification and the cobbled-together episodic narrative are anything to go by. Be that as it may, the use of the topos of attacking the court at a banquet draws on the, by now standard, theme of muddled identities: the outsider is in truth very much like the insiders. Unlike, however, “*Bisclavret*”, *Escanor* and the *Awntyrs*, here the overlapping distinctions between “us” and “them” are effaced by the thrust of violence in the last surviving act.<sup>48</sup> In the beginning, the excellence of the fellowship enjoying the feast is stressed:

All England, both East and West,  
Lords and ladyes of the best,  
They busked and made them bowne.  
And when the King sate in seate-

Lords served him att his meate (ll. 7-11).<sup>49</sup>

At a breathless narrative pace, the challenger arrives:

Into the hall a burne there came.  
He was not hye but he was broad,  
And like a Turke he was made  
Both legge and thye;  
And said, “Is there any will, as a brother,  
To give a buffett and take another?” (ll. 12-17)

Gawain follows the Turk, they share many adventures as comrades, the Turk saves Gawain a number of times, but in the end asks for his due –to be beheaded as is the case in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain naturally refuses but, when he humours his companion, the strike turns the Turk into a “stalwortht Knight” (l. 290).

### SAGAS

We will sample the topos in two works of Old Norse literature. Our first example is the *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, a gem of a saga, multilayered and at times splendidly hilarious. It is exceptional for the way it centralises the motif of the raid. It proceeds along no fewer than three attacks on banquets by warriors with concealed identities (there are eight royal feasts). The number reveals how popular the device was, but we should focus on one case in particular which ranks among the most intriguing in the history of the motif.

The *Egils saga* was written at the end of the fourteenth century but it looks back to the tenth and eleventh, so straddling Iceland’s pre-Christian tradition and its Christian period. The symbiosis of past and present leads to narrative digressions into the past, which are entwined with the main plot that is in progress in current time. In one instance, the attack is part of a plot shift which is, also, a shift in time. The motif, as a consequence, becomes part of controlling the time of narrative. In addition, the attack at hand is presented in terms of the literature of the marvellous, but the shocking quality we encountered in Marie de France is shed. The supernatural fable is recounted in a matter-of-fact way, and the result is a fresh and inventive revisit of the topos.

King Hertrygg of Russia has two beautiful daughters, Brynhild and Bekkhild. Intent on marrying them, the giant brothers Gaut and Hildir in the guise of a huge beast and a terrible vulture respectively, kidnap the girls on two separate occasions, the latter being an extensive Christmas “veizlu dýrliga” (magnificent feast).<sup>50</sup> This abduction launches the narrative: in the grippingly economical manner of the sagas, the king announces:

Pví skal þau mín orð mega bera, at hvern, sem þat vill vinna til minna doetra



[he means Bekkhild] at leita eptir þeim, þá skal sá, sem þær finnr, eiga þær ok þriðjung míns ríkis; en ef þær finnaz dauðar, skal sá hafa enn bezta jarlsdóm í mínu ríki ok þá gipting, sem hann vill.<sup>51</sup>

[I want you all to know that anyone who cares to search for my daughters shall not only marry one if he finds them, but get a third of my kingdom as well. Even if the searcher finds them dead, he can still have the best earldom in the country and choose any woman he wants as his wife.]<sup>52</sup>

Hertrygg's two fearless vassals, Asnud and Egil, motivated by the king's promise to share his kingdom with those who would retrieve his daughters for him, set off to find the girls. They are aided by the giant Queen Arinnefja (Eagle-Beak) who over dinner tells them her story that peaks at another attack on a court. In love with Prince Hring, who was marrying Lady Ingibjorg instead, Arinnefja transformed herself into a fly to attack the bride of Hring "at drekka þá sitt brullaup" (who was celebrating his wedding-feast).<sup>53</sup> Back in the main narrative frame, Asnud and Egil, disguised as good-looking giants, attack the kidnapers at their joint wedding banquet where they are drinking ("sátu þeir þá við drykkju"),<sup>54</sup> slaughter scores of them, recapture the two princesses, and return to safety. In time, they marry the young ladies, and become kings.

Our second Old Norse source is the *Ála flekks saga* which is not an *Íslendingasaga* proper but what scholars used to call a *lygisaga* (a "lying" saga). With other *fornaldarsögur* (sagas *d'antiquité*) it shares the ancient settings and the fairy-tale feeling. Like other *riddarasögur* (sagas of riders) it is the Icelandic equivalent of the courtly romance, and adapts material from *matière de Bretagne*. The *Ála flekks saga* is dated to around 1400, and probably it was orally transmitted in parallel with its manuscript tradition.<sup>55</sup>

The central character, Áli flekk, son of king Ríkarðr of England, marries the maiden queen Þornbjörg. In the course of their adventures, and as part of a plan of theirs, she pretends that she intends to marry the troll Jötunoxi. A feast is set, and "Jötunoxi lætr til bjóða þessarrar veizlu CC flagða. En at þeim samankomnum öllum flögðunum verður mikill glaumur í borg Jötunoxa" [Jötunoxi invited to this feast some two hundred giantesses, and when they all came together, there was a great deal of loud merriment in Jötunoxi's town].<sup>56</sup> The "bride's" friends fuddle the giantesses with ale, and when five hundred companions of hers show up outside the hall, Þornbjörg commands them "at þér veitið flögðunum atgöngu með eldi ok vápnum!" [to attack the giantesses with fire and iron]. At once, "Þeir bera nú eld at hollinni, ok logar hon skjótt" [They set fire to the hall, and it burnt quickly].<sup>57</sup> The destruction of Jötunoxi has some role in the removal of a magic spell by which the protagonist is beset.

**GREEK HEROIC POETRY**

The motif is drastically revised in the medieval Greek body of heroic poetry known as “Akritic songs”, named after the *Akrites*, the Byzantine frontiersmen who defend the south-eastern borders of the empire. Akritic poetry first flourishes from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, probably incorporating older material. It is closely related to an epic, with prominent romance elements, about the adventures of the most celebrated of these warriors, Digenis, which is extant in six versions, the oldest of which is roughly dated to the early twelfth century. Akritic songs continue to thrive as folk poetry into the nineteenth.

There are three disparities with the analogues of the theme examined so far. The chief one is that the courtly milieu is totally replaced by a more demotic setting –either a wedding feast or a sombre meal. Occasionally the function is dubbed “lordly” or “aristocratic”, but there are no extensive descriptions of luxury and wealth other than mentions of opulent meals.<sup>58</sup> Next, the challenger is not a secondary character. The third difference is that, since the Akritic songs run in 10 to 200 lines, they have no space for multiple episodes (the epic being the only exception). The result is that the assault at the banquet sets in motion a single adventure of limited length, which may make up the entire plot.

A popular variety of these poems completely removes any allusions to sumptuousness. The meal is had by heroes who enter the gravest confrontation of all: they defy Death, and in doing so they turn the motif on its head –the hosts are the challengers. In a song recorded in the Ionian island of Kefalonia “τοῦ κόσμου οἱ ἀντρειωμένοι” (the world’s heroes) are building a tower in Jerusalem to escape Death. Irked when he finds out, Death appears at their meal but is respectful. The heroes graciously invite him to share their fine food and drink:

κάθησε νὰ γευτοῦμε,  
νὰ φᾶς τὰπάκια τοῦ λαγοῦ, στηθάρι ἀπὸ περδίκι,  
νὰ πιῆς καὶ τριπαλιὸ κρασί, ποὺ πίνουν οἱ ἀντρειωμένοι (ll. 9-11).<sup>59</sup>

[be seated so that we have our supper,  
eat the rump of a hare, the breast of a partridge,  
drink very old wine, which is drunk by the brave].

He declines, and invites the best of them to a jumping contest which he wins: the loser must now die. Very similar structurally is another Ionian version, although both parties here are more eager to give offence. Three braves boast that they are not afraid of Death. Ever fearsome, the latter goes to their meal (“ ’ς τὴν τάβλα ποὺ ἐγεύοντα”, l. 6).<sup>60</sup> Again he is invited to join them,

Κάτσε, Χάρο, γιά νά γευτῆς, κάτσε νά γιοματίσης,  
 νά φᾶς τσαπλάν' ἀπό λαγούς, στηθάμ' ἀπό περδίκια,  
 νά πιῆς τριῶ χρονῶν κρασί, πού πίνουν ἀντρειωμένοι (ll. 9-11).

[Sit down, Death, so that you eat, sit down so that you have dinner,  
 eat hare offal, partridge breasts,  
 drink three-year-old wine, which is drunk by the brave.]

As before, he refuses, and, after dominating the jumping game, takes the finest of the three men to the underworld with him.<sup>61</sup>

In a poem from Crete, Digenis is not invited to a wedding due to his bad character (“γιά τσοῖ κακές του χάρες”, l. 3<sup>62</sup>), and because he has the habit of killing the bridegrooms and abducting the brides (“γιατί σκοτώνει τσοῖ γαμπρούς καί παίρνει τσοῖ νυφάδες”, l. 4). Another habitual breaker of festivities is the formidably strong warrior named Tsamados who interrupts public festive dinners, and picks fights.<sup>63</sup> According to another song, the lords of Constantinople and Salonica organise a lavish feast for their children’s wedding. Again, Digenis is not invited. This time he is piqued (“πολὺ τὸν βαροφάν’κεν”, l. 10<sup>64</sup>) and he makes an astounding fiddle out of an olive tree with snakes as chords, an adder for a bow and young adders instead of tuning pegs (“τὰ φίδια κόρδες ἔβαλε ἀπάνω στὸ παιγνίδι, / τὴν ὄχεντρα τὴ μ-πλουμιστὴ δοξάρι στὸ παιγνίδι / καί τὰ μικρὰ ἔχεντρόπουλα στιφνάρια στὸ παιγνίδι”, ll. 15-17). He plays so skilfully that the bride, who is so shy that she only looks on the feast from a window, is captivated and has everybody shower Digenis with money. In a Pontic alternative, the instrument is made of snakes and lizards, and the offended hero (Γιάννης Κιμισκῆς) puts a magic spell on the marrying couple and their guests (“κελαδεῖ μαγείας”, l. 10<sup>65</sup>). In a version from Cyprus, Digenis rides to the wedding reception and with his stunning lute seduces the bride.<sup>66</sup>

The theme of abduction overlaps with our topos in a host of heroic poems.<sup>67</sup> In one from Cyprus, Skleropoulos is set on stealing the wife of Konstantas, his uncle and a far better frontiersman. When he attacks, Konstantas is enjoying a plentiful, and probably liquid, supper, and undisturbed invites the intruder to join him. Skleropoulos refuses, and Konstantas sportingly lets him ride off with the wife, and gives him a head start in the chase before he catches and kills him.<sup>68</sup> There is a specific type of a heroic poem in which three noble brothers are indulging in a feast when innumerable enemies raid their territory, and steal their wives, fiancées and children. Confident about their supreme prowess, they send the younger brother (i.e., the least strong and experienced in war) to free the captives single-handedly, while the two others do not bother to leave the table.<sup>69</sup> In another type of poems an expatriate husband eats at a marble table when he senses that his wife back at home is being seized by a man who wants to marry her. On his trusted horse he dashes back, attacks the wedding, and recovers her.<sup>70</sup> In one recension of the

Digenis epic, the leader of a brigand group dares the young hero, who briefly aspires to join their outfit, to set upon a heavily-guarded wedding procession, and snatch the patrician bride.<sup>71</sup>

### **FERDOWSI**

Three of the most imaginative cases of the topos feature in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the epic that chronicles the Persian court from the beginning of the world until the Arab conquest in the seventh century CE. Written in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, it is a dazzling performance of a literary genius with a knack for reinventing the themes of his sources for a highly demanding readership. It is regrettable that Western comparatists do not engage more with the wealth of its 50,000 twenty-two-syllable lines as the rewards would be spectacular.

The three examples are quite different from each other, but there emerges a typology, whose symbolism carries out the poet's agenda: Ferdowsi writes to celebrate the Persian identity, and to complain about the Arab invasion. The Persian court is supreme by and of itself. The fall from perfection happens by means of contamination with an exterior, foreign environment, which either forces the court to make a wrong choice, or reveals latent evil within. Falling back on time-honoured Persian tradition (that is, the ancient heroes who undertake to correct the mistakes), the court redeems itself. In one case, there seems to be no imminent danger as the "challenger" comes in peace. All the same, the novelty he brings along (the exotic world he shows the Persians) suffices to cancel the utopia they were enjoying.

Fairly early in the book, the motif opens the long chapter on King Kavus. When Kavus ascends to the throne, all the world is his.

همی خورد روشن می خوشگوار	چنان بد که در گلشن زرنگار
نشسته برو بر جهان کد خدای	یکی تخت زرین بلورینش پای
همی رای زد شاه بر بیش و کم	ایا پهلو ا نان ایران بهم

[One day he was in a pleasure garden, seated on a golden throne with crystal feet, drinking wine with the Persian chieftains and talking of this and that.]<sup>72</sup>

Danger manifests itself insidiously. A musician, who in truth is a demon, asks to be given audience. When allowed to the inner circle, he sings for Kavus. While listening, the king conceives the egregious idea to invade Mazanderan, the kingdom of demons, against the judgment of his barons. He goes to war but is defeated, taken prisoner and loses his eyesight. This calamity augurs terribly for the country which is accustomed to identifying the physical strength of the king with the well-being of the state. The most revered hero, Rostam, frees the thoughtless king, and along the way performs seven outstanding feats.

Kavus is restored to his throne but not before Iran is invaded in turn by Mazanderan which is eventually defeated.

The second instance of the motif is at the beginning of the story of Bizhan. With masterful sense of timing, Ferdowsi lets it gradually become clear that the apparent peril is the least of the hero's worries: the real enemy has always been inside the court.

ز گردان لشکر همی کرد یاد	به بگمار بنشست یک روز شاد
نهاده به سر بر ز گوهر کلاه	به دیبا بیاراسته گاه شاه
دل و گوش داده به آوای چنگ [...] ]	یکی جام باقوت پر می به جنگ
همه پهلوانان خسرو پرست	همه باده ی خسروانی به دست
به پیش اندرون دسته ی نسترن	می اندر قدح چون عمیق یمن
سر زلفشان بر سمن مشک سای	پریچهرگان پیش خسرو به پای
کمر بسته بر پیش سالار بار	همه بزمگه بوی و رنگ و نگار

[One day King Khosrow was sitting with his warrior chieftains at an entertainment. His throne was draped with brocade and he wore a jewelled crown; in his hand was a cup encrusted with rubies and filled with wine, and the heart-ravishing sound of harps echoed in his ears. Their wine cups filled with wine like rubies from the Yemen and white roses set out before each one, his loyal nobles surrounded him [...]. Serving girls stood before Khosrow, their hair like musk, their skin like jasmine; all the court was alive with colour, perfume and beauty and the king's chancellor presided over the feast.]<sup>73</sup>

Suddenly, a doorman enters and ushers in a delegation from a border tribe, who appeal to the king for help. Countless wild boars maraud their country:

گرفت آن همه بیشه و جویبار	گراز آمد اکنون فزون از شمار
و زیشان همه [ ... ] ستوه	به دندان چو پیلان به تن همچو کوه
ازیشان به ما بر چه مایه گزند	هم از چار پای و هم از کشتمند
به دندان به دو نیم کردند ساد	درختان که کشتن ناریم یاد
مگر مان به یک لخت بر گشت بخت	نیاید به دندا نشان سنگ سخت

[Their tusks are like an elephant's, they are of mountainous size, and they are destroying the land [...] killing our animals, trampling our crops, smashing with their tusks trees that have been there for longer than anyone can remember. Granite is not as tough as their tusks, and we fear that our good fortune is at an end.]<sup>74</sup>

The king takes pity, and offers a hefty reward to the courtier who will kill the boars. Young Bizhan is eager to earn repute, and springs to the challenge ignoring the objections of his father. When the old lord sees that his son is not to be dissuaded, he turns to Gorgin, the son of another nobleman, and asks him to be Bizhan's guide and companion. Gorgin accepts but out of jealousy gives Bizhan deliberately bad advice that puts his life in mortal danger. He encourages Bizhan to go to the court of Manizeh, the beautiful and feisty daughter of Afrosyab, the king of Turkestan, bitter enemy of the Persians. The two fall in

love but Afrosyab arrests and sentences Bizhan to death. The news reaches the Persian court, Rostam and another seven exalted heroes invade Turkestan before they return home in triumph.

Much later in *Shahnameh*, the topos is used again. Eskandar (Alexander the Great, thoroughly Persianized) is leading his army against Babylon. They climb a steep mountain with enormous difficulty, and when they reach the peak, they see a paradisaical river at a distance.

سوی ژرف دریا همی راند ند      جهان آفرین را همی خواندند  
دد و دام بد هر سوی بی شمار      سپه را نبد راهبر جز شکار

[Chanting God's name in gratitude, they headed for the water. As the soldiers were surrounded by wild game, they only had to take it.]<sup>75</sup>

The bliss is broken when a wildly bizarre man rushes in.

پدید آمد از دور مردی سترگ      پر از موی با گوش های بزرگ  
تنش زیر موی اندرون همچو نیل      دو گوشش بگردار دو گوش پیل

[His body was completely covered by hair, and he was dark blue and long like the Nile, and his ears were as big as an elephant's.]<sup>76</sup>

The man describes a fantastical city where all buildings are covered in fish skins and fish bones, and people eat nothing but fish. Prodded by the king in a way reminiscent of the Arthurian anticipation of adventures at the feast table,

سکندر بدان گوش ور گفت : رو      بیاور کسی تا چه ببینم نو!

[Sekandar tells the big-eared man: "Go and bring one of those people here. I want to find out if he has something new to say"],<sup>77</sup>

the creature fetches seventy of the city's inhabitants, who make Eskandar a gift of pearls. The army later resumes the march to Babylon.

### POST-MEDIEVAL

The sixteenth-century Greek romance *Imperios and Margarona* is a strong example of how the motif of the attack fares in post-medieval literature. The setting is ostensibly courtly. Even so, it is stripped of descriptions that demonstrate any immediate knowledge of palaces and courts, which is typical of the folkish provenance of composite romances. Retained is the sudden arrival of an unidentified challenger, which by this time is unmotivated, and serves no other purpose than to cause the hero's departure from home, and the launching of his adventures.

In *Imperios* the motif blends with a long string of topoi. The prince of Provence, who gives his name to the title, is born miraculously to ageing parents, and has the best

education at a precociously young age. He later becomes an invincible warrior. The superlative youth clashes with his father. A nameless rider comes to the court and asks for the king's permission to fight the best local warrior. Unbeknown to his father, Imperios takes the duel and unseats the challenger. The king is rattled because his only son and heir puts himself so recklessly in danger and forbids the prince to act without his consent in the future. Imperios feels wronged and to appease himself, plunges into a long journey, in the course of which he will embark on marvellous deeds.<sup>78</sup>

We have repeatedly seen the supernatural at work in the topos under discussion. In Marie de France, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and the *Alexander Romance* the unearthly figures were extravagant and rather loud: they imposed fear from the outside. By contrast, in 1606 Shakespeare manages to shift focus on Lord Macbeth's internal reasons to be afraid of the ghost which only he can see. The effect of staggering.

*Holinshed's Chronicles*, Shakespeare's source, briefly mentioned that Macbeth threw a "supper" so that his assassins murder Banquo and his son, two allies whom Macbeth in time grew suspicious of. The supper was set outside the palace, so that Macbeth's house was not implicated.<sup>79</sup> Shakespeare works with the banquet model which he obviously appreciates enough to centralise in Act 3, Scene 4. We now see how Macbeth absorbs the impact of his actions. The feast starts with due magnificence and grandeur: there is the "country's honour roofed" (l. 40), and as they walk in the hall, they "know [their] own degrees" (l. 1). But Macbeth cannot enjoy himself. He immediately meets one of his assassins who tells him that his enemy is slain but that his son escaped. His anguish is evident to Lady Macbeth who complains to her husband that he does not "give the cheer" to the feast. Macbeth makes a stamp at being merry, but he sees Banquo's ghost sitting in Macbeth's own chair, and is unrestrainedly upset. Lady Macbeth comes up with an excuse for the guests. The ghost, in silence, leaves the room, Macbeth makes another attempt at joining the festive mood ("give me some wine, fill full", l. 89), but when the ghost, always soundless, re-enters the hall, Macbeth's mental breakdown is complete. Lady Macbeth puts an abrupt end to the feast: "at once, good night" (l. 119). The ferocity of the collapse is such that this time she urges the attendant lords, "Stand not upon the order of your going, / But go at once" (ll. 120-121).

The motif takes an engaging turn in the Far East. In various Japanese folktales the disguised hero is hired as a menial worker at his beloved's wedding, or makes three public appearances on his magic horse wearing his finery at festivals.<sup>80</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Seventy-two samples of the attack on the courtly banquet in the period from 2000 BCE to the seventeenth century CE reveal a powerful tradition of the topos in a broad range of literatures which include Standard Babylonian, Classical Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Old French, Anglo-Norman, Middle English, Middle Scottish, Middle High German, Italian, Old Norse, Middle and Modern Greek, Middle Persian and Japanese.

The major component of these descriptions is an uninvited appearance at a courtly feast of a person who is almost always unknown to the court, often in disguise, not infrequently a magic figure. The intruder engages with one or more of the participants in the banquet, and an adventure follows. Despite the aggression, the person and the office of the king are consistently kept away from danger.<sup>81</sup> The closest the motif comes to jeopardising a central figure of authority is in some Greek heroic songs, where, by defying Death, a lord or a master fighter, in the indirect manner of stealing his daughter/wife, the invaders conceivably lay their own claim on his power, although this implication is never explicitly articulated.

The episodic quality is retained since the inception of the theme in *Gilgameš*, and its reinvention by Homer and Virgil. In the Middle Ages its characteristics are undeviating: the brilliance of the court, rendered in descriptions of varying length; the eccentricity or extremism of the attacker (with or without magic); the challenge either to a value which the fellowship of the court considers to be cardinal, or to a situation which is thought to be the universal norm.

The motif is so popular that it functions as a standard scene-changing device. As employed by some of the more skilful medieval writers, it also makes for inventively stimulating literature. It amplifies the possibilities of the *merveilleux* (Marie de France's "Bisclavret", and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*) and the suggestive (*Gests of King Alexander*). It both confirms and undermines the court's consciousness of self (Chrétien's "Lancelot"). It gives utterance to the stock dichotomy between good insiders and bad outsiders, only to have the certainty about the divide frustrated by merging these two categories (*SGGK*). It queries formal distinctions among preconceived identities (most ably by Ferdowsi, Girart d'Amiens and the anonymous *Awntyrs off Arthure*).

The aim of the present article is to identify a critical host of examples spread over a substantial period of time and distinct literatures, so as to establish the motif which escaped the attention of scholarship. The study of the motif can now proceed to its literary assessment (particularly its transmission among the separated languages, and the ways in which the motif was adapted according to genre and tenor of the text), as well as its thematic analysis. That might include the congruence between its textual organization



and changing historical perspectives and cultural contexts, and its function within various structural patterns.

## NOTES

*I am much indebted to Professor Richard Hunter, Rabbi Jason Leib, Mrs Chana Leib, Professor Alex Sager and Professor Deborah Starr. Warm thanks to Rachel Steiner and Moshe Kanner of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem for tracing the edition of Tanchuma Ha'Azinu 8. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of Professor David Holton who read the entire essay, and suggested Shakespeare and the older versions of the Alexander Romance.*

**1** A point of nomenclature: scholarship has used various terms to discuss conventionalized descriptions, most commonly “theme”, “topos”, “motif”, “commonplace”, even “run”, with each term emphasising a certain aspect of the phenomenon. The present essay does not wish to exclude any of these aspects, so it interchangeably uses “theme”, “motif” and “topos” to designate a schematized narrative unit which is recurrently used as a source for the composition of subsequent texts. Generally, see O.B. Hardison, and Ernst H. Behler, “Topos”, in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 1294, and Horst S. Daemmrich, “Thematics”, *ibid.*, p. 1279-81 with an extensive bibliography which gives a good overview of thematic studies.

**2** I rely on the translation and exegesis of A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, vol. 1, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, Tablets 1 and 2.

**3** The case could also be made for a second attack. In George, *ibid.* Tablet 6., p. 179-182, Gilgameš holds a banquet after which Enkidu is assailed by a terrible dream which effectively will

lead to his death in a conflation of the real world and that of dreams.

**4** All translations from A.T. Murray (transl.), Homer, *Odyssey*, 2 vols, revised by George E. Dimock, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2002.

**5** These individual differences will not come to much, as the killing of Leiodes, for whom ἀτασθαλίαι δέ οἱ οἶψ / ἔχθραι ἔσαν (21. 146-147), finally shows (22. 310-329).

**6** All translations from H. Rushton Fairclough (transl.), Virgil, *Aeneid* VII-XII, revised by G.P. Gould, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2000.

**7** The point was first made by J.R. Bacon, “Aeneas in Wonderland: A Study of *Aeneid* VIII”, *The Classical Review*, vol. 53 no. 3 (July 1939) 97-104: 99-101.

**8** Cf. 8.185-188, “non haec sollemnia nobis, / has ex more dapes, hanc tanti numinis aram / vana superstitio veterumque ignara deorum / imposuit (...)” [These solemn rites, this wonted feast, this altar of a mighty Presence—it is no idle superstition, ignorant of the gods of old, that has laid them on us.] See Bacon, *ibid.*, p. 101, and Cyril Bailey, *Religion in Virgil*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1935, p. 55-58.

**9** On the Greco-Roman *symposion* archetypes of Luke, see Dennis E. Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 106 no. 4 (December 1987) 613-638: 614-616 and 633-636, and more extensively *idem*, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003, p. 13-46. Further on eschatological meals, see Peter-Ben Smit [sic], *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom (...)*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

**10** I follow the description in Daniel 5:1-30. I do not enter into the controversy over the language of the mysterious phrase on the wall in exegetical works like Sanhedrin 22a and Shir hashirim rabbah 3, and the hefty secondary bibliography on the matter.

**11** The parable is published in Moses Gaster (ed.), "The Sefer ha-Maasiyoth, ספר המעשיות, in *Judith "Montefiore" College, Ramsgate: Report for the Year 1894-5, and Report for the Year 1895-1896*, Ramsgate, 1896, p. 1-144: 98-100. For the dating, see idem, "Fairy Tales from Inedited Hebrew MSS. of the Ninth and Twelfth Centuries", *Folk-Lore*, vol. 7 no. 3 (September 1896) 217-250: 226.

**12** Tanchuma (Ha'Azinu 8) is available with parallel translation in Avrohom Davis (transl. and ann.); Yaakov Y.H. Puko (ed.), *The Metsudah Midrash Tanchuma* (מדורש תנחומא, vol. 5, *Devorim*, ספר דברים, Monsey, NY, Distributed by Israel Book Shop, 2004, p. 339. Salomon Buber (ed.), *Midrasch Tanchuma*, vol. 2, Vilnius [Wilna], 1885, p. 51n.1 disputes the authenticity of the story, and assigns its authorship to the printer who published Ha'Azinu 1. It is not in the medieval manuscript on which Buber's edition is based at this point.

**13** See Davis and Puko, *ibid.*, p. 339.

**14** Zohar I. 10b-11a. There is no known source for this teaching in rabbinic literature: see Daniel C. Matt (transl. and comm.), *The Zohar Pritzker Edition*, vol. 1, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 72n.541. Consensus has it that the Zohar was written between 1270 and 1300: see Gershon Scholem, and Melila Hellner-Eshed, "Zohar", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, vol. 21, Detroit, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, p. 647-64: 657. Satan disguised as a poor man (or a woman in some other accounts) who begs at a meal is a common theme in Jewish tradition: see, for instance, Kiddushin 81a.

**15** Chrétien de Troyes, "Lancelot, ou le Chevalier de la Charette" in Daniel Poirion (gen. ed.), Chrétien de Troyes, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 507-682.

**16** In the last part of the romance, written by Godefroi de Lagny, not Chrétien, this favour will

be crucial, as the lady will reciprocate in time by saving Lancelot.

**17** Marie de France, "Bisclavret" in Alfred Ewert (ed.), *Lais*, 1944, reprint, with an Introduction by Glyn Sheridan Burgess, London, Bristol Classical, 1995, p. 49-57.

**18** Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival und Titurel* in Karl Bartsch (ed.), Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival und Titurel*, vol. 1, Leipzig, Brockhaus, 4<sup>th</sup> edition by Marta Marti, 1927, stanzas 312-322.

**19** Fritz Peter Knapp et al. (eds.), Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Die Krone [Diu Crône]*, 2 vols, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 2000-2005.

**20** For a translation, see J.W. Thomas (transl.), *The Crown: A Tale of Sir Gawain and King Arthur's Court by Heinrich von dem Türlin*, Lincoln, NB and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p. 13.

**21** The dating has been reconfirmed recently by Judy Weiss, "Gui de Warewic at Home and Abroad: A Hero for Europe" in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, edited by Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, Cambridge, Brewer, 2007, p. 1-11: 24.

**22** Quotations are from Alfred Ewert (ed.), *Gui de Warewic. Roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 1, Paris, Champion, 1932. The last line (Who were making many threats against the emperor) is rather incongruous. All the crucial details survive unaltered in the later Middle English versions of the romance: the fourteenth-century adaptation in two manuscripts (Auchinleck and Caius) available in Julius Zupitza (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick, The First or 14<sup>th</sup>-century Version, Edited from the Auchinleck MS (...) and from MS 107 in Caius College, Cambridge*, 3 vols in 1, EETS, e.s., 42, 49, 59. London, 1883-1891, and the fifteenth-century version published in idem (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick, The Second or 15<sup>th</sup>-century Version (...)*, EETS, e.s., 25-26, London, 1875-1876.

The fourteenth-century MS Caius might be seen to imply a fine banquet:

The Sowdan at mete was there:

Of Guy ne was he not ware.

With the Sowdan ete kyngis ten:

A fair sighte it was to ken (ll. 3885-3888).

In agreement with MS Caius is the fifteenth-century version:

He fonde the sowdan at hys mete  
 And wyth hym XV kynygs grete  
 And odur men of grete valowre,  
 And all þey seruyd the sowdan þore (ll. 3647-3650).

MS Auchinleck seems to describe a more austere dinner:

Alle atte mete þat þer was,  
 And nouȝt michel noise þer nas.  
 At þe heye bord eten kynges ten [...] (ll. 3885-3887).

**23** Girart d'Amiens, *Escanor* in Richard Trachsler (ed.), *Girart d'Amiens, Escanor (...)*, vol. 1, Geneva, Droz, 1994.

**24** It is not unlikely that there is a repeat of the theme after Gavain's return. Sir Gifflet, whom Gavain calls *compainz* (l. 7690), offers to fight in his stead. When Gavain refuses (ll. 7690-7704), Gifflet considers how best to help the hero. He asks his brother, the *escuier* Glintavet, to avenge the insult. Glintavet disguises himself with a scruffy helmet and weapons (ll. 7875-7911) so as to go unrecognised, and travels to Escanor's court. Sadly, a lacuna after l. 8484 does not let us read how and where Escanor is killed.

**25** Readings from MS Laud Misc. 622 in *Kyng Alisaunder* in G.V. Smithers (ed.), *Kyng Alisaunder*, vol. 1. *EETS*, o.s., 227. London, Oxford University Press, 1952. In the Greek analogues attributed to Ps.-Callisthenes, the episode is retained in a virtually identical form, although the description of the feast is sparse: we read that "πάντων εὐωχομένων" [when everybody feasted sumptuously], Nectanabus appeared "μέσον τοῦ τρικλίνοῦ" [in the dining-hall]. See Richard Raabe (ed.), *Ἱστορία Ἀλεξάνδρου. Die armenische Übersetzung der sagenhaften Alexander-Biographie auf ihre mutmassliche Grundlage zurückgeführt*, Leipzig, 1896, A.κα', p. 6; Wilhelm Kroll (ed.), *Historia Alexandri Magni*, vol. 1, *Recensio vetusta*, 1926, Berlin, Weidman, <sup>2</sup>1958, I.10, p. 10; Leif Bergson (ed.), *Die griechische Alexanderroman, Rezension β'* [Studia Graeca Stockholmiensia, 3], Stockholm-Gothenburg-Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell 1965, p. I.10, p. 13-14. Not describing the court is retained in the sixteenth-century rhymed ver-

sion, where the hall is connoted by a single dubious word: see *Διήγησις τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου* in David Holton (ed.), *Διήγησις τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου. The Tale of Alexander: The Rhymed Version (...)*, Athens, MIET [Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece], <sup>2</sup>2002 (revised edition), l. 187.

**26** On this position with bibliography to boot, see Bernd Bastert, "Late Medieval Summations: *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal* and Ulrich Füetrer's *Buch der Abenteuer*" in *The Arthur of the Germans: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature*, edited by W.H Jackson and S.A. Ranawake, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000, p. 166-180: 170-171.

**27** Claus Wisse and Philipp Colin, *Parzifal* in Karl Schorbach (ed.), Claus Wisse and Philipp Colin, *Parzifal*, Strasbourg and London 1888, cols 50-54.

**28** *Ibid.*, cols 164-172.

**29** Readings from fragment A of *The Gestes of King Alexander of Macedon* in Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr (ed.), *The Gestes of King Alexander of Macedon: Two Middle English Alliterative Fragments (...)*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1929.

**30** *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (eds), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1968 [2<sup>nd</sup> edition revised by Norman Davis].

**31** See *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn* in Ralph Hanna III (ed.), *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn (...)*, Manchester, Manchester University Press; New York, Barnes and Noble, 1974, p. 11-24. For a dating, see *ibid.*, p. 52.

**32** I am convinced by the elegant argument in A.C. Spearing, "The Awntyrs off Arthure", in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, edited by Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach, Kent, OH, Kent State University Press, 1981, p. 183-202:186-187.

**33** In *Pope Gregory's Trental*, Gregory is visited by the ghost of his mother, an unshriven sinner, and saves her soul with a series of masses. On the Middle English tradition of the redemption

of dead sinners (especially by their children), see Ralph Hanna III, “The *Awntyrs off Arthure*: An Interpretation”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 31 no. 3 (1970) 275-297: 286 and n.19.

**34** See further on the idea of the court’s insularity in Kostas Yiavis, “So Near Yet So Far: Medieval Courtly Romance and *Imberios and Margaronna*”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 99 no. 1 (2006) 195-217: 201-202.

**35** All quotations are drawn from the edition by Hanna cited in note 31 above.

**36** For an edition see James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps (ed.), *Torrent of Portugal. An English Metrical Romance (...)*, London 1842.

**37** See the introduction in Alan Lupack (ed.), *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1994, p. 1-9. All subsequent quotations to *Lancelot of the Laik* are reproduced from this edition (p. 12-141).

**38** See Judy Weiss, “The Date of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*”, *Medium Aevum*, vol. 55 (1986) 237-241.

**39** The single exception is the Italian version of 1480, where a fight between two armies replaces the hero’s unassisted raid. See *Buovo d’Antona* in Daniela Delcorno Branca (ed.), *Buovo d’Antona (...)*, Rome, Carocci, 2008, Cantare 3, stanzas 2-8.

**40** For an edition see Albert Stimming (ed.), *Der Festländische Bueve de Hantone*, vol. 1, Dresden, Niemeyer, 1911.

**41** For an edition see Albert Stimming (ed.), *Der Anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, Halle 1899.

**42** For an edition see Eugen Kölbing (ed.), *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, 3 vols in 1, EETS, e.s., 46, 48, 65, London 1885, 1886, 1894.

**43** “King Horn” in Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (eds.), *Four Romances of England (...)*, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1999, p. 11-70.

**44** Text in Werner Wolf and Kurt Nyholm (eds.), *Albrecht, Jüngerer Tituel*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1985, vol. 3:1, stanzas 4503-4608.

**45** Wisse and Colin, *Parzifal*, cols 513-527 (as in note 27 above).

**46** *Ibid.*, cols 672-677.

**47** *Sir Ferumbras* in Sidney J. Herrtage (ed.), *The English Charlemagne Romances*, part I, *Sir Ferumbras*, EETS, e.s. 34, London 1879.

**48** The modern editor’s exemplar is badly mutilated and comprises just over 300 lines.

**49** “The Turke and Gawain” in Thomas Hahn (ed.), *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1995, p. 337-358.

**50** The original “Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana”, in Åke Lagerholm (ed.), *Drei lygisögur: Egils saga Einhenda ok Ásmundar Berserkjabana, Ála Flekks saga, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, Halle, Niemeyer, 1927, p. 7. For the translation, see footnote 53 below.

**51** Lagerholm, *Drei lygisögur*, op. cit., p. 9.

**52** The English translation appeared as “Egil and Asmund” in Hermann Pálsson, and Paul Edwards (transl.), “Egil and Asmund”, in eidem, *Gautrek’s Saga and Other Medieval Tales*, London, University of London Press; New York, New York University Press, 1968, p. 91-120: 92.

**53** Original in Lagerholm, *Drei lygisögur*, op. cit., p. 57; translation in Pálsson and Edwards, “Egil and Asmund”, op. cit., p. 109.

**54** Original in Lagerholm, *Drei lygisögur*, p. 70; translation in Pálsson and Edwards, “Egil and Asmund”, op. cit., p. 114.

**55** The dating by Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 3, Copenhagen, Gad, 1924, p. 110 is generally accepted. On the mixed transmission of the saga, see the phrase “hafi þeir þökk, er hlýddu, en hinir skömm, er óhljóð gerðu” (thanks be given to those who listened and shame to those who made noise) in “Ála flekks saga”, in Lagerholm, *Drei lygisögur*, op. cit., p. 120. For an English translation, see W. Bryant Bachman, Jr. and Guðmundur Erlingsson (transl.), *Six Old Icelandic Sagas*, With a Foreword by James E. Anderson., Lanham, MD, New York and London, University Press of America, 1993, p. 61.

**56** Original in Lagerholm, *Drei lygisögur*, op. cit., p. 113; translation in Bryant Bachman and Erlingsson, *Six Old Icelandic Sagas*, op. cit., p. 57.

**57** Original in Lagerholm, *Drei Iygisogur*, p. 114; translation in Bryant Bachman and Erlingson, *Six Old Icelandic Sagas*, op. cit., p. 57.

**58** This reflects both the fact that the courtly spirit as it is evident in Western art is marginally accommodated in Greek literature, and also that these poems are demotic, not courtly, even when they are about subjects that in Western literature are associated with courtly and composite culture.

**59** Ν.Γ. Πολίτης, «Ακριτικά ἄσματα. Ὁ Θάνατος τοῦ Διγενῆ», *Λαογραφία*, vol. 1 no. 2 (November 1909) 169-275: 256-7. All translations are mine.

**60** Πολίτης, *ibid.*, p. 257-258.

**61** For a different version, see Γ.Κ. Σπυριδάκης et al. (eds), *Ἑλληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια. Ἐκλογή*, vol. 1, Athens, Ακαδημία Αθηνών, 1962, p. 38-41: ll. 1-34. For an additional two examples, one from Cyprus, see Ν.Γ. Πολίτης, «Μελέτη ἐπὶ τοῦ βίου τῶν νεωτέρων Ἑλλήνων», *Νεοελληνική μυθολογία*, vol. 1, Athens 1874, p. 271. The idea that Death visits mortals during their banquets seems to be combining ancient polytheistic motifs with the newer Christian beliefs: see the discussion in Πολίτης, *Νεοελληνική μυθολογία*, op. cit., p. 269-270 of the relief excavated in Athens which depicts Charon claiming his due from a man enjoying himself at a dinner party.

**62** Σπυριδάκης et al., *ibid.*, p. 16-17.

**63** In three surviving Akritic songs, his own son rises to defend the banquet but the young man is unaware of his opponent's identity. After the eventual recognition, the fight stops. See Σπυριδάκης et al., *ibid.*, p. 79-81.

**64** Σπυριδάκης et al., *ibid.*, p. 17.

**65** Σπυριδάκης et al., *ibid.*, p. 18.

**66** Σπυριδάκης et al., *ibid.*, p. 10-16.

**67** On abduction in Akritic poetry, see Peter Mackridge, "None but the Brave Deserve the Fair": Abduction, Elopement, Seduction and Marriage in the Escorial *Digenes Akrites* and Modern Greek Heroic Songs" in *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry*, edited by Roderick Beaton and David Ricks, Aldershot, Variorum, 1993, p. 150-160.

**68** Σπυριδάκης et al., *Ἑλληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, op. cit., p. 82-87.

**69** Σπυριδάκης et al., *ibid.*, p. 65-66. For two versions without abduction, see *ibid.*, p. 64-65 and 67-68.

**70** Claude Charles Fauriel, *Ἑλληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, 1824-1828, vol. 1, *Ἡ Ἐκδόση τοῦ 1824-5*, edited by Αλέξης Πολίτης, Heraklion, Πανεπιστημικές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης, 1999, p. 261-262. Two alternatives in Σπυριδάκης et al., *Ἑλληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, op. cit., p. 114-115 and 115-117.

**71** Βασίλειος Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης in Στυλιανός Ἀλεξίου, ed., *Βασίλειος Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης (κατὰ τὸ χειρόγραφο τοῦ Ἐσκοριάλ) (...)*, Athens, Ἑρμῆς, 2006, ll. 665-668.

**72** Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh (The Book of Kings)*, ابو القاسم فردوسی شاهنامه in Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh (The Book of Kings)*, شاهنامه 8 vols, Costa Mesa, CA and New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987-2008, vol. 2, p. 4, ll. 15-17; translation in Dick Davis (transl.), Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, With a Foreword by Azar Nafisi, New York: Viking, 2006, p. 142.

**73** Original in Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, vol. 3, p. 307, ll. 30-32 and 36-9; translation in Davis, *Shahnameh*, op. cit., p. 307.

**74** Original in Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, vol. 3, p. 308, ll. 55-59; translation in Davis, *Shahnameh*, op. cit., p. 308.

**75** Original in Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, vol. 6, p. 114, ll. 1692-1693; my translation.

**76** Original in Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, vol. 6, p. 114, ll. 1694-1695; my translation.

**77** Original in Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, vol. 6, p. 115, l. 1709; my translation.

**78** For an edition of the sixteenth-century rhymed version, see K. Yiavis (ed.), *Imperios and Margarona. A Critical Edition of the Rhymed Version*, Athens: MIET [Cultural Foundation of

the National Bank of Greece], forthcoming, ll. 97-142. On its composite stripe, see idem, “So Near Yet So Far”, quoted in note 34 above.

**79** Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, vol. 5, 1571, reprint, London 1808, reissued, New York, AMS Press, 1965, p. 271. Quotations below from *Macbeth* are from William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, edited by Nicholas Brooke, Oxford, Clarendon, 1990.

**80** We have not been able to consult the original Japanese sources, and rely entirely on Hiroko Ikeda, *A Type and Motif Index of Japanese Folk-literature*, Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia/Academia scientiarum fennica, 1971, p. 79 [s.n. 314], p. 141 [s.n. 516A] and p. 327 [s.n. K1816.0.3.1]).

**81** This might appear to be incorrect in *Sir Ferumbas*. However, the non-Christian attacker's baptism in the end makes nonsense of his earlier threats to slay the king.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

ΚΩΣΤΑΣ ΓΙΑΒΗΣ: Ο τόπος της επίθεσης σε αυλικά συμπόσια

Το άρθρο αυτό υποστηρίζει ότι η επίθεση από εξωτερικό εχθρό στο γεύμα της αυλικής γιορτής και τους συνδαιτόρες ήταν ένα δημοφιλέστατο μοτίβο της αρχαίας και μεσαιωνικής λογοτεχνίας, που δεν είχε συζητηθεί στη βιβλιογραφία. Παραδειγματίζονται εβδομήντα δύο περιπτώσεις του μοτίβου στην αυλική και δημόδη λογοτεχνία από τον δέκατο μέχρι τον δέκατο έκτο αιώνα στην εβραϊκή, την γαλλική, την αγγλο-νορμανδική, την αγγλική και σκωτική, την γερμανική, την ιταλική, την σκανδιναβική, την ελληνική, την περσική και την ιαπωνική παράδοση. Τα πρωιμότερα δείγματα απαντούν στα σουμεριακά, τα αρχαία ελληνικά και τα λατινικά.

Το κύριο στοιχείο του θέματος είναι η απροσδόκητη εμφάνιση ενός μεταμφιεσμένου εξωτερικού επισκέπτη στο αυλικό δείπνο (εναλλακτικά, ο επιτιθέμενος μπορεί να είναι και μέλος της αυλής, με την οποία, όμως, ήρθε σε ρήξη.) Ακολουθούν συρράξεις και περιπέτειες. Η χρήση της σκηνης είναι τόσο διαδεδομένη τον Μεσαίωνα, ώστε λειτουργεί συχνά ως τυπική μέθοδος εναλλαγής αφηγηματικών επεισοδίων. Το θέμα είναι συνήθως μορφολογικά σταθερό, σημασιολογικά περιορισμένο και πολιτικά ουδέτερο. Πάντως, στα χέρια επιδέξιων ποιητών που γράφουν για απαιτητικότερο κοινό το θέμα παραλλάσσεται με τρόπους που υποσκάπτουν πολλές κανονικότητες: ανατρέπει την αυτάρεσκη εικόνα που έχει η αυλή για τον εαυτό της· ακυρώνει τις διαχωριστικές γραμμές που συμβατικά χωρίζουν τους κακούς ξένους από τους καλούς ημετέρους· και ανανεώνει τα όρια της φανταστικής και ερωτικής λογοτεχνίας του Μεσαίωνα.