

ORIENTAL INFLUENCE AND SYMBOLISM WITHIN THE POEM,  
FLOREZ AND BLAUNCHEFLUR

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## PREFACE

Within many continental poems written during the Middle Ages, one finds evidence to show that stories and symbols from the Orient had merged with traditional courtly love patterns. One such poem is Floriz and Blancheflur. The purpose of this investigation is to discuss the plot of this Middle English poem along with its possible Oriental source, to reveal pertinent Oriental symbols within the poem, and to show the parallels between Floriz and Blancheflur and the anonymous French tale of Aucassin and Nicolette. Emphasis is also placed upon the three major modes of transmitting literature from the Orient to continental Europe during the Middle Ages; i.e., (1) the Crusades; (2) pilgrims returning from the Crusades; and (3) the opening of new trade routes and the reestablishing of ancient ones.

Only three of the extant manuscripts of Floriz and Blancheflur, the Trentham MS., the Cotton MS., and the Cambridge University MS., were consulted in this investigation. A major source in establishing an Oriental parallel for Floriz and Blancheflur was The Arabian Nights, from which the story of "Ni'amah bin al-Rabi'a and Naomi his Slave-Girl" was taken. The distinct resemblance between the Middle English poem and the Arabian story is strong evidence that the plot of Floriz and Blancheflur had its possible beginnings in ancient Arabic literature.

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## CHAPTER I

### CRUSADES, TRADE ROUTES, AND PILGRIMS: POSSIBILITIES OF LITERARY TRANSMISSION

Four major Crusades took place from 1096 to 1295, interspersed with several minor crusades (e.g., the Children's Crusade).<sup>1</sup> The religious ideal of rescuing the Holy City of Jerusalem from the infidels, namely the Saracens, served as the main reason for these movements. The religious impetus which motivated these remarkable undertakings prevailed throughout the entire period of crusading history, although gradually, many of the participants' motives became base, representing a desire to acquire wealth or to escape from political or religious difficulties at home.

The influence of the Orient upon these Crusaders was quite evident. If nothing else, the Crusades served to introduce new levels of comfort into European standards of living. For example, the Crusaders came into contact with the Eastern peoples who loved " . . . coloured textiles and rare jewels coated with bright coloured enamels."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>1</sup>Lynn Thorndike, The History of Medieval Europe, pp. 332-341.

<sup>2</sup>Fred Burgess, Antique Jewelry and Trinkets, p. 32.

experiences of the Crusades provided a liberal education for those who were physically able or who could afford to travel. These individuals suddenly found themselves in contact with a race of people whom previously they had known only in myth. These travelers learned to appreciate such common Eastern items as spices, perfumes, carpets, and other products which previously had been enjoyed by a few wealthy people capable of affording such expensive and unusual items. Descriptions of these Eastern luxuries enhanced the romantic qualities of Middle English literature, adding to it bright colors and warmth. Within Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, for example, much color abounds in numerous descriptive passages like the following:

Whene Guenore, ful gay, grayped in þe myddes,  
 Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al about,  
 Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer  
 Of tryed tolouse, of tars tepites innoghe,  
 Ðat were enbrawdred and beten wyth þe best gemmes  
 Ðat my3t be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye,  
 in daye. (ll. 76-80)

When the Green Knight makes his entrance into Arthur's court, one finds this colorful account of his appearance:

Ande al grayped in grene þis gome and his wedes:  
 A strayt cote ful stre3t, þat stek on his sides,  
 A mere mantile abof, mensked withinne  
 With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene  
 With blyþe blaunner ful bry3t, and his hode boþe,  
 Ðat wat3 la3t fro his lokke3 and layde on his schulderes;  
 Heme wel-haled hose of þat same grene,  
 Of bry3t golde, vpon silk bordes barred ful ryche,  
 And scholes vnder schankes pere þe schalk rides;

And alle vesture ueroyle wat3 clene verdure,  
 Bope þe barres of his belt and oper blyþe stones,  
 Dat were richely rayled in his aray clene  
 Aboutte hymself and his sadel, vpon silk werke3,  
 Dat were to tor for to telle of tryfles þe halue  
 Dat were enbrauded abof, wyth bryddes and flyþes  
 With gay gaudi of grene, þe golde ay inmyddes.

(ll. 151-167)

Although there is a vast amount of scholarship which explains the religious purpose of the movement, it is with the literature and customs brought back by the Crusaders that one must be concerned. Many of the individuals who went upon the crusades were not motivated by a religious zeal or by an interest in doing penance for sins. Instead, history reveals that many noblemen also traveled into the East in search of wealth.<sup>3</sup> Often within a nobleman's party were individuals who were to become the later carriers of literature from the East to the West, i.e., the clerics and the minstrels, or traveling storytellers.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, the cleric was mainly interested in transmitting information concerning religious activities encountered or experienced along the way perhaps noting, as it were, the success or failure (depending upon which Crusade a cleric had joined) of the crusading warriors.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Thorndike, op. cit., p. 331.

<sup>4</sup>Friedrich Heer, The Medieval World Europe 1100-1350, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup>Thorndike, op. cit., p. 330.

Occasionally, these clerics also transmitted the legends or stories which they encountered upon their travels as examples of the heathen nature of the "Saracen pagans." Perhaps, the story was often revised in such a way as to cause it to take on certain aspects of Christianity, placing a hero in the role of a Christian savior and emphasizing his valiant deeds as triumphant victories over pagan individuals.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it is possible that the medieval poem Floriz and Blancheflur, may have been transmitted by such a religious cleric.

On the other hand, minstrels who journeyed with their lords were often quite interested in telling of the exploits of heroes who were already renowned in ancient legends. However, in doing so, they placed their heroes in an Oriental setting, familiar now to the minstrels, with the ever-popular Saracen foe for the hero to combat. In the twelfth century, for example, it was popular in literary tradition to form a cycle of epic heroes in the mould of Charlemagne and William of Orange.<sup>7</sup> However, too frequently, these minstrels, or even a casual writer, ignored the ordinary events of a journey which would have been of great interest, events that would have provided the scholar and historian with greater

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<sup>6</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Zoé Oldenbourg, The Crusades, p. 587.

insight into the situation existing during the Crusades. Nevertheless, the Crusades were responsible for bringing a part of the East back to Europe. The East did, sometimes, provide

. . . an inspiration for the French romancers who pioneered romantic literature in the West. Medieval literature owes a great many of its themes to Oriental folklore, but literary works whose action is set partly in the East are rare.

It is this Eastern inspiration which Oldenbourg observes in the charming Oriental touches that occur in Floriz and Blancheflur, although these qualities occasionally may be the results of fancy or secondhand accounts.<sup>9</sup>

Crusade literature, especially epic tales concerned with chivalry, flourished during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. These tales encompassed subjects dealing with the Crusaders, exploiting victories and defeats in their struggles with the Saracens.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, fiction became so fused with history that the Middle Ages had much difficulty in distinguishing truth from fiction. For example, Oldenbourg has discovered only one work directly concerned with an historical approach to the Crusades, Chanson d'Antioch,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 589.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 590.

<sup>10</sup>Lady Duff Gordon, The History and Literature of the Crusades, p. 321.

supposedly the accomplishment of a trouvère who was travelling with the court of Bohemond at the time of the first Crusade.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, then, the East was to provide the minstrel with a new setting for his stories and with new foes for his Christian heroes to conquer. For example, the following stories refer either to the Crusades or the Saracens in their plots: Apollonius of Tyre, Richard Coer de Lyon, and Titus and Vespasian or The Destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, pilgrims returning from the Crusades were often great "tale-bearers." They represented every social class from the nobleman to the runaway serf. They were those who were able to survive the vast hardships and dangers of the arduous trip to the Holy City. Thus, they came into contact with the "pagan Saracen" and his customs. Out of such experiences, these pilgrims amassed a treasure of great stories to tell to their friends and relatives back home in "civilized" Europe. Many of these tales which were transmitted to the West came from ancient stories of the Middle and Far East already well known for centuries before the time of the Crusades. The guides who attached themselves to the pilgrims were probably another great source for such stories, since

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<sup>11</sup>Oldenbourg, op. cit., p. 586.

<sup>12</sup>John Edwin Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400, pp. 139-156.

gullible pilgrims were possibly inclined to believe almost anything they were to hear about a group of people relatively unknown to their own civilization. The nobler pilgrim or Crusader probably acquired stories from conquered foes or from emissaries on missions of peace. Certainly, there were numerous sources from which a pilgrim might learn of fanciful stories, but the fact remains that, whatever the source, these tales were brought back to the European continent by the travelled and worldly pilgrims who were probably more than eager to relate these adventures and events of their journey to groups of avid listeners.

New trade routes were a third means of a transmission of Eastern legend and myth into Europe. The Crusaders' needs for supplies and transportation reopened the ancient, decaying trade routes between the East and the West. Records show that the period between 1245 and 1345 was especially noted for bringing the East into contact with the West through trade.<sup>13</sup> Merchants themselves carried much Eastern lore back to Europe, not only in their goods, but in their letters and reports sent back to their families or business associates. Marco Polo was probably the most noted traveler of the Middle Ages and, perhaps, the one individual who conveyed to the West so much information about the Orient. He belonged to a family

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<sup>13</sup>Arthur Percival Newton, Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages, p. 124.

of merchants and, as a boy, had spent much of his time at the court of the great emperor of China. In 1296, he had the "good fortune" to be thrown into a Genoese prison.<sup>14</sup> While in prison, he dictated his experiences to an inmate, and eventually produced the Book of Various Experiences.

It was . . . made up largely of descriptions of the natural features of the countries through which he had passed and of their inhabitants, their trade, their religion, their customs, their appearance, and of China, in which he had lived a third of a lifetime.<sup>15</sup>

Among other men of importance to medieval travel literature were John de Plano Carpini, an Italian, and William de Rubruquis, a Fleming.<sup>16</sup> Numerous other authors of travel literature made significant contributions--men like Jordanus of Severac, who described his experiences in India and Abyssiania in a work entitled The Book of Marvels; and Oderic of Pordenone, who spent three years in Peking and left behind a book entitled Description of Eastern Regions.<sup>17</sup> There was even a "Merchant's Handbook" written by Francesco Balducci Pegolotti of Florence.<sup>18</sup> However, one of the most popular

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<sup>14</sup>Edward Cheyney, The Dawn of a New Era 1250-1453, p. 286.

<sup>15</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

pieces of travel literature circulated in England and on the continent the last of the fourteenth century was Maundeville's Travels. Maundeville himself was actually a French physician of Liege, Jean de Bourgoigne, who was, to say the least, a plagiarist.<sup>19</sup> He claimed to have travelled through Asia Minor, Armenia, Tartary, Persia, Syria, Arabia, Upper and Lower Egypt, Lybia, Chaldaeae, a large portion of Ethiopia, Amazonia, Lower India, and the greater part of Upper India, together with the neighboring island.<sup>20</sup> In Cheyney's opinion, "What [Maundeville's] work lacked in veracity it made up for in popularity."<sup>21</sup>

Italian merchants took a great advantage of the many Crusading pilgrims and knights in transporting these zealous guests and, in return, brought back many of the luxuries of the East. The warehouses of these Italian merchants were filled with spices from Ceylon, silk from China by way of Persia, precious stones (such as pearls, diamonds, and corals), carpets from Persia, and exotic fruits.<sup>22</sup> In a list of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> John Ashton (ed.), The Voiage and Travayle of Sir John Maundeville Knight; Which Treateth of the Way Toward Hierusalem and of Marvayles of Inde with Other Ilands and Countreys, p. x.

<sup>21</sup> Cheyney, op. cit., p. 295.

<sup>22</sup> Newton, op. cit., p. 124.

objects that received their names from their places of origin in the Orient, Cheyney includes the following: muslin from Mosul, calico from Calicut, damask from Damascus, and buckram from Bokhara.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, John of Salisbury records the details of an Italian banquet to which he had been invited, where he experienced such delicacies as fruits like the lemon, the bitter orange, and the citron, as well as sugar cane, apparently a popular form of sweet refreshment indulged in by the Crusaders on their march to Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup> Italian merchants traded as far afield as China and the Indies and kept their trade routes a secret, seldom revealed upon the deathbed.<sup>25</sup> Their routes were extended far across the East, from the shores of Morocco and Portugal, along the coast of North Africa and Egypt, to Palestine and Syria, and even into the Mesopotamian area.<sup>26</sup>

One of the trading centers of the world (apart from the major Italian cities of Venice and Genoa) was the Byzantium city of Constantinople, a metropolis that combined

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<sup>23</sup>Cheyney, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>T. A. Archer and Charles L. Kingford, The Crusades; the Story of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, p. 299.

<sup>25</sup>Newton, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>26</sup>Archer and Kingford, op. cit., p. 299.

the cultures of the East and the West. As such, it was a medieval city that served as the ". . . intellectual and industrial clearing-house between Europe and Asia."<sup>27</sup>

Through its city walls perhaps passed more trade than in any other city known to merchant, crusader, minstrel, or pilgrim. Constantinople had maintained its domination for approximately five centuries, from the time of Justinian onward.<sup>28</sup> Since it was the meeting place for merchants from the East and the West, it served as ". . . the nurse of the arts, of manufacture, commerce and literature to Western Europe."<sup>29</sup> Constantinople was the "meeting place" of all nationalities in the time of the Middle Ages.

The Arabs exerted a powerful influence and turned the times of history when they opened the trade routes between Europe and Asia.

It is a commonplace that the Arabs, who in less than a century (633-713) conquered an empire extending from Spain to Sind and central Asia, brought with them into these ancient and highly civilized areas little more than their religion, language, and script.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Frederick Harrison, "Byzantine Empire and Its Significance," in Readings in Medieval History, p. 96.

<sup>28</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>29</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>30</sup>Douglas Barrett, "Islamic Art in Persia," in Legacy of Persia, p. 118.

With the advent of Arabic culture, there were new influences upon European literature. The Arabic tongue became a kind of passport, as it were, between the merchant and the trader, and many Arabic words and Arabic numerals were incorporated into the English language itself.<sup>31</sup> Arabic scholars even contributed to the literature about the Crusades. Ibn al-Qalanisi's Continuation of the History of Damascus (from 1056 and written between 1140-1160) and Ibn al-Athir's Complete Book of Chronicles, written early in the thirteenth century, were two important Arabic contributions to Crusade literature.<sup>32</sup>

The Arabs had their own group of storytellers, known as rāwīs. Each rāwī was, in himself, a living library.<sup>33</sup> As a storyteller, he would often commit to memory a large repertoire of poems and stories which he related to generous patrons or citizens who would provide him with shelter, food, and even money.<sup>34</sup> These storytellers resembled the English minstrels, the Spanish troubadours, the Provençal poets of

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<sup>31</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>32</sup>Harold Swenson Fink, "Crusades," Encyclopaedia Britannica, VI, 834.

<sup>33</sup>James Kritzeck, Anthology of Islamic Literature; From the Rise of Islam to Modern Times, p. 151.

<sup>34</sup>Loc. cit.

Southern France, and the minnesingers of Germany. With the appearance of Arabic letters in the European world, there occurred in European fiction

. . . a glow of Oriental imagination, lighting up romance with sparkling gems, powerful talismans, magic unguents and balsams, graceful fairies, rich palaces, and enchanted gardens.<sup>35</sup>

When these Arabs moved into Spain, they carried with them their storytellers or court poets to perpetuate Arabic prose and verse. However, court poets were not the only ones contributing to the Arabic stories which were being written. The caliphs and emirs themselves, as well as the women of the court, were active in writing and often showed remarkable poetic skill.<sup>36</sup>

There is no doubt that Oriental literature had an ample opportunity and time in which to find its way into European literature in the Middle Ages. The religious pursuit of the Crusades, the devout and, oftentimes, selfish zeal of the crusading pilgrims, and the opening of new merchant trade routes, along with the reopening of older routes, brought about the appearance of Oriental culture in Western literature in such works as Floriz and Blancheflur.

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<sup>35</sup>A. R. Hope Moncrieff, Romance and Legend of Chivalry, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup>H. M. Gwatkin (ed.), and others, The Cambridge Medieval History, III, 434.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MIDDLE ENGLISH POEM, FLORIZ AND BLAUNCHEFLUR:

#### ITS PARALLELS IN NI'AMAH AND NAOMI

The most which critics have observed about Floriz and Blauncheflur is that it appears to contain "Oriental influences" within its story pattern. However, seldom have they gone beyond the scope of this broad statement to offer specific evidence in support of their suppositions. One scholar notes, as a possibility, that the poem may have been derived, in part, from a major work of the Perisan poet, Abu'l Qasim (better known as Firdausi), the work being his epic, Shah-nāma.<sup>37</sup> However, an investigation of this poem does not reveal any story line or conventions that could possibly have contributed to the structure or theme of Floriz and Blauncheflur.

Floriz and Blauncheflur itself is extant in four English manuscripts, none of which contains the full story. The Trentham MS., preserved in the library of the Duke of Sutherland at Trentham Hall in Staffordshire, contains 1033 lines.<sup>38</sup> Scholars believe that this version was written

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<sup>37</sup>A. J. Arberry, "Persian Literature," in Legacy of Persia, p. 212.

<sup>38</sup>George H. McKnight (ed.), King Horn, Floriz and Blauncheflur, The Assumption of our Lady, p. xlii.

around 1440.<sup>39</sup> A second manuscript, presumably written toward the end of the thirteenth century, is known as the British Museum MS. Cotton Vitellius D. III. (or the Cott. MS.), which contains only 451 lines of the poem. Since this manuscript was damaged by fire at one time, only 180 of the 451 lines are now actually legible.<sup>40</sup> The Auchinleck manuscript of Floriz and Blancheflur is preserved in the Advocates Library in Edinburgh.<sup>41</sup> This version of the poem is the most noted of the four manuscripts, because it contains romances of a wide variety, ranging from tales of Eastern interest (such as Floriz and Blancheflur) to two stories on ". . . the matter of France . . . five on the matter of Britain . . . [and] one famous legend [that] blends romance with didactic intent."<sup>42</sup> Loomis suggests that all but five of the works contained in this document were originally derived from a French text, and adds that ". . . these English romances are thoroughly conventionalized and pedestrian in style."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. xliii.

<sup>41</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>42</sup>Laura Hibbard Loomis, "Auchinleck MS. and a Possible London bookshop of 1330-40," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LVII (September, 1942), 606.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 607.

This manuscript contains only 861 lines of Floriz and Blauncheflur.<sup>44</sup> The fourth manuscript, preserving the final 824 verses of the poem, is the Cambridge University MS. Gg. 4. 27. 2.<sup>45</sup> Of these four manuscripts, only the texts of the Trentham, the Cotton, and the Cambridge versions have been referred to in the following analysis of the poem.

The major characters who dominate the plot of Floriz and Blauncheflur are two young lovers, Floriz, the son of a pagan king, and Blauncheflur, a Christian slave-girl. These lovers are reared as brother and sister in the court of Floriz's father, and attend school together until they reach the age of twelve, when the king finally decides that it is time for his son to marry. As the obvious pattern of the plot suggests, Floriz has, by this time, fallen in love with Blauncheflur and now desires to have only her for his wife. Complications arise over the likelihood of such a match, for Blauncheflur is the daughter of a slave and, therefore, not qualified to become the wife of the son of a king.<sup>46</sup> When

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<sup>44</sup>McKnight, op. cit., p. xliii.

<sup>45</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>46</sup>Many romantic tales concerning the fortunes of Christian maidens and their children were prevalent in stories of the Crusades. Dana C. Munro, "Christians and Mohammedans in the Holy Land," in Readings in Medieval History, p. 282.

Floriz is sent to his aunt's castle for two weeks, the youth's parents sell Blancheflur as a slave girl to some merchants in exchange for a cup of gold and silver and " . . . xx mark of reed gold."<sup>47</sup> The parents, then, devise a false grave for the girl in order to convince their son that she has died during his absence from the court. Their plan goes awry, however, when Floriz threatens to kill himself upon hearing of Blancheflur's supposed death. The king and queen, then, confess their wicked plan and send their son on a journey to find Blancheflur, urging him to bring her back to the court. The queen also gives Floriz a magic ring, explaining,

While is it pyne, dou3t no pyng  
Of fire brennyng ne water in þe See;  
Ne yren ne steele shal dere thee.  
(Tr. 11. 376-378)

He is accompanied on his mission by a large entourage and takes with him the cup of gold and silver, given by the merchants in exchange for Blancheflur, and ample money for the journey.

Throughout his search, Floriz is always one step behind Blancheflur. Eventually, he discovers that she has been sold to the Amyral of Babylon, who intends to make the lovely girl his bride. Floriz, as a typical courtly lover,

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<sup>47</sup>Floriz and Blancheflur, Trentham MS., 1. 162. (For long quotations taken from this work, lines and manuscript will be indicated by the use of Tr., for Trentham, and Ca., for the Cambridge manuscript.)

swoons several times upon learning of the future plans for his beloved. On the verge of desperation, he finds a friend in a porter who is stationed at the gate to the entrance of the city of Babylon. This porter suggests to Floriz a plan in which he is enabled to make the gatekeeper at the harem tower his man, who, then, conceals Floriz in a basket of flowers to be delivered to the women's quarters in the tower. However, the basket is taken by mistake to the wrong room. When Floriz leaps out of the basket, he confronts a shocked maiden, who is Claris, a friend of Blauncheflur. It is she who, then, is successful in bringing about the reunion of the young lovers. Problems next arise, following the reunion when Blauncheflur fails to take her turn in laving the hands of the Amyral. The ruler immediately suspects some trickery on her part when she does not arrive at his quarters with Claris, and when he appears in her chamber, he discovers that a man is sleeping with his intended bride. In anger, he almost succeeds in killing the two lovers, but when they cry for mercy, he imprisons them until they may be judged by his barons.

Before the court, which includes the Amyral and his barons, Floriz attempts to give the magic ring to Blauncheflur so that no harm may come to her. However, she will not accept the gift, but demands, rather, that she alone receive the punishment intended for both of them. One of the earls discovers

the ring, takes it to the Amyral, and tells him that the lovers would sacrifice their lives for each other. The Amyral is so moved by this expression of true love that he spares the lovers and marries them with the same magic ring. Floriz is made a knight, and the Amyral weds Claris because of the fidelity which she has shown to her friend. When Floriz receives the news that his father has died, he and Blauncheflur return to Spain to claim the throne.

Analoguees of Floriz and Blauncheflur are to be found in the literature of almost every country in Europe, none of which, however, throws any light upon the history of the transmission of this poem. McKnight admits that its route from East to West would not be easy to trace, but is convinced that this work undoubtedly was influenced by the Crusades, suggesting that the Provençal troubadours may have been its agents of transmission.<sup>48</sup> Herzog proves that there were two early versions of this poem. He argues that version B took root in Italy, and, thereby, spread to Spain, Greece, and neighboring countries.<sup>49</sup> His supposition includes the possibility that Floriz and Blauncheflur may have been carried over the popular trade routes through Italy. However, one

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. xxx.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. xxxi.

cannot ignore the possibility that a Crusader or a returning pilgrim may have brought the story back to the Western world. The second copy of the poem (version A, according to Herzog) supposedly was imported into France, indicating that this version of the work may also have been carried over the trade routes, once more through Italy or, perhaps, from Spain into the southern part of France, where the Provençal poets eventually had their opportunity to develop its theme into its present form. The poem obviously contains ample evidence of Oriental influence, especially Arabic influence, to suggest that it may have come into Europe through Spain, its transmission being at the hands of the Moors. From Spain, then, scholars conclude that it would have been a simple matter for the story to have been carried into the southern part of France by traders or, perhaps, traveling minstrels. Some scholars express doubt, however, convinced that this theory is inadequate, although they admit that ". . . its tolerance and spirit of humanity . . . does seem to bear traces of influence from some land where Christian and Moslem often lived in amity."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, such a place was the Byzantine empire where

. . . Byzantine poets translated into their own language French and Italian narratives of love and combat and

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<sup>50</sup>Richard Garnett and Edmund Gosse, English Literature: an Illustrated Record, I, 117.

also, perhaps to an even greater extent, created their own works of this genre, examples being "Floire and Blanchfleur", "Lybistros and Rhodamne", and "Belthandros and Chrysantza".<sup>51</sup>

It is to be noted, however, that, in their general statements often found in the discussions surrounding this poem, scholars have detected a Byzantine influence within the work, although they offer little evidence to demonstrate exactly what the characteristics are that clearly reflect its Byzantine nature. McKnight, for example, merely suggests that the poem shows a definite Byzantine influence, his only support for this observation being the following comment: "It was one of the first of these oriental tales to be retailed in the Occident and had a wide circulation in all the countries of Western Christendom . . . ." <sup>52</sup>

Byzantine influence or not, Floriz and Blauncheflur does have a definite Oriental flavor, showing an affinity with the ancient collection of tales, Hazār Afsāna (The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night), or The Arabian Nights, as it is better known. The unknown author of these

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<sup>51</sup>Deno J. Geanakoplos, Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, p. 29. Such a sweeping statement of origin cannot be definitely supported, and no further evidence is offered by Geanakoplos to develop this statement.

<sup>52</sup>McKnight, op. cit., p. xxx.

ancient tales employed an ingenious device for linking his stories, giving them unity and coherence by placing separate narratives within the framework of another story until the whole formed " . . . a thread on which one after another the beads were strung."<sup>53</sup> This pattern was the one which was later to be used by Boccaccio in his Decameron and by Chaucer in The Canterbury Tales. The Oriental stories preserved in the Arabian Nights were derived from numerous ancient sources and were probably shaped into a pattern around the time of the twelfth century, having taken on their present form in Egypt during the fourteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Many of these stories " . . . were translated by the Arabs from the Persian, when the caliphs of Baghdad were at the height of their power."<sup>55</sup> Moncrieff feels certain that, at Venice " . . . more than one of the Arabian Nights stories were current long before these seem to have been known to the rest of Europe."<sup>56</sup>

There are obvious parallels between an Arabian story and Floriz and Blancheflur; however, in noting such parallels

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<sup>53</sup>Tales from the Arabian Nights, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup>Kritzeck, op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>55</sup>James Harvey Robinson, The Ordeal of Civilization: A Sketch of the Development and World-wide Diffusion of Our Present Day Institutions and Ideas, p. 79.

<sup>56</sup>Moncrieff, op. cit., p. 75.

one must keep in mind the facts that there is usually a loss in translation, and that characters and actions may often be changed at some point in the long line of transmission, perhaps as an attempt to suit the taste of a given people in a certain locality. The Arabian story which contains a close parallel to Floriz and Blanche-flur is "Ni'amah bin al-Rabi'a and Naomi his Slave-Girl". The Arabian characters are Ni'amah and Naomi. This story similarly develops the slave-girl theme. At the beginning, a slave, along with her infant daughter, is purchased by a wealthy man of Cufa. The slave's daughter and the man's son grow up together and reach a marriageable age, at which time they are married and live together for about two years. One day, when the Viceroy of Cufa hears Naomi singing, he is convinced that she must be as beautiful as her song. He decides, therefore, to capture her so that he may sell her to the Commander of the Faithful, Abd al-Malik bin Marwan. With the help of an old hag disguised as a religious person, Naomi is carried away from her husband. Eventually, she is sold for ten thousand dinars to the Commander of the Faithful, or the Caliph, and is placed in a harem. When Naomi's husband discovers the plot, he becomes ill. A remarkable physician who comes to cure the youth, devises a plan whereby he may recover his wife. This physician establishes a shop in Damascus, the city to which Naomi has been taken, and Ni'amah serves as his assistant. In the

meantime, one learns that Naomi has been pining for her love and that the Caliph has been seeking a cure for her love sickness. When an old woman, who attends Naomi, hears of the physician's great skill, she decides that he is the one to save the young woman. When Ni'amah discovers for whom the old woman seeks a cure, he is able to enlist her aid in gaining entrance into the harem (where men are forbidden, except for the Caliph and the euchs who stand guard). The young husband is taken into the harem disguised as a woman, but misfortune befalls him when he is sent to the wrong room. Instead of being in Naomi's room, he finds himself before the Caliph's sister, but she will aid him in finding Naomi. In the meantime, the Caliph's sister tricks her brother into listening to a song that Naomi sings, which concerns a tale similar to the events that have happened to Naomi and her husband. The Caliph admits that there is justice in the story and agrees that such lovers should not be punished. Naomi, then, reveals herself and produces Ni'amah, since the Caliph now cannot punish the couple because of his previous judgment of the story contained in the song. Instead, the old woman and the physician are rewarded for their services, and the young husband and wife return to the house of Ni'amah's father, where end their lives happily.

The age of the young men in the two stories is twelve, at least when they marry. One recalls that Floriz and

Blauncheflur were "of elde of seuen 3ere,"<sup>57</sup> when they entered school, and the poem reveals that they study together for five years before Floriz's father decides that his son should marry. The events in the poem seem to take place within a period of a few months, although no definite times are actually stated. Hence, one concludes that Floriz and Blauncheflur are twelve years old at the time of their marriage. One may make the same calculation in the case of Ni'amah and Naomi, although a confusion about Ni'amah's age arises at one point in the story, when one learns that, when the children had reached the age of ten, Ni'amah married Naomi, but that they lived together as man and wife for two years before they were separated. Later, the physician places Naomi's age at fourteen. Thus, one assumes that, sometime between the ages of ten and twelve, Ni'amah and Naomi were married.

In both stories, Blauncheflur and Naomi are slaves who are sold to foreign rulers with the help of intermediaries. In the Middle English poem, Blauncheflur is bought by " . . . marchaundes of babyloyne ful ryche [for] xx mark of reed golde / And a Coupe good and ryche."<sup>58</sup> She is, in turn,

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<sup>57</sup>Floriz and Blauncheflur, l. 6.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., l. 147; ll. 162-163.

purchased by the Amyral of Babylon for " . . . Seuyne sythes of golde her wy3t."<sup>59</sup> Naomi similarly is taken by the Viceroy of Cufa, Al-Hajjaj, and sold to the Commander of the Faithful for ten thousand dinars. Moreover, in both stories, the two young girls were described as having been well educated for their time. For example one learns the following details about the training of Blancheflur and Floriz:

So wel pey had lerned poo,  
Inow3 pey coup of latyne  
And wel wryte on parchemyne.  
(Tr. 11. 32-34)

In the Arabian tale, one is told that Naomi " . . . as she grew up . . . learnt the Koran and read works of science and excelled in music and playing upon all kinds of instruments . . . . "<sup>60</sup>

In both tales, when the young men set out in search of their lost ladies, they eventually receive help from "wiser" men who counsel them. For example, Ni'amah is taken into the care of a physician who travels with the youth to Damascus and establishes a physician's shop, where Ni'amah poses as his son. It is through the reputation of this shop that the

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 1. 196.

<sup>60</sup>Richard F. Burton (trans.), The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night, IV, 2.

old physician hopes to discover the place where Naomi is being held prisoner, knowing that she will be wasting away with love sickness and that his medicine will help her. His ruse works, and Ni'amah and Naomi are brought together. In Floriz and Blauncheflur, Floriz receives help mainly from a porter who attends the gate leading into the city of Babylon. Daris, the porter, formulates a plan whereby Floriz is able to make the gatekeeper of the tower at the harem his man. The porter's plan is for Floriz to disguise himself as a freemason who admires the art work on the tower and who engages the gatekeeper in conversation; thus, the gatekeeper enables Floriz to gain entry into the harem. Actually, Floriz is responsible for very little of the planning that succeeds in bringing him to Blauncheflur; rather, he is at the mercy of the other men. However, once inside the harem, it is his own ingenuity that brings him success. He is carried into the harem, concealed in a basket of flowers. In the Arabian story, Ni'amah enters the harem similarly in disguise, because when Naomi's maid disguises Ni'amah as a woman and tells the eunuch on guard that Ni'amah is "the handmaid of Naomi," the eunuch dares not prevent her and the "handmaid" from entering. Once within the harem, the young men in both tales receive much help from the women whom they encounter. For example, in the Middle English poem, Floriz is taken mistakenly into the chamber of Claris. When he hears a woman approaching the basket, he leaps

out, thinking to surprise Blauncheflur. Instead, he confronts Claris, who " . . . bygan to shrelle and to grede."<sup>61</sup> However, Claris soon realizes that this youth must be Floriz, the one for whom Blauncheflur pines. She, then, deters those who have heard her screaming and makes a plausible excuse for her fright. After the others leave, she goes to Blauncheflur to inform her of Floriz's arrival. Here, she plays upon words in addressing Blauncheflur:

. . . suete blauncheflur,  
 Wiltu seo a wel fair flur?  
 Hit ne greu no3t on pis londe,  
 Dat flur pat ihc bringe peto honde.  
 (Ca., ll. 481-484)

Furthermore, after reuniting the lovers, Claris is momentarily able to prevent Amyral from knowing that Floriz is in the harem.

In the Arabian story, Ni'amah enters the harem, disguised as a woman, but he enters the wrong room, and the woman he confronts there is the sister of the Caliph. Luckily, the Caliph's sister willingly serves as a helpmate for the young couple and is able to intercede with her brother, in a round-about fashion, thus saving the young couple's lives. She has Naomi recite a story to the Caliph which resembles the actual story of Ni'amah and Naomi. At the end of the tale, Naomi

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<sup>61</sup>Floriz and Blauncheflur, l. 756.

explains that the ruler in the tale killed the young lovers without inquiring into the matter. When the Caliph's sister questions the justice of such an act, the Caliph commits himself to preserving justice, saying:

This [the act of killing the young lovers] was indeed a strange thing: it behoved that King to pardon when he had the power to punish; and he ought to have regarded three things in their favour. The first was that they loved each other; the second that they were in his house and in his grasp; and the third that it befitteth a King to be deliberate in judging and ordering between folk, and how much more so in cases where he himself<sup>62</sup> is concerned! Wherefore this King thus did an unkingly deed.

In the Middle English poem, Floriz, as well, must face an angry king who discovers Floriz and Blancheflur sleeping together. Infuriated, the king places the lovers in prison to await the judgment of his barons. Actually, the king's judgment of Floriz and Blancheflur appears to be a further development of the episode of the Caliph's judgment in the Arabian story. When they are brought before the barons and the king, Floriz and Blancheflur prove their love for each other.

Once justice has been rendered in both stories by the Caliph and by the Amyral, and once the young couples have

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<sup>62</sup>Burton, op. cit., p. 21.

been reunited, it is time to reward the faithful who helped the two couples. Thus, the Caliph rewards the physician, claiming him as one of his chief officers, bestowing upon him robes of honor, and ordering for him a handsome present. The old woman who helped Ni'amah to enter the harem is also rewarded for her assistance. The rewards in Floriz and Blancheflur are perhaps more generous. For example, Claris is greatly rewarded, because she " . . . was fet down of pe Toure, / And Amyral wedded hur to queene."<sup>63</sup> The gatekeeper, in turn, receives his reward directly from Floriz and is given the gold and silver cup, but he also receives another reward inasmuch as he is forgiven by the Amryal for having allowed a man to enter the harem, an act which was usually punishable by terrible torture and death.

These comparisons reveal the striking similarities that exist between the Arabian story, "Ni'amah bin al-Rabi'a and Naomi his Slave-Girl," and Floriz and Blancheflur, suggesting that the Arabian story lies behind the medieval poem. The Arabian story is much longer than Floriz and Blancheflur, however, mainly because of the song that Naomi recites. On the other hand, Floriz and Blancheflur contains more descriptive detail than the Arabian story. However, as mentioned earlier, there are far too many similarities between

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<sup>63</sup>Floriz and Blancheflur, ll. 1069-1070.

these two stories for one to discount the Arabian tale as a possible source for Floriz and Blauncheflur. Between these two works one has noted the following parallels: (1) both youths are quite young (between the ages of ten and twelve) when they are married; (2) they are reared as brother and sister; (3) they are separated, the girl being sold as a slave to a foreign ruler; (4) they receive help from "wiser" persons; (5) the young man enters the harem in disguise; (6) the lovers are helped by young women within the harem; (7) the foreign ruler forgives the lovers' transgressions and reunites them; and (8) the faithful, helpful women are rewarded. Until scholars discover another Oriental story of an earlier date concerned with the same theme, one concludes that Floriz and Blauncheflur must be considered in terms of its parallels with the story of "Ni'amah bin al-Rabi'a and Naomi his Slave-Girl".

### CHAPTER III

#### ORIENTAL INFLUENCES IN FLORIZ AND BLAUNCHEFLUR

The story of "Ni'amah bin al-Rabi'a and Naomi his Slave-Girl" basically establishes the fact that there is a link between Floriz and Blauncheflur and the Oriental tale. However, within the poem itself there are certain terms, symbols, or unusual allusions that warrant further investigation since they demonstrate the nature of the Oriental influence in the poem.

The Oxford English Dictionary is helpful in establishing the possible Oriental origin of certain words that occur in the text. Therefore, the following terms of definite Oriental origin are given, first, in their textual use and, then, within the framework of the definition supplied by the OED. In each case, the specific word is italicized within the passage taken from the text of the poem.

Barbecan. And ef þer comeþ eniman  
Biþinne þilke barbecan,  
Bute he him 3eue leue,  
He wule him boþe bete and reue.  
(Ca., ll. 243-246)

The word, barbecan, has an uncertain origin; perhaps, it is derived from the Arabic or Persian barbār khānah, which is a possible combination of the Persian words for "house on the wall." Actually, examples of the use of this word are lacking,

but one scholar, Devic, suggests that it came from barbakh (a canal or channel through which water flows). Yet another scholar prefers the spelling of bāb-khanāh, the regular name used in the East for a towered gateway. The latter connotation is most in keeping with the usage of the word in the Middle English poem, which suggests a place connected with a tower. The "he" referred to in the passage is the gatekeeper at the tower, and it is appropriate to the story that he is protecting a towered gateway.

Galyngale. Loue is at his her roote  
 Eat no þing is so soote:  
Galyngale ne lycorys  
 Is not so soote as hur loue is . . .  
 (Tr., ll. 117-120)

The derivation of the word, galyngale, is from the Arabic khalanjān or khaulinjan, which is said, in turn, to have come from the Chinese ko-liang-kiang, literally meaning "mild ginger from Ko, a prefecture in the province of Canton." Galyngale also appears in continental use as a form of sedge and its dried roots. Within the context of the poem, the word suggests the sweetness of love as compared to the sweetness of a spice, thereby, alluding to the fact that Floriz finds his love sweeter than the sweetest spices of the Orient.

Chekere. Wel sone he wyl com þe nere,  
 An wyl byd þe play at þe chekere.  
 (Tr., ll. 669-670)

The word, chekere, comes from medieval Latin for the word, chess. The OED defines chess as follows:

. . . so med. L. had saccī, scāci, scāchi . . . Sp. and Pg. (Portuguese) on the other hand, have preserved in Sp. ajedrez, Pg. xadrez, the Arabic name, shāt-rand, from OPers. chatrang, Skr. chaturanga lit. "the four angas or members of an army (elephants, horses, chariots, foot soldiers)."

No one appears to know about the direct origin of the game of chess, although most scholars think that it came into Europe from the Orient, perhaps from India through Persia. Archer and Kingford have found evidence which shows that the Crusaders were amusing themselves with the intricacies of this game in Antioch as early as 1098.<sup>64</sup> No one is really certain, however, as to how the game found its way into Europe. Hughes thinks that

. . . the Spaniards very likely received it from their Muslim conquerors, the Italians not improbably from the Byzantines, and in either case it would pass northward to France, going on then to Scandanavia and England.<sup>65</sup>

The chess pieces obtained their names in Persia, and the translated versions of these names are in use today. For example, the shah represents the king; the firzan, the queen; the fil, the bishop or elephant; and the ruk, the castle or chariot.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Archer and Kingford, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>65</sup>George Bernard Hughes, "Chess," Encyclopaedia Britannica, V, 461.

<sup>66</sup>Reuben Levy, "Persia and the Arabs," in Legacy of Persia, p. 79.

Parais. For hi funden hem so honde,  
 To þe lond þer his lemman is;  
 Him pu3te he was in parais.  
 (Ca., ll. 74-76)

Parais (or paradise) is derived from pairidaēza, which is a combination of the words pairi (around) and diz (an enclosure or park). In modern Persian the word, firdaus, is still used to denote a garden or paradise. Scholars believe that this word traveled into the European languages through the pen of Xenophon in the Oeconomicus.<sup>67</sup> Within the text of the poem, a description of paradise is not actually given. However, in the sense that a well-kept and well-organized garden was, to the Persians, almost comparable to paradise, one finds a paradise within the story in the form of the garden surrounding the harem tower. A further discussion of the Persian garden is presented later in this chapter.

Amyral. To þe Amyral of Babyloyne  
 Bey solde þat mayde swythe soone;  
 Rath and soone þey were at oone.  
 (Tr., ll. 91-93)

Amyral is actually a forerunner of admiral, which comes from the Arabic amir, or commander. The word is commonly rendered into English as ameer or emir, and followed by -al (of the) as in amir-al-umara, i.e., ruler of rulers. In English, the

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<sup>67</sup>V. Sackville, "Persian Gardens," in Legacy of Persia, p. 266.

chief form of the word represents the Old French amiral, -ayl, reduced in the sixteenth century by phonetic gradation to amrel, a pronunciation still in common use among sailors. However, the refashioned admirale, or -ail, occurs as early as 1205, and became regular after 1500 as its literary form. The original meaning of the word was "Emir, Saracen commander, ruler under the Caliph or Sultan." Within the Middle English poem, amyral signifies a ruler, supposedly under the hand of the Caliph or Sultan. Such an office, in this poem, would cause the ruler to be of a lower rank than the Commander of the Faithful, or Caliph, discussed in the Arabic story in Chapter II.

Within Floriz and Blauncheflur are several objects which are alluded to and which reveal an Oriental influence. The use of the following items along with their Oriental qualities suggests that the source of this poem is Oriental culture.

Goblet or Vessel. Within the poem, a cup fashioned out of silver and gold is used by the merchants who come to purchase Blauncheflur from the King of Spain. These merchants pay the King's price, as indicated in the following passage:

Der haue þey for þat maide 3olde  
 xx. Mark of reed golde,  
 And a coupe good and ryche,  
 In al þe world was none it lyche.  
 (Tr., ll. 161-164)

This same cup is later given to Floriz for his use on the journey in search of Blauncheflur. Within Romanesque times,

a chalice with a lid (similar to the one described for this gold and silver cup) was symbolic of the human heart.<sup>68</sup>

Because the cup eventually becomes an important link in the poem between Floriz and Blancheflur as a kind of love token, it also symbolizes the human heart and all of its suffering. In Persia, the Timurids were a group of craftsmen who took great pleasure in making vessels of " . . . silver plate with applied gold plaques and incrustation of precious stones and glassy enamels."<sup>69</sup> Their vessels would, perhaps, have resembled the gold and silver cup which figures so prominently in the poem. Floriz uses the gold and silver cup to bribe the tower gatekeeper to permit him to enter the harem. However, Floriz must first use a disguise to approach the gatekeeper, as indicated in the following discussion.

Masonry. When Floriz first approaches the gatekeeper, one recalls that he appears in the disguise of a mason who has come to admire the art work on the harem tower. The tower itself is described as follows:

In pat bour, in mydward py3t,  
 Stondeþ a toure, y the ply3t,  
 An hundryd fathum it is hye,--  
 Who-soo beholdeþ hit, fer or nere,  
 An hundred fathum it is y-fere;--  
 It is made with-out [en] pere,  
 Of lyme and of Marbulstone;  
 In al pis world is such noone.  
 (Tr., ll. 567-574)

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<sup>68</sup>J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 114.

<sup>69</sup>Barret, op. cit., p. 81.

Knights returning from the Crusades actually brought back a knowledge of the craft of heavy stone masonry which they had learned from the Byzantines and Arabs.<sup>70</sup> This knowledge of stone masonry helped the returning Crusaders in the construction of stone castles and churches. That the Arabs were good masons is apparent in the previously cited description of the tower. They were also adept at building walls to surround their gardens, as is apparent in the following discussion.

Persian garden. Once Floriz has made his way past the gatekeeper at the tower, he finds himself in the harem. Earlier in the poem, Daris, the porter, had given Floriz a description of the garden (or orchard) in which the tower was located. Records show that, among the Persians, a well-kept and well-organized garden was a thing of beauty. The orchard described in the poem is no exception, as the following lines demonstrate:

De feirest of al mydlerd:  
 Deryn is mony fowles song;  
 Men my3t leue peryn ful long:  
 About þe Orchard is a walle,--  
 De fowlest stone in Cristalle,--  
 And a well spryngeb perynne,  
 Dat is made with much gynne;  
 De wel is of much pryse,  
 De stremes com froo Paradyse;  
 De grauel of þe ground is precious stoones,  
 And al of vertu for þe noones.

(Tr., ll. 606-616)

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<sup>70</sup>Harold Swenson Fink, "Masonry," Encyclopaedia Britannica, VI, 834.

Apparently, most Persian gardens were constructed with similar plans or layouts. Generally, there was great regularity and simplicity in the arrangement of these gardens. The basic need for irrigation of plants existing in the dry desert sand often made it necessary for the owner to construct narrow canals " . . . running like ribbons over blue tiles, widening out into pools" in the garden.<sup>71</sup> In addition, within these gardens were to be found " . . . long avenues, the straight walks, [and] the summer-house or pavilion at the end of the walk."<sup>72</sup> Persian gardens were always walled, since the Persian was an individual who did not like to expose his private life to public view. To ensure such privacy, he built a wall around his garden, sometimes elaborately constructed with battlements and towers, or merely decorated with precious stones or painted scenes.<sup>73</sup> Numerous flowers and trees abounded within these towering walls. Sackville, in his discussion of the pattern of a typical Persian garden, emphasizes the fact that a Persian's love of trees was overwhelming.<sup>74</sup> Also resplendent within these gardens were

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<sup>71</sup>Sackville, op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>72</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

plantings of flowers, ranging from carnations, lilies of the valley, violets, primroses, tulips and narcissi, to iris, evening primroses, hyacinths, jasmine, and roses.<sup>75</sup> These flowers were not the only "gems" to be found within the garden, however, for precious stones were an important part of a Persian garden setting.

Gems. In Floriz and Blauncheflur, resting along the pathway of the garden were numerous precious stones. Some of the stones specifically mentioned were thought to contain special properties. For example, within the Amyral's garden, as part of the "gravel" on the paths, were

Bope saphirs and sardoines,  
And subbe riche cassidoines,  
And Iacinctes and topaces,  
And onicle of muchel grace,  
And mani on oper direwerpe stone  
Dat ich nu nempne ne can.

(Ca., ll. 285-290)

Several of these stones were quite appropriate for a harem garden as a reminder to the women that they should maintain certain standards of behavior. For instance, the sapphire was a good sign, one that brought " . . . wealth, strength, energy, and both divine and princely favor."<sup>76</sup> It was also

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>76</sup>Maria Leach (ed.), Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend, II, 972.

reminiscent of the qualities of the well located within the garden, to be mentioned later. Moreover, supposedly the sapphire would change its color if worn by one who was unchaste.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the orange jacinth was thought to be good for the heart, because it could chase away sadness and bring restful sleep.<sup>78</sup> Next to the jacinth was the topaz. Among the Hindus, there existed an ancient belief which maintained that this stone could " . . . assure long life, beauty, and intelligence."<sup>79</sup> Certainly, the qualities of the stones mentioned in the poem were adequate to insure the safety and peace of mind of all of the women in the harem. Also in the poem, but not in the description of the garden particularly, was the carbuncle stone, which was affixed to the pomel of the gold and silver cup. This gem was supposed to be endowed with a power to cure melancholy and sadness, although it was thought to have a tendency to produce sleeplessness.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Floriz probably felt assured that he would eventually be cured of his melancholy and sadness as long as he had the jeweled cup in his possession.

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<sup>77</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p 533.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 1119-1120.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., I, 191.

This cup with its carbuncle stone would be used, later, to bribe the harem tower gatekeeper who would, in turn, see to it that Floriz gained entry into the harem. Once in the harem, however, Floriz (as well as Ni'amah) must take care to avoid the eunuchs, the men who guarded the harem women.

Eunuchs. It is common knowledge that the men who guarded the harem women were eunuchs. There is an allusion to such an individual in the Arabian story which parallels Floriz and Blancheflur, and, in the poem, Daris,<sup>81</sup> the porter, in describing the tower in which the women are kept, refers to such men with the term Capoun, as follows:

Naw arn þer Seriauntes in þat stage  
 Ðat seruen þe maydons of hy3e parage;  
 But no serieaunt may serue þeryne  
 Ðat bereþ in his breche þat gynne  
 To serue hem day and ny3t,  
 But he be as a Capoun dy3t.

(Tr., ll. 589-594)

Suffice it to say that eunuchs were guards and servants for harem women. According to Burton, eunuch meant chamberlain, a bed-chamber-servant or slave.<sup>82</sup> It is unlikely, however, that the chamberlain who accompanied Floriz on the trip was such an individual.

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<sup>81</sup>Darius (Old Persian Darayavaush), the name of three kings of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia. Cf. Coolidge Otis Chapman, An Index of Names in Pearl, Purity, Patience, and Gawain, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup>Burton, op. cit., I, 49.

Other features of this poem reflect Oriental parallels or, at least, interesting Eastern backgrounds. For example, there is the well in the garden which boils up and turns as red as blood when an unchaste maiden approaches. There is also the tree of love that sheds its first leaf upon a maiden who is to be chosen as the Amyral's bride and which grows new leaves upon the loss of any leaf. These Oriental references in combination with the parallels discovered in the Arabic story strongly suggest that Floriz and Blauncheflur had its origin in Oriental sources.

## CHAPTER IV

### FLORIZ AND BLAUNCHEFLUR AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE FOR

#### AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE

Floriz and Blanche-flur may be the source for several other Medieval stories. McKnight cites the following examples of possible variations on the theme of this poem: (1) in Italy, the Cantare and Boccaccio's Filocolo; (2) in Germany, Floris ende Blancefloer and Flosse un Blankflosse; (3) in the Scandinavian countries, Flóres ok Blankiflúr, and several other saga fragments; and (4) in Spain, Blancaflor and the Gran Conquista de Vlramar.<sup>83</sup> The latter work, the Gran Conquista de Vlramar, popular in the thirteenth century, alludes to Floriz and Blanche-flur as ". . . the most devoted pair of lovers that one had ever heard of."<sup>84</sup> Actually, the Gran Conquista de Vlramar, "a fictional-historical account of the Crusades up to 1271," belonged to a period of Spanish history that dealt with literature mainly concerned with the Crusades or with events associated with the Crusades.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>McKnight, op. cit., pp. xxiv-xxvii.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. xxxvi.

<sup>85</sup>Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwartz, A New History of Spanish Literature, p. 422.

According to Chandler and Schwartz, the ultimate source for stories founded in Spain were imitations or translations of stories from the French.<sup>86</sup>

The tale which is most often discussed in connection with Floriz and Blanche-flur is Aucassin and Nicolette, the closest parallel to Floriz and Blanche-flur without actually being a direct translation of the poem. It is probable, as well, that the text of Aucassin and Nicolette followed many of the same transmission routes as did Floriz and Blanche-flur. Since several scholars assign a later date of origin to Aucassin and Nicolette (variously established between 1150 and 1250),<sup>87</sup> one suggests that the story itself took root in France, perhaps in the Provence region where the troubadours and trouveres held forth. Some scholars believe that the author of Aucassin and Nicolette was a native of Arras in northeastern France who lived in the last half of the twelfth century.<sup>88</sup>

The plot of Aucassin and Nicolette varies somewhat from the one found in Floriz and Blanche-flur. For example, one is never told that Aucassin and Nicolette were brought up

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 161-162.

<sup>87</sup> Clifton Joseph Furness, "Interpretation and Probable Derivation of the Musical Notation in the 'Aucassin and Nicolette' MS.," Modern Language Review, XXIV (April, 1929), 144.

<sup>88</sup> Edwin B. Williams, Aucassin and Nicolette and Four Lais of Marie de France, p. x.

together as children. The first similarity between the characters in the two stories occurs when the reader is told, ". . . Nicolette is but a captive maid, come hither from a far country, and the Viscount of this town bought her with money from the Saracens, and set her in this place."<sup>89</sup> Once again, the slave-girl theme is established within the framework of this story, as it earlier had been in the case of Ni'amah and Naomi and Floriz and Blancheflur. Aucassin's father, aware of his son's love for Nicolette, goes to the Viscount and orders him to send Nicolette to some far away place. The father even threatens the Viscount if he does not carry out this order quickly. The Viscount, who loves Nicolette as if she were his daughter, promises to ". . . send her to so far a country that nevermore shall he [Aucassin] see her with his eyes."<sup>90</sup> Instead of carrying out this promise, however, he places her in the uppermost ward of a castle within a garden and assigns an old woman to act as her guard and companion. One sees that the plot similarity between Aucassin and Nicolette and Floriz and Blancheflur is quite close at this point. Thus, the lovers are separated, the father of the boy is responsible for the separation, and the young girl is eventually placed

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<sup>89</sup>Eugene Mason, Aucassin and Nicolette: And Other Medieval Romances, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

in a tower or in some high residence for safekeeping.

Aucassin, of course, laments the loss of his beloved, as did Floriz and Ni'amah. However, he is not compelled to make an exceptionally long journey to find his lover. Rather, he realizes that his father has had some hand in the disappearance of Nicolette. Consequently, he confronts his father and proposes a bargain, in which he promises to take part in the battle against Count Bougars of Valence if his father will allow him to look once more upon Nicolette, to have a few words with her, and to kiss her. The father agrees to such a plan, but when Aucassin returns from battle with the captured Count of Valence and asks to see his Nicolette, he finds that his father is now unwilling to keep his part of the agreement. Embittered by this turn of events, Aucassin exacts a promise from the Count of Valence to continue to wage a war against the youth's father. The father, however, enraged upon learning that Aucassin still loves Nicolette, imprisons his son.

At this point, the plot is at variance with those of the previously investigated stories. For example, Nicolette manages her own escape, using the ancient trick of tying together sheets and towels to fashion a rope, thus enabling her to climb out of her window. Freed from prison, Aucassin searches for Nicolette, ventures into a forest, discovers her hiding place, and eventually is reunited with her. It is

true that Aucassin and Nicolette also makes use of disguise, but it is Nicolette who dresses herself as a wandering minstrel and who sings a song about her love for Aucassin.

There is, however, a possible faint echo of Floriz and Blauncheflur in one episode in Aucassin and Nicolette involving a play upon words which suggest the name, Blauncheflur. For example, when Aucassin is in prison, he refers to Nicolette as a "white lily-flower," which appears to be a pun upon Blauncheflur in its use of the French for white and flower.<sup>91</sup> One observes, as well, that the month of May figures prominently in both tales, although there is probably little reason for one's attaching any significance to this matter.<sup>92</sup> There is, however, coincidence surrounding the ages of the young lovers in both stories. It has already been shown that both Floriz and Ni'amah were twelve years old at the time of their marriage to Blauncheflur and Naomi. It is possible to demonstrate that Aucassin was similarly young at the time of his marriage to Nicolette. Assuming, of course, that Aucassin and Nicolette were approximately of the same age, one may subtract three years (representing the happiness they experience as man and wife at Torelore) from the age which Nicolette alludes to when

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>92</sup>It is significant to note, however, that in honor of the feast of Pasque-floire (Palm Sunday) the children are named Floriz and Blauncheflur. Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, Middle English Metrical Romances, p. 283.

she tells the King of Carthage, ". . . [I] was stolen away when but a little child, full fifteen years ago."<sup>93</sup> If this deduction be permissible, one may conclude that Aucassin was at least twelve years old when he became enamored of Nicolette.

It has already been established, moreover, that parallels exist between Floriz and Blanche-flur and the Arabian story of Ni'amah and Naomi. Consequently, one suggests that the Oriental "flavor" which scholars detect in Aucassin and Nicolette derives from its having similarities with the other two tales. Some scholars have suggested that Aucassin and Nicolette reveals an influence of Byzantine culture. Still others have maintained that the story has a Moorish source and a Spanish setting, probably in Valencia, because Aucassin and his father were engaged in a war with the Count of Valence.<sup>94</sup> Furness, however, has discovered that the story shows a connection with Arabic music, claiming that ". . . the very structure of the music recorded for Aucassin and Nicolette, and even the scale in which the main burden of the melody is carried, are identical with Arabian forms."<sup>95</sup> He argues that, within the music itself, the constant change of clefs, a problem which has puzzled musicologists, suggest that members

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<sup>93</sup>Mason, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>94</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. x.

<sup>95</sup>Furness, op. cit., p. 150.

of a listening audience during the recitation of the tale may have taken part in the singing of the refrain during the presentation of its lyrical portions.<sup>96</sup> He cites an example of a modern-day practice as evidence of his belief.<sup>97</sup> He is convinced, therefore, that ". . . the opening phrases of Aucassin and Nicolette were written to be performed to the accompaniment of viols or pipes,"<sup>98</sup> implying that the story was probably transmitted by a wandering minstrel, often in the company of singing boys or dancing girls.<sup>99</sup> At any rate, one finds the following similarities between Floriz and Blancheflur and Aucassin and Nicolette: (1) Blancheflur and Nicolette are slave girls; (2) the fathers of Floriz and Aucassin are a source of immediate trouble for the young men; (3) Blancheflur and Nicolette are held captive in the course of events; and (4) the ages of the youths in both plots are the same. Perhaps, a further investigation of the musical backgrounds of Aucassin and Nicolette will clearly demonstrate the presence of an Oriental influence in the cante-fable. The present evidence, however, supports the contention that Floriz and Blancheflur and the stories and analogues related to it were derived from Oriental sources, probably as a result

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>97</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>99</sup>Mason, op. cit., p. xiii.

of the Crusades and the subsequent intermingling of the cultures of the East and the West.

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