

# From Camelot to China, or, ‘A History or Moral Tale about a Young Sir Gabein’s Marvelous Adventures Illustrating Divine Providence’

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This article offers the first English-language translation of Sir Gabein, a hitherto unknown eighteenth-century Yiddish tale about Sir Gawain, in which the Arthurian knight becomes the Emperor of China. The accompanying scholarly introduction places the text into its larger context within Judaic culture, and European, Germanic, and Yiddish Arthuriana. (AO)

*‘Mein namen ist Kuduks der Zehnte, keisr von China’ (er knepfte sich oufun’ zeigte ihm ouf seinem unterm kleide den chinesischen keiserlichn stern)*

*[‘My name is Kuduks the Tenth, emperor of China.’ He unbuttoned his clothing and showed him the Chinese imperial star on his undergarment.]’*

Together with the surprised audience, a baffled Gawain (in Yiddish: Gabein) observes how the stranger who just defeated and abducted the Arthurian knight reveals his identity as emperor of China, underscoring this claim by the display of his insignia. Some twelve pages later, the audience will learn that, after eighteen years, Gabein will not only have married the emperor’s daughter but himself succeeded Kuduks to the Chinese imperial throne. In order to read about these adventures, a contemporaneous audience would have had to be familiar with so-called *vayber-taytsh*, a semi-cursive typeface of the Hebrew alphabet. Otherwise, the adventures that turned one of the most famous Arthurian knights from a member of the Round Table into the new emperor of China, as narrated in the 1789 *History or Moral Tale about a Young Sir Gabein’s Marvelous Adventures Illustrating Divine Providence* [*HISTORIE oder moralische erzehlung handelt von wunder-bahre begebenheiten eines jungen Riter Gabein worous di getliche var-sehung erkant wert*] (henceforth referred to as *Gabein*), would have remained hidden from them.<sup>2</sup>

This article provides an English-language translation of, scholarly introduction to, and interpretation of the Yiddish *Gabein* (1789), a tale about

Sir Gawein heretofore untranslated into English, in which this knight leaves the Arthurian court to become the Emperor of China. The background information on the transmission and adaptation history of *Gabein* provided in this paper illustrates how transcultural identities are imagined and navigated in this eighteenth-century Arthurian romance and places it into its larger context within European, Germanic, and Yiddish Arthuriana and Judaic culture.

*Sir Gabein* is part of a shared Yiddish-German Arthurian narrative tradition centered around the coming-of-age story of Gawain's son Wigalois (in Yiddish: Viduvilt).<sup>3</sup> Within the Arthurian framework, the *Wigalois* tradition is as representative for the general Arthurian tradition as it is exceptional. It is representative because the retelling includes changes in media, textual representation, and genre. And it is exceptional because the adaptations involve two seemingly distinct linguistic and cultural groups, the Jewish Yiddish-speaking and the Christian German-speaking audiences. Nevertheless, these disparate strands culminate in one shared narrative tradition that also illustrates the continued reception of Arthurian material in a Jewish Ashkenazi context.

The first known adaptation in this tradition is the Middle High German romance *Wigalois* by Wirnt von Grafenberg (1210/20). *Wigalois* represents the rather traditional Arthurian narrative type, the *fair unknown* narrative, which focuses on a knight's rite of passage, in which the knight errant completes a series of quests in order to obtain land and wife, kingdom and vassals. Scholars have generally agreed with the proposition that Wirnt's *Wigalois* portrays the tale of an exemplary knight, one whose path is free from true crisis.<sup>4</sup> The narrative as told in *Wigalois* begins with Wigalois' parentage and leads Gawein from King Arthur's court to a mysterious, far-away land where he marries its princess. After a period of time, however, Gawein decides to return to the Arthurian court, unaware his wife is pregnant. Years later, Wigalois, now an adult, himself travels to the Arthurian court himself, in search of his father. At the court, he is challenged with a quest, to free a besieged kingdom from its heathen usurper. After the successful completion of a series of adventures, Wigalois marries the princess of the formerly bewitched land and becomes its new king. Following these events, a significant part of the remaining text covers an epic battle that draws on the tradition of *chanson de geste*, a narrative type centered on the Christian-heathen wars associated with Charlemagne.<sup>5</sup>

This text, the first German example of this narrative tradition, proved to be widely successful. More than 28 fragments and 13 complete manuscripts of Wirnt's *Wigalois* still exist, with the earliest dating from 1220-1230, that is, shortly after its composition. Moreover, within the span of several hundred years, the story was reworked into Early New High German prose at least three times, once as a stand-alone text, *Wigoleis vom Rade* [*Wigoleis of the Wheel*] (1483/1493),<sup>6</sup> and twice as an interpolated text within larger romance

compilations, Ulrich Füetrer's Early New High German *Buch der Abenteuer* [*Book of Adventures*] (1496-1500)<sup>7</sup> and Sigmund Feyerabend's Early New High German *Buch der Liebe* [*Book of Love*] (1587).<sup>8</sup> In the 1390s, the *Wigalois* material was also adapted in an exclusively visual form as a mural cycle at Castle Runkelstein (Roncolo), in the South Tyrol.

The broad historical reception of *Wigalois* is highlighted by a Yiddish adaptation, commonly referred to as *Viduvilt*, that represents the first known Yiddish rendering of an Arthurian text. Unfortunately, author identity, date, and place of the composition remain unknown. Some sixteenth-century manuscripts point to Italy as the place of composition; during the period, Italy was a central location for the production of Yiddish literature<sup>9</sup> while later adaptations appear to have come from further north. Although only three incomplete manuscripts of this first Yiddish *Wigalois* story are preserved,<sup>10</sup> this Yiddish *Viduvilt* adaptation became a template for numerous reworkings, including, for instance, the subject of this essay, *Sir Gabein* (1789), and indicated a fascination with Arthuriana among Yiddish-speaking audiences that would last for centuries.

The Yiddish adaptations bridged the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century gap, a time in which the stories of King Arthur were not reworked within the German-speaking world. Even though Arthurian stories enjoyed immense popularity in this area during the Middle Ages, they fell into oblivion in the seventeenth century, only to be rediscovered near the end of the eighteenth-century (which was also the case for the German 'national' epic, the *Nibelungenlied*).<sup>11</sup> Yet the story of the Arthurian knight *Wigalois* continued to be retold in the Yiddish stories, thanks partially to the Protestant philosopher and Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil, who transliterated, translated and reprinted *Artis Hof* [*Arthur's Court*] (1671/1679) in his Yiddish textbook for non-Jews, *Belehrung der Jüdisch-Teutschen Red- und Schreibart* [*Introduction to Spoken and Written Jewish-German*] (1699), thereby making the adaptation accessible to a non-Yiddish speaking audience.<sup>12</sup> In 1780, Daniel Ernst Wagner reworked Wagenseil's version for his collection of narratives entitled *Erzählungen aus dem Heldenalter teutscher Nationen* [*Tales from the German Nations' Heroic Age*], using the story to evoke a spirit of 'Germaneness' that he suggested dated back to the Middle Ages.<sup>13</sup> Even the famous German romantic poet Ludwig Uhland (1787-1862) drew on transliterated Yiddish version rather than the Middle High German *Wigalois* for a fragmentary poem he composed entitled 'Ritter Wieduwilt'.<sup>14</sup>

Wirnt von Grafenberg's *Wigalois* itself was devalued in nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries' scholarship as a 'post-classical' Arthurian romance, marred by an eclectic use of derivative material.<sup>15</sup> Despite the initial lack of scholarly interest, the amount of research published on *Wigalois* has increased immensely during the last two decades, ranging from descriptive analyses of

newfound fragments to the construction of gender within the narrative.<sup>16</sup> The increase in was enabled by a modern-German translation reproduction of the 1926 Kapteyn facing-page edition of *Wigalois* and extensive commentary by Sabine and Ulrich Seelbach, published in 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2014).<sup>17</sup> *Wigalois* is also available in French translation, most notably Danielle Buschinger's *Wigalois, le chevalier à la roue* (2004), and in English translation by J. W. Thomas (1977).<sup>18</sup>

Similar to the Middle High German *Wigalois*, the Yiddish adaptations are for two important reasons slowly being (re-)discovered. Firstly, translations and editions are making the Old Yiddish texts known and accessible to a broader audience.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, contemporary historians, including Verena Kasper-Marienberg and Jonathan Elukin, are revisiting the assumption that the Jewish Yiddish-speaking minority in the Holy Roman Empire led an existence separate from the Christian, German-speaking majority and had little or no impact on the culture of the latter. Largely through primary-source historical documents, they are uncovering an intricate network of cultural interaction and cross-fertilization.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, recent research on Old Yiddish literature supports these historical claims, revealing a more intimate form of cultural mixing than court documents or commercial exchanges alone would convey, namely the one told through stories.<sup>21</sup>

#### GABEIN'S HISTORY AND LANGUAGE

The story of *Gabein's* transmission over the generations and its preservation is arguably as interesting as the content of the adaptation itself. Several fortunate coincidences provide us with access to the text, of which no original copy remains. As far as we know, only one version—a modern transliteration—exists, as Leo Landau's Appendix II of his *Arthurian Legends or the Hebrew-German Rhymed version of the Legend of King Arthur* (1912). Landau's edition focuses on two *Viduvilt* manuscripts, held at the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky (Cod. Hebr. 255 and Cod. Hebr. 289, both 16<sup>th</sup> ct.), and the printed *Artis Hof* as found in Wagenseil's *Belehrung* from 1699. Landau's overall aim was to illustrate the '[m]utual influence of Christian and Jewish Literatures'<sup>22</sup> using the example of these early Yiddish adaptations. But the true importance of Landau's work contestably lies in his transmission of the otherwise unknown and unpreserved *Gabein*. In 1926, Landau additionally published a discussion of his scholarly insights in a brief article that, fortunately, also reprints the original first and last page of *Gabein*.<sup>23</sup> These two pages are the only direct witnesses of the early *Gabein* transmission, with all Yiddish originals seemingly lost.

Since Landau, only two other scholars have engaged closely with *Gabein*, namely Achim Jaeger and Christoph Cormeau. In his monograph *Ein jüdischer Artusritter* (2000), Jaeger offers a thorough analysis of elements and language

used to describe courtly life and argues that *Gabein* displays a longing on the part of the Jewish author and audience for acculturation.<sup>24</sup> Christoph Cormeau in 1978 approaches the text from the now-discredited position that these entertaining Yiddish-language texts were intended for women who could not understand Hebrew, arguing that *Gabein* was inspired by fairytales, eventually offering its audience a happy ending that takes place against all odds.<sup>25</sup> A third expert on the German-Yiddish tradition, Robert G. Warnock, is perhaps more typical of the previous scholarly attitude toward *Gabein*. He refuses a thorough engagement with *Gabein*, referring to it as low-brow literature, 'a schmaltsy tale of separation and reunion ('eine Trennungs- und Wiederfindungsschnulze')'.<sup>26</sup>

Even if we were to entertain Warnock's dismissive statement as possessing an element of truth, the reason that this unusual story about the exemplary Arthurian knight Gawein becoming emperor of China is so utterly under-researched would seem to lie not so much in its inferior literary qualities but rather in its unusual language and in its transmission history. Landau himself used the copy owned by the Jewish Romanian-English scholar Moses Gaster (1856–1939) who was known for his great ability to collect, and thus to preserve, material that otherwise would have been lost. The now-lost *Gabein* manuscript was comprised of 9 leaves and was printed in the so-called *vaybertaytsh*, a semi-cursive typeface of the Hebrew alphabet, in Frankfurt an der Oder in 1789 (5549 according to the Jewish calendar).<sup>27</sup> The language of *Gabein* could be categorized as generally closer to Old Yiddish. This form of Yiddish differs significantly from modern Yiddish, which originated in the contact with Slavic languages caused by the late medieval move to the East, which left its mark on phonology, morphology, the lexicon, syntax and pragmatics.<sup>28</sup> Many seemingly 'incorrect' forms in *Gabein*, however, cannot be accounted for within the framework of either German or Old Yiddish.<sup>29</sup> Such mixture of German- and Yiddish-language elements in *Gabein* is not the only source of linguistic confusion; the names that often appear in multiple various spellings throughout the text are equally confusing for modern readers. For example, the emperor's name appears in four different forms (Kadukus, Kudukus, Kaduks, Kuduks) and his daughter's name in two (Schartine, Schartina).

No concrete source or model has been identified for this adaptation, and thus a meaningful comparison can only address general changes in regard to the other *Wigalois/Viduvilt* adaptations. The most obvious difference is the focus on Gawain or, as he is called here, Gabein. *Gabein* consists of two major parts. The first focuses on Gabein's life and covers the events from a stranger knight's appearance at court until the birth of Gabein's son Viduvilt (Landau: Widwilt). The second, much shorter part (only one third of the total narrative) focuses on Viduvilt and his search for his father, culminating in the meeting of the two and Viduvilt's wedding. Until Gabein's departure from the Arthurian

court and his voyage with the strange knight to the latter's homeland, the plot is similar to the other *Wigalois*/*Viduvilt* adaptations, but after Gabein arrives at the strange knight's court, the story diverges significantly. While the plot of *Gabein* differs in many places from both *Wigalois* and *Viduvilt*, the general story line still includes Gabein's being taken to an otherworld, a counter to the Arthurian world; the upbringing of Viduvilt in this new realm; and a place that is under a general threat, in *Gabein* from very earthly highwaymen and in *Wigalois* a heathen or demonic usurper. The text also includes the hero's search for his father and the final reunion of Gabein's family along with the appointment of a new ruler. The story, however, no longer takes place in a bewitched otherworld requiring salvation, as is the case in other *Wigalois* adaptations, but in the more realistic locales Sardinia and China, where threats involve simpler and more everyday dangers such as robbers. With a radically increased focus on China, admitting a contemporaneous fascination with the empire, *Gabein* abandons the world of the Arthurian court and ultimately offers the tale of a knight who incorporates the early enlightenment fascination with the cosmopolitan hero.

A HISTORY OR MORAL TALE ABOUT A YOUNG SIR GABEIN'S MARVELOUS  
ADVENTURES ILLUSTRATING DIVINE PROVIDENCE

*The ancient chroniclers record, among other things, a pleasant story that truly took place at a certain King Arthur's court. This king had many territories under his command. His residence was a mighty and beautiful city that he had built next to the sea and therefore gave the name Arthur-City [Artisstat]. His table was quite large, and many princes and counts ate at his table daily. Here, at this royal court, it was established in ancient days that under threat of corporal punishment no one was allowed to eat or drink, be it the king or queen themselves, neither footman nor servants, until foreign visitors were received. There was never a shortage of foreign visitors, for the country was so large that every day new people arrived. By chance, one day no foreigner arrived and all those at court had to go to bed without having eaten anything at all. The queen, who was languishing with hunger, had gotten up very early in the morning and raised her eyes towards Heaven, asking that they may be so fortunate as to receive foreign visitors. And finally, she beheld a glorious knight arriving from afar. His shield and helmet sparkled with gold and diamonds.*

*His horse was covered with a golden saddlecloth, and its silver harness was studded with jewels. This knight rode up to the castle garden where the queen stood and asked somebody who that lady might be. 'The queen,' was the answer. He jumped off the horse immediately and threw himself to the queen's feet. She had told him rise and asked what he desired. 'Gracious queen,' he said, 'I would like to be granted the favor to honor your majesty with a precious belt that is so beautifully gemmed that I flatter myself you have never seen its like. And although King Arthur might have many treasures<sup>30</sup>, I still believe that this belt*



*cannot be unpleasant for you. Here it is. Show it to the king and to the whole entourage. Meanwhile, I will abide here until I hear your gracious decision in the morning.' The queen, who was overjoyed to be released from hunger by this visitor, received him most graciously, especially since he had brought her a beautiful gift. She accepted it enthusiastically on the condition that the court permitted it. At mealtime, when the king and all his lords were sitting together, the queen reported to the king, 'Here is a beautiful and exquisite belt which a foreign knight wants to give me as a gift. It all depends on whether your royal majesty has no objection. Would your royal majesty consider it and graciously share your decision with me?'*

*The king showed this belt to all the knights who were present at the table and, while doing so, said that everyone should express his opinion about it. Each of them thus made his observation and all but one knight, whose name was Sir Gabein, approved. Some said, 'This gift is of great value and we know of no downsides.' Others added, 'From this belt it is clear that its owner must be a mighty regent who wants to show with this gift that he is a good friend of your royal majesty, even though he does not reveal his identity; however, you will find it out in time.' But Sir Gabein made a stand against this: 'Admittedly, I am the youngest,' he said. 'And thus I blush with shame about presenting my decision, which cannot easily be reconciled with the advice of the whole council. But we all are duty-bound to advise the king case by case and each according to his own insight. This duty makes me so bold as to advise your royal majesty in accordance with my thoughts against it. The value of the belt be as it may, it nevertheless does not honor the king to take gifts and even less so the queen to accept presents if they are from a foreign gentleman. Indeed, if he discloses his identity and turns out to be an actual king or emperor, he shall not be refused.' The king was pleased with Gabein's advice and ordered the belt to be returned on the following day, unless [the stranger] disclosed his identity.*

*The belt was thus returned by the queen to the unknown knight who, despite the queen's attempt to persuade him, did not want to declare his identity.<sup>31</sup> 'You are humiliating me,' he told the queen. 'And I will forever believe that the scoundrels sitting at your royal table have advised your majesty against this. Well, if they would be chivalrous men, they should take up their swords and fight with me. Tell the king that I challenge his knights to combat here in this place. And if they refuse to come, I will take out my revenge on his royal majesty, King Arthur.' (He beat his chest.) 'I am a man who holds himself in high esteem, even if you do not know who I am.'*

*Among all the knights there was none who, on the request of the king, wanted to attend to this fight. 'Had your majesty not rejected our counsel, this would not have happened. You preferred to follow Sir Gabein's advice. Let him sort out the mess,' they replied.<sup>32</sup> Sir Gabein was called to king Arthur. 'My loyal knight,' he said to him, 'I pledge to you on my crown and scepter that I will bestow the highest honors on you if you defend my honor this time. The unknown knight*

who wanted to present the belt to the queen is very affronted that it was denied him, and thus he challenges my best knight to a duel. See to it now that you defeat him. Otherwise, he will disgrace me and my whole court.' 'I will serve your royal majesty with the last drop of my blood!' said Sir Gabein, 'and it shall happen right away.' Noble Sir Gabein saddled his horse, girded himself with weapons and saber, and immediately attacked the unknown knight heroically and undauntedly. The duel lasted several hours before they were able to inflict wounds on one another. And finally, after intense fighting, Sir Gabein was so badly wounded that he had to surrender himself as prisoner to the strange knight. The king now wanted to pay a high ransom for Sir Gabein, but no money was enough for the unknown knight: 'I do not need any money,' he told the king; 'my honor means far more to me than your entire kingdom.' It was painful<sup>63</sup> for the king to watch when Sir Gabein rode away as a captive behind the unknown knight: 'May God have mercy on you and may He be with you,' were his words. Thus, the unknown knight rode away and Gabein went behind him.

They rode a long way through many lands and eventually, in the sixth month, they reached China. On one side, the country is bordered by a wall, four ells<sup>64</sup> wide and thirty ells high, and it was a thoroughly beautiful country. Sir Gabein was amazed that he had never seen such beauty. Not long after that, they found themselves in the proximity of a beautiful and magnificent city. In the distance, one could see glistening forth a beautiful palace whose roof was covered in fine gold and studded with carbuncles. Sir Gabein couldn't stop marveling at the fact that he had never before seen such beauty. In this moment, the stranger addressed Gabein in a friendly manner for the first time. And half a mile from the palace, on a beautiful and fragrant meadow, they stopped. They dismounted from their horses and let the horses graze there a little. 'Now, my dear son,' he said to Sir Gabein, 'how do you like this country and the palace that lies in front of us?' 'Immensely, my lord! I believe there is nothing more beautiful in this world.' 'My dear son,' said the unknown knight, 'You will see many things even more beautiful in my house. It is time to explain to you who I am. I am the emperor of this country. This palace is my castle. My name is Kuduks the Tenth, emperor of China.' (He unbuttoned his clothing and showed him the Chinese imperial star on his undergarment). 'Do not be afraid, be cheerful! You can expect many good things from me. I have no son in my late years and the almighty and all-wise God only gave me one daughter. She is beautiful. You will have seen no one more beautiful in all your life. She possesses greater intellect and understanding than a thousand others of her gender; she is praised widely, and she is called therefore the beautiful and intelligent Princess Schartine. Many distinguished kings and princes have presented themselves [as suitors] on her account but I did not choose any of them. I have decided to give her nothing less than a heroic knight. About you, I have sufficient lands and people, and my successor will need nothing more than what I already possess. I have been told that you are a heroic knight just as



*I am looking for. This is why I went to seek you at King Arthur's court. I admit that I was pleased with how you fenced so boldly and swiftly! I will, moreover, be pleased with you if you would now take my Schartine to be your wife. Declare yourself! But she shall not be forced on you. If she is not to your liking, I will set you free to return to your home. You shall also be given a great deal of money to take with you.'* Sir Gabein was taken aback at this proposal. *'Alas, gracious emperor, you are mocking me! I believe that you will find a much better match for your princess than a captive knight.'* *'No!'* the emperor said, *'I am not mocking you. I am not asking for anyone better. You please me beyond all measure and Heaven wants it! Now then, let us ride to the palace in good spirits and you shall see my daughter for the first time.'*

*And thus, Emperor Kuduks with his blazing imperial star rode on the right side and Sir Gabein by his command rode now on his left side into the palace. As soon as they arrived, cannon salutes were fired all around the city and in between each cannon shot, trumpets and shawms were played, and tympani beaten upon the towers. The streets were illuminated and adorned with triumphal arches. The citizens wore their finest and the palace donated a large amount of money to the poor. Princess Schartine received her father, and Sir Gabein cast his view upon Schartine and was enamored by her beauty. It did not take a quarter-hour until the castle was full of ministers and princely counts who were at the residence to welcome the emperor. The emperor thanked them and at once presented Sir Gabein to them: 'Here, I recommend this knight to you now and that you pay him great respect. With God's will, he shall marry my Schartine and be my successor.'* Sir Gabein fell down at the emperor's feet and was raised up by the emperor himself: *'Sit here next to me, my dear son,'* said the emperor while passing to a chair of red velvet adorned with gold braid. Sir Gabein paid his compliments and all the court that was present commended themselves most humbly to their emperor and to Sir Gabein.

*'My dear son,'* said the emperor to Sir Gabein, *'Do you still believe this is mockery?'* *'No,'* he replied, *'I am convinced by your imperial mercy. Your imperial majesty will forgive me that I just did not consider myself so fortunate.'* *'How do you like my Schartine? Did you see her?'* *'Yes, your imperial majesty, I like her beyond all measure and I am very happy. Oh Heaven! Who can comprehend Your works? How marvelously have You brought me through this incident to the highest peaks of fortune?'* Yes, your imperial majesty, this affair is a decree of the Almighty and I firstly thank Him and then your imperial majesty. Thanks be to You, Almighty, that You make me so joyful through this gracious emperor. I will proclaim Your deeds forever. Your support and mercy shall always remain my songs of joy. And you, your imperial majesty, you are an angel of the Almighty. I will serve your majesty in all matters to the last drop of my blood. And your Schartine shall reign over my heart and be its lord.' The emperor took him by his hand and walked with him to the princess Schartine's room. She was in love with him and

received him very cordially. When the emperor was conclusively able to register their mutual satisfaction, he asked Schartine whether she would decide to be Sir Gabein's wife: 'I am well disposed towards him and if you love him, he shall be my successor to the throne.' Schartine blushed and did not know how to answer immediately. Eventually, she shared her decision with her father softly: 'My dear and gracious father, whomever you love, I shall love dearly.'

Sir Gabein and Schartine were betrothed and their wedding was scheduled to take place two months later. After two months, the wedding took place at the palace in the presence of the whole imperial nobility. Joy was written on everybody's face and each individually blessed the newlyweds, that they may enjoy their lives in the shadow of fortune. Before the wedding, Emperor Kuduks had Sir Gabein crowned as heir to the Chinese throne.

Here, we need to insert the prayer that Sir Gabein said one hour prior to the wedding ceremony: 'Oh Heaven, almighty, everlasting, and all-knowing Creator, Lord of Hosts,<sup>36</sup> and King of Kings, You have raised me from a humble place. I thank you that it pleases You to marry me to Schartine, princess of the emperor of China! Our marriage is an act brought about by You, the most high! Bestow, therefore, Your mercy and grace upon us and forgive us our unconscious wrongdoings that we have committed since childhood. Lead and guide us in Your ways. Grant us a pure heart to help the poor, to raise up those who are bowed and to aid widows and orphans. Oh Heaven, I shudder when I think back to the day when I thought to live all my life as a slave. It was as if a thunderbolt struck my heart when I had to leave my parents behind in despair. The only comfort they still had left, the staff of their old age that I was for them, disappeared. I thought I was taken from them forever, never to see the light that shines on my parents again. Mighty regent, Your punishing rod was indeed pleasant to me, but my parents' lament and grief as they lost me their only son was for me like the most bitter death. But You cheered my soul [because I believed] You to be righteous in all You do. Thus, my hope did not cease. And You, all-benevolent lord, You have made the sun shine over me after this rain. The very fate that I believed would destroy me is now the tool that brings everlasting joy to me and my parents. My parents are, however, unfortunate that they do not have the luck to witness here this happiest day. Lord of all joy, let a feeling of happiness nevertheless flow into their souls and let them see this fortunate union already today in their dreams. Announce it to them through an angel—Your power is unlimited!—and bestow the mercy upon me to be able to visit them before the year is over in person, to tell them of my welfare. I vow, with Your help, to visit them before the year is over and then to take them to my home. They shall enjoy their old age in great peace here with me and my wife—and—' Thereupon, Sir Gabein was called to the wedding and had to shorten his fervent prayer. He wiped away his tears and looked like the golden sun again. The wedding was conducted according to Chinese ceremonies, and afterwards they went to the banquet. The tables were made of silver, the

serving vessels of gold, and altogether everything was so beautiful and splendid that nothing like it had ever been seen with another emperor.

After several months, the wife, Schartine, got pregnant and her husband, Sir Gabein, remembered the oath he had given on that holy day. He was obliged to visit his parents, and he disclosed this to his wife and his father-in-law. 'We are not happy to see you undertake such a long journey,' they replied to him. 'You could share such things with your parents in a letter. But we do not wish to keep you from your oath. Godspeed to you and tell us of your arrival [there].' Thus, he took his leave of them and from all the nobles too, and left China with an escort of ten mounted warriors and with a large amount of money.

Unfortunately, Sir Gabein and his escort were attacked by a gang of highwayman.<sup>37</sup> His escort was too weak to resist them and they were stricken dead by them. Sir Gabein alone had the fortune to flee from their murderous hands on foot to a forest. He wandered around for four days in these woods before he saw another human being. 'Oh Heavens! Gracious Father!' he began to plead. 'Do not let me give up my life here in these wild woods, but rather let the tears of my poor parents appear before your eyes. Fulfill my wish to be able to embrace them and then to see my poor Schartine again, whom I have left behind pregnant. Then, I will happily sacrifice my life to you, and I will happily answer to You in front of your judgement seat'— 'Bang, Bang,' boomed out something behind him. Shaking, he fell down in fear to the ground, until he at last found renewed courage. 'Who could be firing off canons around here?' He had no other thought than, 'These are distress signals, fired upon a nearby sea somewhere around here by a ship in distress in order to receive help.' And thus, he walked toward the smell of the gunpowder and luckily arrived at a sea that closely bordered this forest and found a ship that had run aground a sand bar there not far from land. He dared swim to it and saved two people out of it who screamed miserably for his help.

Soon afterwards, the ship sank with all the people who were still on board. By their appearance, these two people were of high rank. They thanked this noble knight for saving their lives and asked him who he was. 'I am called Sir Gabein,' he said. 'And who are you, my gentlepeople?' 'We cannot tell you who we are because we are traveling incognito,<sup>38</sup> but know that you have saved the lives of a king and a queen. If you would stay with us until we are fortunate enough to find a ship that takes us home, you shall have our oldest daughter, Anne, for a wife.' 'I thank your majesties,' Sir Gabein responded, '[But] I am already married. My wife is the only daughter of the Chinese Emperor Kuduks. Not far from here, fate has robbed me of the company of my escort of ten dragoons, not to mention my servants, through the hands of a large gang of highwaymen. All my belongings fell into their hands. Alas, wretched me, I saw with my own eyes how the murderers took their lives. Divine Providence allowed me to flee on foot into this forest through Her own hand. I have been trapped for four days already in this forest without having eaten anything at all. How wonderful are the works of

*the Almighty; they are unfathomable. His providence is without end. Indeed, I believed that I was destined to fall prey here in these woods to the wild animals, but, to the contrary, I was fortunate enough to save the lives of fellow human beings, a king and a queen. Who could have told me earlier in China the reason I would be attacked by highwayman along my path in this region? Now I have the comfort of knowing that the Omnibenevolent brought me here, furthermore, with good intentions.' The king and the queen were deeply touched by this story. Amid this narration, an Arthurian and an English ship passed them. Sir Gabein and his companions hailed them. Each of the ships' captains sent a small boat to them. Sir Gabein allowed himself to be brought onboard the Arthurian ship and was happy to be able to return to his fatherland. His companions allowed themselves to be brought onboard the English ship. Unfortunately, the Arthurian ship on which Sir Gabein traveled suffered many misfortunes and was blown out toward Greenland<sup>89</sup> for eighteen years.*

*In the meantime, his wife Schartine had the good fortune to give birth to a prince. He was given the name Widwilt Gabein. He emulated his father in all of his skills and surpassed him in beauty and strength. He was the single comfort of his mother who bewailed her dear husband daily: 'Alas!' she often said to Widwilt. 'What good is it all? Your father! Your father is bound to my heart, and it beats incessantly. I cannot rest for even a quarter-hour. My sleep is interrupted. He has been away for so long, and still, no one has heard anything about him! God knows what has happened to him, and you, my beautiful little Widwilt, you have lost in him a great teacher of virtue. May God grant that we both live to experience the joy of embracing him!' She could not speak these words without tears running down her cheeks. Widwilt wiped away these hot tears with his soft hands: 'Take heart, mother! Once I am grown up, I will seek my father,' was his response.*

## SECOND PART

*Widwilt was in his seventeenth year when he resolved to watch his mother's grief no longer and had the strong urge to look for his father Sir Gabein. He said to his grandfather, 'The duty that I owe my father shall not quit me until [I draw] my final breath, and I hope that Heaven will give me the good fortune to gladden my inconsolable mother.' 'Godspeed, my dear grandson. I wish that you have the fortune to find your father and that you might return joy to me and your mother.' 'I am glad,' the old man said to his Schartine, 'that young Widwilt dares to undertake such a long journey. It is my dream that he will be lucky.' 'May God grant that this dream becomes reality,' Schartine responded. Widwilt had a fine horse saddled and took two good, fully-loaded pistols as well as a sturdy saber with him. 'Adieu, mama! Adieu, grandpapa!' Emperor Kuduks responded: 'Farewell! Return safely and bring your father with you!' Schartine kissed him once more: 'May God be with you! Return swiftly with a good outcome!'*

Widwilt departed from home without any servants and, after a fourteen-week-long journey, arrived eventually [at a place] not far from Sardinia and was attacked by six assassins three miles from Sardinia. This hero not only fended them off single-handedly, but he also defeated them so soundly that he was able to deliver them as murderers at the Sardinian court within the first week. This strange story reached the ears of the king of Sardinia. He immediately sent for this hero, had him recount to him the whole story, and asked him at the same time who he was and to where he intended to travel.

Widwilt told him that he was a grandchild of the Chinese emperor and that he intended to seek his father who was called Sir Gabein, at King Arthur's court: 'He took his leave from my mother eighteen years ago without her having received the least bit of news from him.' 'Sir Gabein!' The king clapped his hands, 'and he has been gone for a total of eighteen years already?' 'Yes, your royal majesty. Can you provide me with any news about him?' 'Some, my dear son. Excuse me for just a moment!' He had for his queen sent for right away. She came and the king received her in great joy: 'My dear wife, I have had you called in order to listen to a wonderful story! This young lord here bravely defended himself against six assassins and rightly delivered them to the local courts. But I have to tell you something even greater! He is the son of Sir Gabein who saved our lives seventeen years and several months ago.' 'Thanks be to God!' the queen exclaimed, 'that we may now show our gratitude to his son!' 'Yes, dearest,' the king said, 'you are right.' Sir Widwilt was taken aback: 'What? My father saved your majesty's life seventeen years ago and you want to repay me for his good deed? Does he not live anymore then? Is he already dead? Oh, poor mother! Alas!' 'God forbid!' said the king and the queen. 'Do not be scared! We will be able to give you some news about him.' Widwilt replied: 'I can barely wait! Let me hear what happened with my father and Your majesties and what news you can give me about him.' 'You shall hear about it, my dear son,' the king said. 'I traveled incognito together with my wife to Russia. On our return, however, our ship ran aground upon a sandbar not far from the Galbanian border. We fired several cannon shots but did not receive any help. In the meantime, it was wondrous what happened then between us and your father. Your father, who rode from his home and passed through Galbania with a great deal of money and an escort of ten riders, had been attacked not far from the shore by a group of highwaymen. All the people he had with him were murdered, but your father was fortunate enough to escape. He made his escape into a dark forest, which was located close to the sea upon which our ship was facing the greatest danger. This noble hero, who alone heard in horror our distress shots, swam to our ship and retrieved my wife and me from the ship, taking us on his shoulders. He swam with us to the shore. We were not there two minutes when the ship sank to the bottom with all its [remaining] passengers. We wanted him to remain with us [and hoped] he would marry our oldest daughter. Thereupon he told us that he was [already] married to a daughter of the Chinese emperor



*and that he had intended to visit his parents in the Arthurian lands, and he also shared what had happened to him. Amid his tale we were fortunate enough to see two ships passing before us, one towards Arthur's court and the other towards London. We had ourselves brought onboard the English ship, went to London and then to Sardinia, but your father went onboard the Arthurian ship. Now, dear Widwilt, we devoted great effort to locating your father but have, unfortunately, not received any news. Therefore, we wrote to King Arthur and in reply we received an answer saying that they had had news that the ship had encountered many misfortunes and at this point had been unaccounted for seventeen years. The ship's captain, however, is supposed to be a very skilled sailor, on account of which they still have great hope. Here is the letter that I received just six weeks ago from King Arthur. You may also read it yourself. It does not contain anything special. If you would follow my advice, stay with us. We expect King Arthur with his entire court to call on us within the next four weeks. He will marry our oldest daughter. Perhaps your father has successfully reached the Arthurian court since this letter was sent, and then you would hear about it from the king and his people. But, above all, we ask you to marry as your wife our youngest princess, our wise Lorel. She is absolutely beautiful and virtuous, and she has double anything anyone could wish for in a suitable match. It is surely by divine providence that you have met with this pleasure in our territories, so that we can now bestow upon you the recognition that we owe your father. We can honor you with no greater reward than with our princess Lorel, who will inherit our entire kingdom.'*

*Widwilt replied: 'Your royal majesty, I marvel at this wondrous tale while I listen to you like an angel telling the story of my father. If God grants that I hear still more about him, I will then, with the consent of my father, take your Lorel as my wife. But as long as I have no further news about him, nothing can please me, because I am thinking about my mother and my dear father, who at any moment is perhaps in the gravest danger. But I will remain at your court until King Arthur arrives and will be able, at least, to take part in your joyous day, to which you oblige me with your welcoming story.'*

*[Here ends page [8b]. Landau continues the pagination count with [9a], but it seems that there was a leaf missing, most likely containing the arrival of Arthur and Gabein. Widwilt is, presumably, brought to a neighboring room. Arthur, Gabein, and the Sardinian royal couple greet each other.] [Sardinian king:] 'He told me that he was seeking at the Arthurian court a certain Sir Gabein, who is his father. His mother, he said, is the daughter of Emperor Kuduks, 'and my father has already been missing a total of eighteen years, and I was still in my mother's womb when he took his leave from my mother and grandpapa to travel to his parents at the Arthurian court. And up to now, we have still not had any news from him.' Now imagine our joy meeting a son of yours. We counselled that he stays until King Arthur arrived here, and he most kindly followed our advice and remained here.' [The door to] [t]he adjoining room was opened. Here he*



*sits!’ Simultaneously with this resolution, the announcement came: ‘The emperor of China, in the company of his daughter Schartine, has arrived. Their coach is already below at the palace.’ Sir Gabein and Widwilt wasted no time and together ran to the coach. ‘Oh, dearest [Wife]...and gracious Father-in-law,’<sup>40</sup> exclaimed the former. ‘Fortunate Mother and Grandpapa,’ exclaimed the latter. The joy could not have been greater. Sir Gabein embraced Schartine, and Widwilt kissed now father and kissed now mother. Finally, they were guided by King Arthur and the king of Sardinia up to the room where the queen of Sardinia and both her princesses were together. Amid the joy that attended his arrival, the queen reminded him that Widwilt had promised them that he would marry their princess Lorel once he had learned about his father. And now he is indeed fortunate enough to embrace joyfully father and mother. ‘We ask you, therefore, if it pleases you, not to refuse us this.’ ‘God has ordained it! It pleases us!’ they responded.*

*Thus, King Arthur married the eldest daughter and departed. Widwilt married the youngest daughter, was crowned heir to the Sardinian throne, and, therefore, stayed in Sardinia. And then Sir Gabein together with his wife and the emperor of China, as well as Gabein’s parents, joyously departed for China escorted by the Sardinian king’s royal guard and lived there most contentedly. The End.*

NOWHERE IN CAMELOT: THE FADING OF THE ARTHURIAN COURT  
AND THE RISE OF THE CHINESE EMPIRE

While the plot of Gabein shares many similarities with other Wigalois adaptations, the story world has significantly changed. Traditionally, the Arthurian world has two core spaces: the Arthurian world, in itself a fantastic space, and a counter place, an otherworld. Otherworlds within Arthurian romances are spaces reserved for quest and adventure.<sup>41</sup> Solving a problem and/or fulfilling a task in the Otherworld results in the hero returning stability to the court and occasionally in becoming the new ruler over the now-integrated Otherworld. Characteristics of Otherworlds as prominently featured in medieval romances include a special form of entry (through mountains, water, magic doors, etc.), indescribable beauty, and abundance of all sorts.<sup>42</sup> These worlds also often distort spatial and temporal norms.

All other Wigalois adaptations include such a topical Otherworld, the bewitched country of Korntin. The topography in Gabein, in contrast, can be arranged according to two categories: real places that can be found on a map and fictionally marked places. The first category consists of places such as China, England, and Sardinia; the second category consists of the Arthurian Court, which decidedly does not coincide with England. Rather than integrating the Arthurian realm into this newly revised story world, the text presents the Arthurian world as the removed otherworld and engages with its predecessors by ultimately abandoning this space altogether.

The only geopolitical information the reader receives about the Arthurian Court is that 'This king had many lands under his government. His residency was a mighty and beautiful city, which he commissioned to be built next to the sea and thus gave her the name 'Artisstat' [Arthur-Town].' Arthur's land is not connected to a country or a city but rather associated only with the name Arthur. Only one topographical parameter is given repeatedly: it's close to the sea. Otherwise, there is no topographical validation; rather, Arthur's realm is portrayed as similar to the hidden island of Avalon: a place beyond the world conceivable through a map. In Gabein, this is underscored by the fact that topographical and temporal parameters outside of the Arthurian realm are precisely measured. Gabein's and Kuduks' travel to China takes over five months (Gabein, 138, 25-26); it took less than a quarter-hour to organize a welcome reception for them (Gabein, 139, 37-39), and a letter takes six weeks to arrive at the Sardinian court. By contrast, such parameters play little to no role in the Arthurian realm, which stands in stark contrast to the description of the rest of the story world. For example, an Arthurian law had been implemented in ancient days ('von ur alters', Gabein, 136, 8) and the initial crisis occurs 'an einem tage' ('on any particular day', Gabein, 136, 13-14). The Arthurian court is removed from the time and space of the rest of the story world; it has become the ultimate Otherworld and loses its relevance as center of the story world. At the end of the narrative, the future for the knights lies not at the Arthurian Court or a liberated Otherworld but, rather, in the geopolitical realms that can be found on the contemporaneous map: Widuwilt remains in Sardinia, whereas Gabein returns immediately to China with his parents in tow. Neither of the knights that could be considered Arthurian actually returns to the court and to the Arthurian realm.

China fills the power vacuum caused by the fading of the Arthurian world and its depiction is fueled by a contemporary fascination with the empire as well as colonial fantasies. China is described as a vast country of immense beauty, with a palace of such grandeur at its political center that Gabein has never seen anything like it (138.33-34 and 138.40-41). Whereas the Arthurian realm is marked by fluidity because it is repeatedly and almost exclusively described as 'by the sea', the Chinese realm is marked by a symbol of strength and stability, a wall. Presumably the Great Wall of China, this is the first architectural structure of that country that Gabein and his audience encounter: 'the country is bordered by a wall, four ells wide and thirty ells high.' With Gabein, the audience learns that the state insignia is a star, and the state colors are red and gold when the emperor of China, upon introducing himself, unbuttons his shirt and displays the 'chinesischen keiserlichn stern' ('Chinese imperial star', 139.1) on his undergarment.<sup>43</sup> Shortly thereafter, when Gabein and Kuduks are welcomed at the Chinese palace, the court ceremony resembles European ceremonies, including cannon salutes and

familiar instruments: 'so bald si kamen, wurdn kanonen um der ganze stat herum ab gschosn und zwischn jedn schuss wurde ouf di termen gblasn mit rompetn schlmeian und mit kesl-poukn gschlagin' ('As soon as they arrived, cannon salutes were fired all around the city and in between each cannon-shot, trumpets and shawms were played, and tympani beaten upon the towers', 139.29–34). These rites and customs of Chinese culture are not represented as ethnically or culturally different in Gabein but rather as what Homi Bhabha described in his postcolonial critique as a 'familiar space of the Other'<sup>44</sup>. The description of the court reflects existing features of contemporaneous European courts. China looks almost like Prussia, whose ruler Frederic Wilhelm the Second is mentioned in Gabein's encomium.<sup>45</sup>

The description of Gabein's wedding, however, emphasizes Chinese difference: 'DI trou war nach dem chinesischen zeremonien ghaltn wordn' ('The wedding was conducted according to Chinese ceremonies', 141.33–34). This brief remark in Gabein encourages the audience to envision something different, something new that requires a particular adaptability from Gabein. Yet, the audience is left with only this brief comment and never learns exactly what such a ceremony looks like. By refusing to offer any further details, the author also avoids the difficulties of articulating Otherness. The exoticism of China is restricted to a bare minimum so that it remains recognizable to a contemporary audience and simplifies the transition for the hero. The result is not the construction of a new Arthurian kingdom in a faraway land, but the continuation of the Chinese Empire that happens to look significantly like kingdoms and empires in Western Europe. A post-colonial reading suggests that this construction of the Chinese empire strives to create a 'recognizable Other, as subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.'<sup>46</sup> Core to this portrayal of China is mimicry, the most elusive and effective strategy of colonial power and knowledge that ultimately enables Gabein to become the new leader of this geo-political realm.

The eighteenth century, when Gabein was printed, marks a time in which Europe increasingly took an interest in China.<sup>47</sup> Although the European fascination with China dates back to the Middle Ages (see Marco Polo's Travels, for instance), an in-depth engagement with China happens predominantly in the late Baroque and early Enlightenment eras—at the point when China is perceived as culturally and materially superior to Europe.<sup>48</sup> The fascination with China was especially strong in Prussia and included the introduction of tea pavilions and silk; Chinese and Japanese porcelains were already treasured in seventeenth-century Europe.<sup>49</sup> However, China as a place was generally closed to visitors and businesses.<sup>50</sup> The seclusion did not, however, hinder the development of an extensive European discourse concerning government and religion in China.

Gabein was conceived against the larger backdrop of this contemporaneous fascination with China. This presentation mirrors the outer literary interest in and historic seclusion of China through a portrayal that incorporates real elements, such as its political identity as empire and the Great Wall, and fills empty spaces, such as the court ceremonial, freely. Mediating the Otherness of China allows for a smooth transition for the Arthurian knight(s). The construction of China within Gabein illustrates the contemporary fascination as well as colonial fantasies. China serves as the background to a discourse on the hero Gabein's cultural adaptability, which ultimately leads to an expansion of European power.

The author of the text establishes different groups' identities via topographical, political, and even ritual spaces, although cross-cultural, multinational monotheism enables Gabein to easily navigate all of these spaces. Gabein embodies Diderot's definition of 'cosmopolitanism' as it appeared 40 years before the publication of Gabein: He is a 'stranger nowhere in the world.'<sup>51</sup> To some extent, the Arthurian hero of the Middle Ages displayed cosmopolitan traits too. He left the Arthurian court, found adventure in an Otherworld, which was portrayed as simultaneously different and familiar, and often ended up instated as the new ruler of this Otherworld.<sup>52</sup> Gabein brings these topics to the forefront in its portrayal of different cultures, introducing notions from the medieval Arthurian romances to the eighteenth century geo-political reality. In doing so, the text does not eradicate the idea of demarcations and differences as Cosmopolitanism represents the reconciliation of the universal with the local. Gabein acknowledges the existence of differences while illustrating how the hero's cosmopolitanism enabled the crossing of cultural, religious, and geo-political borders.

Considering Gabein's identity as a potentially Jewish text, we need to consider in how far the contemporaneous fascination with cosmopolitanism was relevant for the Jewish community, the potential audience of the text. The idea of the Jewish diaspora and the networks established, for example through the Yiddish language, often made Jews appear 'as quintessential cosmopolitans—a transnational community that was at home everywhere (and nowhere).'<sup>53</sup> Networks of trade as well as of education connected Jews in different places of the diaspora. Many Jews in the early modern period experienced mobile lives due to expulsion and/or hybrid identities due to living among other religious majorities. The Maskilim, the Jewish Enlightenment philosophers, praised the Jews as natural mediators due to their ability to navigate the particular as well as the universal, envisioning a society in which the focus lay on shared humanity first and not on different religions and nations.<sup>54</sup>

But the Jewish communities in the eighteenth century were also familiar with several notorious cosmopolitans of Jewish origin, such as Jonathan

Eybeschütz (1690–1764) and Jacob Joseph Frank (1726–91), leading figures within the messianic movement that originally formed around Shabbetai Zvi (1626–76). Both navigated, more or less successfully, and transgressed religious and regional borders while being rooted in the belief system of the Sabbateans.<sup>55</sup> The founder, Shabbetai Zvi himself, presents a cautionary tale: he eventually converted to Islam, causing a huge crisis concerning Messianism within the Jewish community, particularly in Europe. Eighteenth century German Jewry was still dealing with the aftershocks of this and other major religious crises of syncretism.

By contrast, the heroes of Gabein present a positive image of cosmopolitanism. Gabein effortlessly adjusts to court ceremonies and rites no matter where he is and presents himself as a trans-imperial traveler who adapts himself to the various cultures he encounters. By inheriting the imperial throne and thus creating a new center in the story-world, outside that of the classic Arthurian one, the knight both follows the model of other Arthurian knights and represents his own individual cosmopolitanism. Gabein as an Arthurian knight, navigating the Chinese and Arthurian courts at the two extremes of his world, resembles a potentially Jewish audience's everyday reality of navigating Christian and Jewish spaces in the Holy Roman Empire—spaces that have much in common but remain very different at the same time.

In its portrayal of a hero who easily navigates different cultural and geopolitical spaces, Gabein presents its audience with a cosmopolitan hero. In Gabein, the world of the narrative spans Sardinia in the West to China in the East. With the introduction of Sardinia and China to the map of the story-world, the Christian-Arthurian court has lost its role as the gravitational center. Having become irrelevant, the Arthurian court fades into oblivion, unlike the places that are described in the rest of the text—real places that can be found on eighteenth-century maps. The Arthurian court, the center of the medieval Christian-Arthurian world, has become the Otherworld of Gabein. The focus of Gabein lies instead on the conquest of new worlds through marriage politics and the hero's skills at navigating different cultures, embodying the ideal of the early enlightenment as colonialist fantasy.

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## NOTES

I would like to thank Joe Sullivan for his insightful comments on the first draft of this article and his help with translating the intricacies of the original language into modern English.

- 1 Yiddish-language quotes follow the transliteration, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation of Landau's edition as his is the only source. See Leo Landau, 'Gabein', in *Arthurian Legends or the Hebrew-German Rhymed Version of the Legend of King Arthur*, ed. Leo Landau (Leipzig: E. Avenarius, 1912), pp. 136-147.
- 2 The Yiddish words ('histori') or sometimes ('lid') are equivalent to the Early New High German term *histori* a common term in the self-categorization of early modern narratives. See Joachim Knappe, 'Historie' im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Begriffs- und gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen im interdisziplinären Kontext (Baden-Baden: Koerner, 1984), p. 399.
- 3 The Yiddish name which here takes the form of *Widwilt* and not as in other Yiddish adaptations *Viduvilt*, is based on a pun. Before leaving his pregnant wife in order to return to the Arthurian court, Gabein's wife asks him what to name their son. Gabein answers: 'Heys es vi du vilt' [Call him whatever-you-want] (*Viduvilt*, 11r), which translates into: you may name him as you like. Gabein seems to give his wife the choice of what to name the child. This means, however, that the knight's name is based on a misunderstanding, for his mother takes Gabein's answer literally and mistakes it for a suggested name, *Viduvilt* ('Asyouwish').
- 4 See Christoph Fasbender, *Der 'Wigalois' Wirnts Von Grafenberg: Eine Einführung* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 86; Klaus Grubmüller, 'Artusroman und Heilsbringerethos: Zum Wigalois' des Wirnt von Gravenberg,' *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 107 (1985), p. 224 [218-239]; Stephan Fuchs, *Hybride Helden: Gwigalois und Willehalm. Beiträge zum Heldenbild und zur Poetik des Romans im frühen 13. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997), p. 120; Joachim Heinze, 'Über den Aufbau des Wigalois,' *Euphorion. Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 67 (1973): p. 267 [261-271]; Karin Lichtblau, 'ein tier sô wol getân: Zum Motiv der Tierverwandlung im Wigalois des Wirnt von Gravenberg,' in *Tierverwandlungen. Codierungen und Diskurse*, ed. Willem de Blécourt and Christa Agnes Tuczay (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2011), p. 221 [pp. 221-239]; Neil Thomas, *Wirnt of Gravenberg's Wigalois: Intertextuality and Interpretation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), p. 70. Several scholars, however, oppose this common interpretation. See Jutta Eming, *Funktionswandel des Wunderbaren: Studien zum Bel Inconnu, zum Wigalois und zum Wigoleys vom Rade* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1999), p. 144; Gisela Lohbeck, *Wigalois: Struktur der 'bezeichnungen'* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 289f.



- 5 The vast majority of adaptations do not include this extensive epic battle. Thus, in contrast to Wigalois, the consecutive adaptations present a more typical Arthurian romance in the narratological tradition of the Arthurian romances of the Middle High German author Hartmann von Aue or of his inspiration, Chrétien de Troyes.
- 6 Ein gar schöne liepliche und kurtzweilige history von dem edelen herren Wigoleis vom Rade. Ein Ritter von der Tafelronde. Mit seinen schoenen hystorien und figuren / Wie er geborn / unnd sein leben von seiner jugent an Biß an sein ende gefürt unnd vollbracht hat. Ed. Johann Knoblauch, 2nd ed. Strasbourg 1519.
- 7 'Wigoleis,' in Buch der Abenteuer der Ritter von der Tafelrunde, ed. Ulrich Füetrer (1496–1500). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CGM 1., 75 r.–83r.
- 8 'Ritterliche History des Hochberühmpten und Thewren Ritters Herrn Wigoleis vom Rade...', in Buch der Liebe, ed. Sigmund Feyerabend (Frankfurt, 1587), pp. 382–396.
- 9 See Wulf-Otto Dreeßen, 'Wigalois – Widuwilt: Wandlungen des Artusromans im Jiddischen.' in Westjiddisch. Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit. Le Yiddish occidental. Actes du colloque de Mulhouse 1 (1994): 85 [84–98]; Achim Jaeger, Ein jüdischer Artusritter (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 2000), p. 29.
- 10 Manuscript MS F 12.44, held at Trinity College Library in Cambridge, is the only one to include an epilogue, but due to ill-fated attempts at preservation, is largely illegible in the second half (Viduvilt. Cambridge, Wren Library. MS F.12.44 [16th ct.]). Cod. hebr. 289 and 255, held at the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, offer a mainly identical text, but lack both prologue and epilogue. Furthermore, cod. hebr. 255 only consists of a few leaves (Viduvilt. Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 255 [16th ct.] and Cod. Hebr. 289 [16th ct.]).
- 11 It is, however, important to note that this was not the case in the English-speaking world, where the Arthurian tradition continued uninterruptedly. For a further discussion on the 'return' of the Arthurian material in the German-speaking context, see Maike Oergel, *The Return of King Arthur and the Nibelungen: National Myth in Nineteenth-Century English and German Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998).
- 12 See Johann Christoph Wagenseil, *Belehrung der jüdisch-teutschen Red- und Schreibart ...* (Königsberg, 1699).
- 13 'Wieduwilt,' in *Erzehlungen aus dem Heldenalter teutscher Nationen*, ed. Daniel Ernst Wagner (Danzig, 1780), pp. 382–517.
- 14 See Ludwig Uhland, 'Ritter Wieduwilt,' in *Gedichte: Vollständige kritische Ausgabe auf Grund des handschriftlichen Nachlasses*, vol. 2, ed. Erich Schmidt and Julius Hartmann (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta Nachf., 1898), pp. 159–161.
- 15 Scholars such as Werner Schröder have been particularly critical of the excessive use of magic and mystical elements in Wirnt's contribution to this tradition. See Werner Schröder, 'Der synkretistische Roman des Wirnt von Gravenberg,' *Euphorion* 80 (1986): 235–277.
- 16 The *Bibliographie der Deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* alone lists 68 publications on Wigalois from the last ten years. Examples include: Christa

- Bertelsmeier-Kierst, 'Die Krakauer 'Wigalois' Fragmente (q): Eine weitere Handschrift im Umkreis der Cgm 19-Gruppe?' *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 144 (2015): 150–177; Cordula Böcking, "daz w̃zr ouch noch guot wibes sit:' Streitbare Frauen in Wirnts Wigalois,' in *Aktuelle Tendenzen der Artusforschung*, ed. Brigitte Burrichter et al. (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2013), pp. 363–380; Christoph Fasbender, "Gwigalois' Bergung: Zur Epiphanie des Helden als Erlöser,' in *Aktuelle Tendenzen der Artusforschung*, ed. Brigitte Burrichter et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), pp. 209–222.
- 17 Wirnt von Grafenberg, Wigalois, ed. Johannes M. N. Kapteyn, trans. Sabine and Ulrich Seelbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Wirnt von Grafenberg, Wigalois. *Der Ritter mit dem Rade. Erster Band: Text*, ed. Johannes Marie Neele Kapteyn (Bonn: Klopp, 1926).
  - 18 Danielle Buschinger, *Wirnt von Grafenberg: Wigalois, Le Chevalier À La Roue* (Paris: Champion, 2004); Wirnt von Grafenberg, Wigalois: *The Knight of Fortune's Wheel*, trans. J. W. Thomas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977). Joseph M. Sullivan is currently preparing a facing-page Middle High German edition with modern-English translation that will appear in the Boydell and Brewer 'Arthurian Archives' series, expected in 2021. This edition will be a completely new edition based on the Leiden Manuscript B.
  - 19 For the English-speaking world, Jerold Frakes has undertaken the enormous effort to make a large amount of Old Yiddish material accessible through translations and scholarly guides. Also, a recent new translation of the Bove Bukh by Claudia Rosenzweig offers a new and critical access to a classic of Old Yiddish. See Elye Bokher, *Bovo d'Antona. A Yiddish Romance: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
  - 20 See Jonathan M. Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2013). See also Verena Kasper-Marienberg, 'Gemeinsamer Alltag—Geteilter Lebensraum: Der Frankfurter Wochenmarkt Als Christlich-Jüdischer Begegnungsort,' *Aschkenas. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 26.2 (2016): 327–349.
  - 21 Achim Jaeger's monograph *Ein jüdischer Artusritter (Wigalois, Viduvilt)*, particularly emphasizes the value of comparative studies; his detailed analysis of the early Yiddish retelling had a significant impact on the revaluation of the Wigalois adaptations. Astrid Lembke's 'Ritter außer Gefecht' (Wigalois, Viduvilt), example discusses the construction of the hero's identity in relationship to the women he encounters along the way. See Astrid Lembke, 'Ritter außer Gefecht. Konzepte passiver Bewährung im Wigalois und im Widvilt,' in *Aschkenas* 25 (2015): 63–82 Bianca Häberlein's 'Transformationen religiöser und profaner Motive' (Wigalois, Viduvilt, Ammenmärchen) discusses the retellings in the light of changing audiences and changes based on their respective cultural and religious needs.
  - 22 Landau, *Arthurian Legends*, p. vii.
  - 23 Leo Landau, 'A nit bakanter yidish-daytshe nusach fun der artus-legende,' in *Shriftn fun yidishen visnshaftlikhen insitut*, band I, Landau-bukh Dr. Alfred Landau tsu zayn 75stn geboyrtstag den 25stn november 1925 (Vilna: 1926), columns 129–140.

- 24 Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, p. 349.
- 25 See Christoph Cormeau, 'Die jiddische Tradition: Bemerkungen zum Fortleben einer Fabel unter veränderten Bedingungen,' *LiLi Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 8.22 (1978): 41 [28-44].
- 26 Robert G. Warnock, 'Frühneuzeitliche Fassungen,' *Akten des VII: International Germanisten Kongresses* [5] (1986): 13 [13-19].
- 27 The title page includes a bible verse from Deuteronomy 27:17. Several of the letters are in a larger font than the others. If the value of these letters is calculated, the result is 549, which means year 5549 of the creation, i.e. 1789CE.
- 28 The question as to whether or not this early form of Yiddish is a language in its own right or merely a dialect is as contested as the name (West-Yiddish, Early Yiddish, Jewish-German, Hebrew-German to name just a few). See, among many others, Shlomo Berger, 'Functioning Within a Diasporic Third Space: The Case of Early Modern Yiddish,' *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15.1 (2008): 68-86; Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, trans. Jerold Frakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-25; Jerold Frakes, *The Politics of Interpretation. Alterity and Ideology in Old Yiddish Studies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); Paul Wexler, *Three Heirs to a Judeo-Latin Legacy: Judeo-Ibero-Romance, Yiddish and Rotwelsch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988).
- 29 Words that resemble Yiddish, include for example 'di' [the; plural article] and 'hir' [here; locative adverb] (Landau, Gabein, p. 136). In contrast, several words retain their German forms 'voller' [full of; präposition], 'staat' (but in lower case) [state; noun, masculine] (Landau, Gabein, p. 136). We also find cases that at the same time are German and Yiddish, such as 'ouf-stehen' [to stand up; separable verb, infinite] which consists of the Yiddish separable prefix 'ouf' [up] and the German verb 'stehen' [to stand] in its inflected form. From the preserved two pages, it seems that these issues were also present in the original, but the way in which Landau presents Gabein to his audience in *Arthurian Legends* reflects significant choices. The first one lies in Landau's decision to comment on seemingly strange linguistic forms. Landau (inconsistently) indicates this with an exclamation mark in brackets, such as in the case of typos 'persent (!)' (should be 'present', Gabein, p. 136) or wrong verb conjugation 'Gabein fall (!) dem keistr zur fise' ('Gabein fell to the feed of the emperor', Gabein, p. 139). Some obvious typos, however, he does not mark ('nnsere er kerntlichkeit', should be 'unsere'; 'our gratitude', Gabein, p. 146) and in many cases, he does not remark on inconsistencies, such as in the cases of 'kenign' and 'kenigin' (queen, both Gabein, p. 136). A second area that required Landau's decisions as editor results from the fact that he presents Gabein in the Latin alphabet (in a Fraktur typeface), making appropriations necessary by incorporating conventions that would not have been possible in his Hebrew-alphabet model such as capitalizing words.
- 30 In Landau's edition: 'portziesen,' (Gabein, p. 136).
- 31 Alternatively, '[...] despite persuasion did not want to declare himself to the queen.'

- 32 The text as Landau presents it does not complete the German-based idiom replacing the apparently missing word for dirt with a hyphen: 'las er nun di kare ous dem-fihrn.'
- 33 The text as Landau presents it mistakenly has 'mein' and not 'ein,' but the context indicates that this is an error.
- 34 'ellen' (Landau, Gabein, p. 138), which I translate here as ells, were traditional units of measure. Depending on the region, an ell was between 16 and 26 feet.
- 35 The word in Landau's text is 'glik' which one might translate as fortune or joy, as I do here (Gabein, p. 140).
- 36 Gabein refers to God as 'her aller herr schahren' ('Lord of Hosts,' Landau, Gabein, p. 140) drawing on the German 'Herr der Heerscharen' used traditionally in a Christian context as translation of the Hebrew term [Tsevaot].
- 37 I omitted the following part of this sentence in order to avoid confusion: 'in selbigen lande' (in this very country). This seems to be an error in the original text. Indeed, the audience is told later that the attack took place in Galbanien, close to the sea.
- 38 Earlier scholarship had mistakenly interpreted 'Kanata' as name of a place, but the context indicates it means incognito rather than 'in Kanata,' despite the misleading capitalization in Landau's text.
- 39 What I translate here as 'Greenland' appears in Landau's text as 'Gruland' (Landau, Gabein, p. 143).
- 40 The ellipses here in the translation correspond to missing and incomplete words in the text that Landau (Gabein, p. 146) indicates by '... len.'
- 41 Aisling Bryne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 1.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 One might be tempted to draw parallels to the contemporary flag of China; however, it has only been in use since 1949. The flag contemporaneous with Gabein, commonly referred to as the Yellow Dragon Flag, portrays a dragon on a yellow background.
- 44 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 47.
- 45 Landau, 'A nit bakanter,' p. 133.
- 46 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 85f.
- 47 Kurt-Ingo Flessau, 'Familien-, Unterhaltungs- und Reiseromane,' in *Deutsche Literatur: Rationalismus, Empfindsamkeit, Sturm und Drang; 1740–1786*, ed. Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), p. 211f. [204–218].
- 48 Peter K. J. Park, 'Leibniz and Wolff on China,' in *Germany and China: Transnational Encounters since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho and David M. Crowe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 21 [21–37]; Christian Benne, 'Orientalismus? Fontane, Nietzsche und die 'gelbe Gefahr',' *Arcadia* 37.2 (2002): 219 [216–246].
- 49 Benne, 'Orientalismus?,' p. 219f.

- 50 Only after the first Opium War in 1842 did a number of German states begin trade relations with China (Joanne Miyang Cho and David M. Crowe, 'Introduction,' in *Germany and China: Transnational Encounters since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho and David M. Crowe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 2 [1–18].
- 51 Denis Diderot, *Encyclopedie; ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des artes et des métiers*, (Paris: André le Breton et al., 1751–72), 1:404.
- 52 Over the last two decades, ideas of cosmopolitanism have increasingly proved fruitful for the analysis of pre-modern narratives. Scholars such as John M. Ganim, Shayne Aaron Legassie, Daniel Vitkus, and Margaret C. Jacobs promote case studies from the medieval and early modern periods, providing new genealogies and narratives for exploring cosmopolitanism as a phenomenon that includes multiple categories and means of contact and interaction. See the essays collected in Shayne Legassie and John M. Ganim, eds., *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- 53 Michael L. Miller and Scott Ury, 'Cosmopolitanism: The End of Jewishness?' in *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and the Jews of East Central Europe*, ed. Michael L. Miller and Scott Ury (London/New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 8 [1–19].
- 54 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 55 Pawel Maciejko, 'Sabbatian Charlatans: The First Jewish Cosmopolitans,' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 17.3 (2010): 25–42.























