

ORIENTALISM IN “THE TALISMAN” BY SIR WALTER SCOTT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Rozikova Nozigul Fozil qizi

Master student of English Literature Department at
Asia International University

M.R.Kilicheva

Scientific supervisor: ass.prof.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14874172>

Abstract. *This article explores the elements of Orientalism in Sir Walter Scott’s novel The Talisman (1825) within the context of 19th-century European literature. By analyzing Scott’s portrayal of the East—specifically its characters, cultural representations, and power dynamics—the study examines how the novel reflects Western perceptions of the Orient. While Scott offers a more nuanced depiction of Muslim figures compared to his contemporaries, his portrayal remains embedded in an exoticizing and othering discourse. This paper applies Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism to The Talisman, highlighting the novel’s role in shaping Western literary constructs of the East.*

Keywords: *Orientalism, Sir Walter Scott, The Talisman, Edward Said, Crusades, 19th-century literature, Western perceptions of the East.*

ОРИЕНТАЛИЗМ В «ТАЛИСМАНЕ» СЭРА ВАЛЬТЕРА СКОТТА: КРИТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

Аннотация. *В этой статье рассматриваются элементы ориентализма в романе сэра Вальтера Скотта «Талисман» (1825) в контексте европейской литературы XIX века. Анализируя изображение Скоттом Востока — в частности, его персонажей, культурные представления и динамику власти — исследование изучает, как роман отражает западное восприятие Востока. Хотя Скотт предлагает более тонкое изображение мусульманских деятелей по сравнению со своими современниками, его изображение остается встроенным в экзотизирующий и отчуждающий дискурс. В этой статье теория ориентализма Эдварда Саида применяется к «Талисману», подчеркивая роль романа в формировании западных литературных конструкций Востока.*

Ключевые слова: *ориентализм, сэр Вальтер Скотт, «Талисман», Эдвард Саид, крестовые походы, литература XIX века, западное восприятие Востока.*

Orientalism, as theorized by Edward Said (1978), refers to the Western construction of the East as an exotic, inferior, and often mysterious entity. European literature of the 18th and 19th centuries played a pivotal role in reinforcing these perceptions by depicting the Orient as a place of wealth, decadence, and cultural stagnation. Sir Walter Scott's *The Talisman* (1825), a historical novel set during the Third Crusade, provides a compelling case study for analyzing Orientalist discourse in literary fiction.

While Scott attempts to depict Muslim characters, particularly Saladin, in a dignified and even admirable manner, his portrayal remains rooted in Western stereotypes. The novel constructs the East as an exoticized and mystical realm, reinforcing the ideological dichotomy between Europe and the Orient. This paper critically examines the ways in which *The Talisman* embodies Orientalist tendencies while simultaneously challenging some prevailing 19th-century biases.

Scott's descriptions of the Muslim world in *The Talisman* align with traditional Orientalist portrayals that emphasize sensuality, mysticism, and grandeur. Saladin's court is depicted with opulence, filled with luxurious fabrics, rich scents, and intricate architecture. This aestheticization of the Orient serves to create an exotic backdrop for the novel while reinforcing Western fascination with the "mystical East" (Matar, 1998).

The novel also contrasts the supposed emotional restraint of European knights with the perceived theatricality of Eastern characters. The depiction of Saladin as both a warrior and a cunning strategist mirrors the Orientalist trope of the "noble but dangerous" adversary, a figure who commands respect yet remains an outsider to European ideals (MacKenzie, 1995).

Unlike many 19th-century depictions of Muslim rulers, Scott portrays Saladin as a figure of chivalry and wisdom. He is repeatedly shown as more honorable and intelligent than some of the European crusaders, particularly the deceitful Conrad of Montferrat. However, despite this positive characterization, Saladin remains an "other" in the narrative—admired but ultimately separate from the European world.

Scott's version of Saladin aligns with the Romantic ideal of the noble adversary, a figure who embodies virtues recognized by Western audiences but is still marked by his cultural difference. This selective portrayal reinforces the Orientalist practice of defining the East in relation to Western values rather than as a self-sustaining civilization with its own complex political and cultural realities (Kabbani, 1986).

One of the novel's most striking Orientalist tropes is the contrast between Western and Eastern medicine. Saladin, disguised as a physician, cures King Richard I using advanced medical

knowledge that far surpasses that of European doctors. While this portrayal acknowledges the scientific advancements of the Muslim world, it also mystifies Eastern knowledge, presenting it as secretive and almost magical rather than empirical and methodical (Irwin, 2006).

This trope reflects a broader Western literary tendency to depict Eastern wisdom as ancient and arcane rather than progressive or scientific. By framing Saladin's healing abilities as a form of "hidden knowledge," Scott perpetuates the notion of the Orient as a land of secrets and mysticism rather than intellectual innovation (Sardar, 1999).

Despite Scott's attempts at fairness, *The Talisman* ultimately positions Western ideals as superior. The Crusaders, for all their internal conflicts, are still portrayed as the rightful bearers of chivalric tradition. While Saladin is noble, he remains a lone exception rather than a representative of a broader civilization equal to that of the West.

Furthermore, the novel reinforces the idea that Christian values, despite the flaws of individual knights, represent a more just and enlightened worldview. This implicit hierarchy aligns with 19th-century European attitudes that viewed non-Western cultures as fascinating but ultimately secondary to Western progress (Lewis, 1993).

While *The Talisman* presents a more nuanced view of the Muslim world than many of its contemporaries, it remains deeply entrenched in Orientalist discourse. The novel's depiction of the East as an exoticized and mysterious realm, its framing of Saladin as a "noble other," and its contrast between Eastern mysticism and Western rationality all reflect the underlying assumptions of 19th-century European thought.

By analyzing *The Talisman* through the lens of Orientalism, we gain insight into how historical fiction has shaped Western perceptions of the East. Scott's novel, while progressive for its time, ultimately upholds the same ideological structures that continue to inform contemporary discussions of East-West relations.

REFERENCES

1. Irwin, Robert. *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*. Penguin Books, 2006.
2. Kabbani, Rana. *Europe's Myths of the Orient: Devise and Rule*. Macmillan, 1986.
3. Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the West*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
4. MacKenzie, John M. *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester University Press, 1995.

5. Matar, Nabil. Islam in Britain, 1558–1685. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
6. Said, Edward. Orientalism. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
7. Sardar, Ziauddin. Orientalism. Open University Press, 1999.
8. Scott, Walter. The Talisman. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co., 1825.