The Contribution of Germanic Sources in the Textual Reconstruction of the *Chanson de Roland*
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Introduction

The *Chanson de Roland* is, due to its immense importance and influence, quite a *monstre sacré* in French literature. Ever since its literary rediscovery and newly-found fame in the early 19th century, it has continued to intrigue and puzzle philologists and other scholars to the point that the history behind its textual reconstruction can be considered in part as a history of modern philology as well. Influential editions such as Bédier’s and Segre’s helped define philology both as a discipline and a method as much as they forwarded the studies on the *Chanson de Roland* itself.

The corpus of manuscripts that preserves the text of the *Chanson de Roland* is rather vast and spans many centuries and different regions across Europe. In fact, the oldest surviving manuscript, the Oxford manuscript, was preserved (and probably also written) in England, while other important texts, such as the manuscripts *V4* and *V7*, were compiled and preserved in Northern Italy. The great success of the poem and the predominant position of French culture and literature in medieval Europe ensured that it was almost immediately translated and adapted into other languages as well, such as English, German, Spanish, Old Norse and even Welsh.
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The various translations in the Germanic languages are of particular interest, as these manuscripts, that Segre called “nordic manuscripts” and grouped them together based on shared affinities, are based on lost manuscripts that were probably older than most surviving Old French texts. As such, these manuscripts have been studied by germanists and, to a lesser extent, by romanists like Paul Aebischer, who recognised the relative importance of these sources in the textual reconstruction of the Chanson de Roland. Nonetheless, the nordic texts remain somewhat obscure to the romanists that either only marginally consider them or rely on old translations and commentaries in their analyses. On the other hand, germanists are often only interested in the Germanic texts themselves and do not seek to draw conclusions on the larger picture.

The purpose of this work is to determine the weight and significance of these Germanic sources in the vast ocean that is the textual tradition of the Chanson de Roland, and to assess their contribution compared to the French sources. The first chapter will provide a general introduction to the historical context as well as an overview of the literary climate in which our poem, and the chansons de geste in general, came to be. The second chapter will delve deeper into the Chanson de Roland with an analysis of plot, structure and themes in order to provide an overall scheme of the poem as to facilitate the understanding of the passages that will be analysed in the following chapter.
Furthermore, this chapter will also contain a brief history of the various editions and a survey of the most important manuscripts and fragments that constitute the corpus of the *Roland* tradition, as well as provide a *stemma codicum* of said manuscripts as delineated by Segre in his critical edition. The third and final chapter will instead focus on the Germanic sources themselves, specifically the German *Ruolandes Liet* and the Old Norse *Karlamagnús saga* with its Danish and Swedish offspring. First, these texts will be thoroughly analysed from a textual standpoint and then compared with each other and with the rest of the corpus, and the Oxford manuscript in particular, in order to determine their position and relative importance within the textual tradition of the *Chanson de Roland*. 
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Whenever a portion of the *Chanson de Roland* is cited, Cesare Segre’s 1989 revised critical edition of the Oxford Manuscript is used, as well as his numeration of laisses. The English translation provided here is by Joseph J. Duggan and Annalee C. Rejhon, found in their 2012 translation of the entire French corpus. For citations of Konrad’s *Ruolandes Liet*, I used Dieter Kartschoke’s 2011 revised edition of the poem and I provide an English translation based on his Middle High German-New High German text. As for the *Karlamagnús saga*, Carl R. Unger’s 1860 edition was used, as well as both Eduard Koschwitz’s 1878 German translation of Branch VIII and Paul Aebischer’s 1954 French translation and commentary. The reference editions for the Danish *Karl Magnus Kronike* and Swedish *Karl Magnus* are Poul Lindegård Hjorth’s 1960 and David Kornhall’s 1957 editions respectively.
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I. Literary context and poetic tradition

1. Europe in the High Medieval Period

To understand the complexity of the literary culture that flourished in western Europe in the first centuries of the second millennium it is necessary to first analyse the political and socio-economic factors that made it possible. The period comprised between the 11th and 13th centuries, often referred to as the High Middle Ages, saw an unprecedented growth in population, technology, trade and economy in general, which led to significant changes in the political system and society as a whole. In fact, the foundations of what would later become the major European nations were laid in this period, while in the growing cities a new class of merchants and craftsmen emerged, the bourgeoisie.
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This period of growth coincided with a political climate of decentralisation and delocalisation of power from the centralised post-Carolingian states to the new feudal aristocracy, which grew in strength and power, ultimately becoming a force that every European monarch had to cope with. Further undermining the authority of the secular institutions was the Church, which became even more powerful and bold, to the point of directly challenging the Empire and other European states in a protracted power struggle that ultimately resulted in little to no success for the Pope.¹

1.1 Feudalism and rural aristocracy

The rise of the feudal system, and the new mounted nobility, was a consequence of the internal and external crises that struck the Carolingian Empire during the 9th and 10th centuries.² Political instability and a series of wars between the sons of Emperor Louis the Pious resulted in the division of the empire into three independent kingdoms, only formally subject to imperial rule. In 843, with the Treaty of Verdun, the eldest son, Lothair (795-855), kept the title of emperor and king of Italy, while also receiving the territory comprised between the Rhine and Rhone rivers (later recognised as a kingdom and called Lotharingia). His brothers Charles the

¹ Mundy (1973), 325.
² Duby (1974), 162.
Bald (823-877) and Louis the German (806-876) were instead given the western and eastern part of the empire respectively.³

Divided and weakened, the Carolingian Empire suffered waves of raids and migrations over the course of the 9th and 10th centuries.⁴ After a series of successful incursion, Viking raiders from Scandinavia were able to bring chaos all over Europe, sacking cities and even conquering kingdoms in Britain. Their attacks were particularly devastating in the Western Frankish kingdom, culminating in the siege of Paris of 885. The Northmen, although defeated, continued their raids and some of them, under the leadership of Rollo, managed to receive in 911 the Duchy of Normandy from Charles the Simple, king of the West Franks.⁵

The Eastern Frankish kingdom instead bore the brunt of the Hungarian invasions in the 10th century.⁶ The Hungarians, or Magyars, a nomadic people from the region of the Ural Mountains, migrated to Pannonia at the end of the ninth century and from there started a series of raids towards Western Europe, successfully pillaging Italy, Bavaria, Saxony, Thuringia and even reaching as far as the Pyrenees. Hungarian raids continued until their army was defeated by Otto the Great, king of

³ Beltrami (2017), 118.
⁴ Duby (1974), 112.
⁵ Liborio & De Laude (2002), 46-47.
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Germany, at the battle of Lechfeld in 955. The reign of Otto saw the rise of the Eastern kingdom as the new centre of the Empire, with Otto’s coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in 962 and the establishment of the Ottonian dynasty.

The necessity to defend the kingdom’s borders, coupled with the weakening of the centralised authority of the state, created a fertile ground for the small princes and administrators to take direct action and increase their local power, obtaining benefices such as noble status and hereditariness of lands and titles from the monarchs in exchange for military service and other related duties.\(^7\) The new rural aristocracy quickly evolved as a social order and was integrated as one of the three ordines of medieval society: laboratores, bellatores and oratores.\(^8\) As a military order, it developed a set of values and an ideology that were antithetical to those of the lower working classes and those preached by the ecclesiastics.

The knightly order’s main occupation was war, but when not at war it indulged in practices such as hunting and taking part in one of the many group fights or tournaments, a custom that was extremely popular amongst the warrior elite but openly condemned by the Church. These tournaments had the double benefit of training the knights during peacetime and giving them the possibility to ascend the ranks and gain both fame and fortune,

\(^7\) Mundy (1973), 259-260.
\(^8\) Liborio & De Laude (2002), 45-46.
since the victor could claim the arms of the defeated.\textsuperscript{9} All of these occupations were devoted to the betterment of the knight’s fighting capabilities, through training and the acquisition of better arms, equipment and horses. Horses in particular were one of the most important parts of the knight’s armaments, to the point of becoming a symbol of his status and his social superiority.\textsuperscript{10}

The need to acquire the best equipment possible and gain prestige and rank created a very competitive environment, in which a knight had to display not only his martial skills, but also his finesse and prodigality. High society demanded a certain etiquette and ethos, displayed during the many feasts and banquets, which were, “along with warfare, the mainstay of the aristocratic way of life.”\textsuperscript{11}

1.2 \textit{Secular powers and the Church}

On the other hand, the Church and the clergy had a different view on society and Christendom as a whole. It was a common opinion inside and outside the Church that the Pope was superior to any secular monarch, even the Emperor himself, his power bestowed upon him, as a descendant of Saint Peter, by Jesus Christ himself and reinforced by Emperor Constantine

\textsuperscript{9} MUNDY (1973), 253.
\textsuperscript{10} DUBY (1974), 167.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 168.
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with the so-called Donation of Constantine. This conviction led the Pope to intervene in secular matters, actively engaging in politics and power struggles.

Emblematic of this conflict was the Investiture Controversy, a dispute that arose between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV over the investiture of bishops and abbots. When Henry rejected the Church’s appointed bishop of Milan the Pope resorted to excommunicate him in 1076 and made him walk barefoot in the snow around the castle of Canossa as penitence. This was a major turning point in the relation between the Empire and the Church but it didn’t put an end to the conflict, which continued until the Concordat of Worms of 1122. The Concordat restricted imperial right over investitures and severely weakened the Emperor’s power, while the Church became more powerful, to the point that the Pope was seen not only as a spiritual leader, but also as a ruler who stood above all the kinglets and emperors of Christendom.

The struggle between Papacy and Empire took on a different form in the following century. From mid-12th century to the death of Frederick II in 1250 the Hohenstaufen dynasty of Swabia controlled the Empire but was firmly opposed by the Welfen, a rival dynasty whose strongholds were

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13 Ibid., 323.
Saxony and Bavaria. This animosity was reflected on the many wars that the Hohenstaufens had to fight to maintain imperial control over the unruly Italian city-states, where the two factions, one supporting the Pope and the other the Emperor, were labelled Guelphs (from Welfen) and Ghibellines (from the castle of Waiblingen in Swabia) respectively.\textsuperscript{14}

The Pope aspired to a unified Christianity under his leadership, but the fractured feudal society posed many obstacles, since local rivalry and regional conflicts were frequent. This situation, exacerbated by the Muslim menace in the Mediterranean, severely threatened the ‘Peace of God’, the idea that power was bestowed upon kings and popes by God with the purpose of keeping peace and justice in the world.\textsuperscript{15} The double objective of redirecting conflicts away from Europe and at the same time expanding Christianity’s borders was achieved with the crusades.\textsuperscript{16}

### 1.3 Expanding the borders of Christendom

Lasting over two centuries, the crusades were a series of religious wars and expeditions aimed at battling the Muslim threat in the southern and eastern borders of Christendom as well as eradicating heresy and paganism from Europe with the consequent expansion of the Roman Church. The

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\textsuperscript{14} MUNDY (1973), 368.  
\textsuperscript{15} DUBY (1974), 162-163.  
\textsuperscript{16} MUNDY (1973), 324.
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first crusade started in 1095 when Pope Urban II gave a sermon in Clermont in which he urged the Christian princes to take arms and retake Jerusalem from the Turks and ended successfully in 1099 with the capture of the city.

During the following two centuries the crusaders tried to establish their presence in the Holy Land but their efforts failed when the Muslim world counterattacked and the Christian forces were defeated at the battle of Hattin in 1187 and Jerusalem fell. Several crusades were called for to recapture the city but they all ended in failure and eventually European presence in Palestine was completely eradicated when the last Christian stronghold, Acre, fell in 1291.17

The Holy Land wasn’t, however, the sole target of the crusades. Since the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Omayyad Caliphate the Spanish kingdoms had been fighting to retake possession of the region. The crusades gave new fervour to the Christian armies, which were able to reconquer much of Spain in a series of military campaigns, leaving only a strip of land to Islam.18 The Spanish Reconquista lasted until 1492 when the combined armies of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon conquered the last Muslim city, Granada.

17 MUNDY (1973), 65.
18 Ibid., 60.
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In the north, the crusades were driven towards the last pagan peoples in the Baltic region. In the course of the 12th century the Germans started pushing eastwards into Slavic territory in a crusade against the Wends and later against the Prussians. In 1198 they founded the city of Riga and started a series of wars in order to Christianise and submit the local Baltic tribes. The crusaders were led by the Teutonic Knights, a German military order that, over the course of the 13th and 14th century, managed to create and administer a crusader state spanning from Poland to Estonia.

1.4 Trade, technology and towns

German supremacy over the Baltic wasn’t, however, only a military one. German merchants dominated commerce in northern Europe, creating trade routes and establishing trading posts in the major cities of the region from London to Visby and reaching as far as Novgorod. This posts, or kontore, were run by German settlers mostly from the northern German cities of Lübeck, Hamburg and Cologne and formed a commercial and political network that was later known as the Hanseatic League.

This rapid evolution of commerce was a direct consequence of the substantial improvement of agricultural and industrial production in western Europe, a phenomenon mostly caused by a somewhat milder

19 MUNDY (1973), 66.
20 Ibid., 66-67.
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climate and technological advancements such as water- and windmills, the three-field system and the use of horses for ploughing.\textsuperscript{21} The expansion of arable land was extensive and widespread, forests were cleared, marshlands were drained and new areas were settled. As a result, Europe’s population increased exponentially, reaching numbers that were not to be surpassed until modern times.\textsuperscript{22} In Northern Italy and in the region comprised between the rivers Rhine and Loire urbanisation reached its peak during this period, with the major cities reaching up to 60,000 inhabitants. Paris, the biggest city in Northern Europe, boasted a population of 80,000 at the beginning of the fourteenth century, rivalled or even surpassed by the rich Italian cities of Milan and Venice.\textsuperscript{23}

Especially in Italy, where cities formed self-governed republics, but also in other urbanised areas, the importance of towns grew both as trading hubs and production centres. Rivers were used for transportation of goods and trade routes in the Mediterranean connected the great ports of southern France and Italy with the Middle-East and beyond. Wine from France was found in the market squares of towns all over Europe and wool from England was exported in large quantities, while city industries produced all

\textsuperscript{21} MUNDY (1973), 111.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 120.
sorts of consumer goods, from clothing to furniture to weapons and armour.\textsuperscript{24}

1.5 \textit{Knowledge and culture}

These bustling towns became economic as well as cultural centres, rivalling the monasteries in the fostering of knowledge and education. By the end of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century the first universities were created and during the 13\textsuperscript{th} they were institutionalised and given papal recognition.\textsuperscript{25} These schools were dedicated to the study and teaching of several disciplines (such as law, theology, medicine, physics, grammar, logic and rhetoric) and produced some of the most important intellectuals of the time, such as Thomas Aquinas or the Franciscan Salimbene.\textsuperscript{26}

Despite the primate of the Church in regards to education, however, this period saw a considerable expansion of culture and literacy outside of the dominion of the clergy towards the territory of secular culture. Apart from the monasteries and the universities, the major centres of cultural production in this period were now the feudal courts, which constituted the base of the new aristocracy’s power and the places where its customs and

\textsuperscript{24} MUNDY (1973), 126-127.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 465-466.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 468-469.
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ideals were established and evolved into a structured and cohesive culture. First in France, where the emergence of the feudal system was more so rapid, and then all over western Europe, these courts produced and consumed a highly developed literature in the vernacular tongues.

2. The rise of vernacular literature in Romance

2.1 *The Carolingian Renaissance*

The coronation of Charlemagne (742-814) as Roman Emperor in 800 and the subsequent foundation of the Carolingian Empire was a major turning point in the history of Europe, as it shaped the political and economic layout of the continent for the centuries to come. The consequences for the arts and culture were no less noteworthy, however, to the point that scholars refer to this period as the ‘Carolingian Renaissance’.

Charlemagne himself, though illiterate, saw the importance of literacy and schooling for the organisation and administration of his empire and launched a series of reforms aimed at contrasting the degradation of Latin, caused by the poor education of many ecclesiastics, and at forming a class of functionaries up to the task of managing a vast and multicultural empire. One of the greatest achievements of such an endeavour was the creation of a new standardised script, the so called ‘Caroline minuscule’, which had a lasting influence throughout the Middle Ages and formed the basis for the development of the Humanist minuscule and the modern scripts.²⁸

²⁸ Beltrami (2017), 116-117
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Another example of the revitalisation of arts under Charlemagne comes from his own biographer, Einhard, in a passage of the *Vita Karoli Magni*. Einhard states that the king, who wanted to preserve the collective memories of his people, ordered that the ancient barbaric poems that celebrated the great kings of old (*barbara et antiquissima carmina*) be transcribed and preserved for posterity.²⁹ Of these poems, most probably composed in the Germanic tongue, nothing remains but their very existence, and thus the existence of a Frankish epic tradition, was enough to fuel the debate on the origin of the Old French epic, on whether the latter could trace its origins back to the former or not.³⁰

2.2 *The first Old French texts*

The revitalisation of Latin culture during the Carolingian renaissance, though not directly aimed at that, also had repercussions on the vernacular tongues that were incessantly diverging from their parent language. In fact, a major consequence of the normalisation of Latin to a more classical form was precisely the realisation of this divergence, a new awareness of the existence of the Romance Languages.³¹

²⁹ *Beltrami* (2017), 107.
³¹ *Beltrami* (2017), 117
In 813 the Council of Tours officially stated that, in order to be understood by the common people, priests deliver their sermons in the vernacular tongues (in *rusticam Romanam linguam aut Thiotiscam*) instead of Latin. While it had always been necessary to translate homilies for the less cultured Germanic population, it wasn’t the case, up to this point, for the Romanised inhabitants of the former Roman Empire.\(^{32}\) This act was the first recognition of vulgar Latin as not just a lower and simpler variety of Latin but as a separate language in its own right, and is considered as a statement of the birth of the Romance Languages.\(^{33}\)

It wasn’t long before the appearance of the first recorded text in a Romance language, the famous *Oaths of Strasbourg*, in 842. These oaths were taken by Charles the Bald and Louis the German in front of their assembled armies as a statement of allegiance against their elder brother Lothair, whom they had defeated a year before at Fontenoy. What makes these oaths unique is the fact that each of the two brothers swore in the language of the other’s army: Louis addressed Charles’s soldiers in a form of Gallo-Romance (*romana lingua*), while Charles did the same in a Franconian dialect of Old High German, followed by the soldiers, who swore in their own respective language.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{32}\) Beltrami (2017), 118.

\(^{33}\) Liborio & De Laude (2002), 11.

\(^{34}\) Beltrami (2017), 118-119.
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Once again, the necessity to be understood by the common people was the cause of a gradual increase in the use of the vernacular tongue for liturgical, evangelical, juridical and literary purposes. Sometimes the language of the people was used to celebrate notable events and kings, as is the case of the German *Ludwigslied*, composed to commemorate king Louis III and his victory over Viking raiders at the Battle of Saucourt, but oftentimes it was a tool employed by the Church to reach and audience of little to no culture, who nonetheless needed to be educated in the faith. Example of this are the Hagiographic Poems, the oldest of which, the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, is preserved, not by chance, within the same manuscript that contains the *Ludwigslied*.35

2.3 *The Hagiographic Poems*

Almost all the Romance texts dating to the period comprised between the 9th and 11th centuries are religious texts, of which the vast majority consists of hagiographies. The fact that these texts were fortuitously preserved in a few manuscripts, whose content was often unrelated, and were copied in the blank pages or even the binding of the codices, is an indicator of the secondary position of vernacular literature compared to the more important and well established Latin material. On the other hand, it

35 FASSÒ (1997), 53.
means that this literature must have been more copious than the few texts preserved, only it wasn’t deemed as important as the Latin texts and thus not as worthy of conservation.36

Dating to the end of the 9th century, the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, the oldest preserved literary text in a Romance Language, is a short poem of 14 assonanced couplets (plus a final line) about the martyrdom of Eulalia, a Spanish saint of the 3rd century, which is preserved in one manuscript (ms. 150, Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale) along with a Latin sequence and the aforementioned *Ludwigslied*. The Old French *Sequence* appears to be a rehash of the Latin one, although it differentiates itself for the prevalence of the narrative aspect.37 The presence, within the same manuscript, of three different languages in three distinct texts, two of which (the French *Sequence* and the *Ludwigslied*) transcribed by the same hand, is a testament to the multicultural environment of northern France in the Carolingian Era.38

Two other texts from the 10th century, preserved in the same manuscript (ms. 240, Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque municipale), one narrating the life and death of Saint Lethgier, the other the Passion of Christ, fall in the same category as the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*. All these

36 BElTRAMI (2017), 124.
38 BElTRAMI (2017), 126.
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texts were meant to be sung during paraliturgical services (in the case of the Passion and Saint Lethgier the original musical notation survives) in which the faithful could find illustrious examples of faith in the saints’ lives and passions.39

Also worth mentioning are two very important texts written in Occitan, both from the 11th century, the Boeci and the Sancta Fides. The Boeci is a life of Boethius based on his famous work, De consolatione philosophiae, while the Sancta Fides, just like the Sequence of Saint Eulalia, narrates the martyrdom of a young woman, Fides of Agen. Though the Boeci is composed in decasyllables and the Sancta Fides in octosyllables, these two poems have in common the use of the same basic metrical unit that will feature later on in the chanson de geste, the laisse, a group of lines with the same assonance or rhyme.40

Unique among the Hagiographic Poems, the Saint Alexis is attested in a copious manuscript tradition, whose oldest member dates back to the mid-11th century.41 The Old French poem is based on a Latin version of a legend of Syrian origin about the son a rich Roman noble, Alexis, who leaves the family during his wedding night to live a life of penitence in the Levant, comes back to Rome after 17 years, lives as a mendicant in a

40 Fassò (1997), 55.
41 Beltrami (2017), 200.
basement and dies a saint. The intended audience of the Saint Alexis was the feudal aristocracy, as evidenced by the language used, the themes and the characters. Alexis’ father, Eufemien, is portrayed as the typical feudal lord, pious though still bound to the vain rituals and values of his social status, while Alexis exemplifies the righteous path of rejection of all earthly things and complete embrace of God in poverty and prayer, seen as the only salvation for the military order.42

Different styles and subgenres merge in the Saint Alexis: from the earlier Hagiographic Poems comes a sense of community between author and audience through the use of inclusive pronouns, from medieval Latin poetry the highly sophisticated lyrical forms of the planctus (a lament for a deceased relative, friend or companion). Lastly, the meter used is the decasyllable, which was most prevalent in the epic genre.43

The fact that the Hagiographic Poems predate and, most importantly, bear many similarities, in both language and style, with the epic tradition of the chanson de geste, has led some scholars, chief among them Cesare Segre, to assert the continuity between the two traditions.44 In fact, the Hagiographic Poems as a whole display several features that are typical of epic but are nonetheless absent in the Latin hagiographies they are based on,

42 FASSÒ (1997), 56-57.
43 LIBORIO & DE LAUDE (2002), 24-25.
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such as a simple and paratactic style, the frequent use of parallelisms and repetitions and lastly the presence of a certain stock of formulaic expressions.45

45 Fassò (1997), 53.
3. The Old French Epic

3.1 Chanson de geste

Between the 11th and 12th centuries appeared in Northern France the first texts of a literary tradition that goes under the name ‘chanson de geste’, epic poems that celebrated the heroic deeds of great heroes, the fight against the pagans and the military values of honour, fealty, faith and sacrifice. The popularity of the chansons in this period is attested by the various redactions and sheer number of manuscripts preserved, making it one of the most prolific genres in medieval literature. The numerous chansons were grouped very early into cycles of similar (or same) argument, characters and themes, called gestes, which, deriving from Lat. gesta, indicated feats and accomplishments or even entire lineages made illustrious by great heroes.\(^{46}\) These cycles are:

- The Cycle of the King, which is centred around Charlemagne and his paladins. To the cycle belong, among many others, the Chanson de Roland (the oldest preserved chanson), the Pèlerinage de Charlemagne, Ogier le Danois and the Chanson d’Aspremont.

- The Cycle of Guillaume, which follows the exploits of the eponymous Guillaume d’Orange and his lineage. This cycle is vast

\(^{46}\text{FASSÒ (1997), 63.}\)
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and its long lasting fortune sprouted many chansons such as the Chanson de Guillaume, the Prise d'Orange, Aliscans, Aymeri de Narbonne and the Couronnement de Louis.

- The Cycle of the rebel vassals, which is not a cycle per se but a collection of chansons that feature the theme of rebellion against an unjust or inept royal authority. Famous examples are Raoul de Cambrai, Girart de Roussillon and Gormont et Isembart.

- The Cycle of the Crusade, which groups together several chansons about the crusading effort in the Holy Land, such as the Chanson d'Antioche, Les Chétifs and the Chanson de Jérusalem.

From a stylistic standpoint, the entirety of the Old French epic production features the same basic characteristics, from the metre to the syntax and formulaic expressions. All of the chansons make use of the same metrical unit, called laisse, which is a group of lines of the same length (but variable number) united by the same assonance, or, in the case of the more recent texts, the same rhyme. The most common verse is the decasyllable with a caesura after the fourth syllable but other types of versification exist, such as the so-called alexandrine (consisting of twelve syllables) and the octosyllable, which is found in the oldest poems and may have been the original verse of Old French epic.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{47} FASSÒ (1997), 60-61.
The language used in the *chanson de geste* is rather simple and schematised: the lines form complete sentences while the laisses are homogenous in metre, content and also melody; the former are connected by parataxis, the latter by repetitions and juxtaposition of similar verses. The simple and flexible structure leaves this type of poems open to reworking, from simple rephrasing to the addition of new lines and even modification of the contents. This variability, itself a characteristic of all preserved manuscripts, has to do with the oral nature of the performances through which the *chansons* were experienced. The poems, in fact, were originally meant to be sung by jongleurs and their audience came from all layers of society, aristocrats and common people alike, literate and illiterate. 48

The question is whether these texts were not just orally consumed but also orally composed, whether orality played an important role in the production as well as in the fruition of said texts. The answer is not an easy one and scholars are divided on the matter, some proposing an oral origin, based on the many repetitions and formulaic expressions, while others, more cautiously, do not stray from the written form in which the *chansons* are preserved. Each theory has its arguments, but the lack of major evidence and the fact that every study is inevitably conducted on written sources has led the oral hypothesis to an impasse. 49

The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland

Further complicating the matter is the issue of the genesis of the chanson de geste. There is, in fact, a certain time gap between most of the chansons and the historical events and characters they are based on. In the case of the Chanson de Roland, whose oldest preserved manuscript, the Oxford manuscript, dates back to the second quarter of the 12th century, there is at least a gap of three hundred years between the possible date of composition (which varies depending on the scholar, although the general consensus is around the last decades of the 11th century) and the events narrated, which took place in 778. This hiatus creates many problems in dating the individual poems and the genre in general, as there is scant evidence to support any proposed date of composition prior to the manuscripts themselves, but there are also many elements within the chansons that lean towards an earlier composition. The problem is yet unsolved, as it is tied to the complicated matter of the origins of the epic genre, another topic of heated debate.

3.2 The problem of the origins

The origin of the Old French epic is a much discussed topic, one that has generated, over the course of more than a hundred years, endless debates.

50 FASSÒ (1997), 59.
51 Ibid., 64.
and a plethora of different hypotheses generally grouped together under two very wide banners, the ‘traditionalists’ and the ‘individualists’.

The traditionalist hypothesis had its foundation on the romantic belief that epic was the spontaneous and collective creation of the people, who, struck by a particularly noteworthy event, started singing about it and, over the course of centuries, through aggregation of different songs and rhapsodies, formed the substance of the epic material. From this perspective, the great epic poems, the *Chanson de Roland* among them, were seen as the unique and collective product of the respective nations, a reflection of their own national spirit (*Volksgeist*).

The argument of Gaston Paris, the most prominent traditionalist, was that the *chanson de geste* had its origins in the popular songs that were composed and recited in the period immediately following the real events, based on allusions in the Latin chronicles and the fact that the *chansons* themselves seem to refer to, or even be based on, earlier, very popular works. Though these early songs are all but lost, contemporary examples, such as the already mentioned *Ludwigslied*, can be found in the Germanic world, where there already existed an epic tradition. Considering these

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53 Fasso (1997), 60.
55 Ibid., 53-54.
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facts, and the fact that Charlemagne had ordered the transcription of the ancient Frankish epic poems, it is reasonable to assume that these early songs were Germanic and thus the Old French epic of the 11th and 12th centuries would be a direct continuation of an earlier Frankish epic tradition. However, faced with the dilemma regarding the language of these early poems, which he dubbed cantilènes, Paris asserted the independence of French epic from its Germanic counterpart, stating that the theory of the Germanic origin was based on nothing and that there was no possible way to explain the language shift from Germanic to Romance.\(^{56}\)

Another traditionalist, Pio Rajna pushed the composition date even further back in time. He tried to connect the Carolingian epic with the Merovingian one, claiming that epic poems in Romance had existed long before previously thought.\(^{57}\) His hypothesis, though fascinating, was far-fetched and failed to gain a longstanding support as critics moved on to the individualist theory, which, by contrast, was centred around the idea that the chanson de geste was a later creation influenced by the esprit de croisade that was spreading through Europe during the first crusades in Spain and in the Holy Land.\(^{58}\)

\(^{56}\) PARIS (1986), 53-56.
\(^{57}\) RAJNA (1986), 63-65.
\(^{58}\) RONCAGLIA (2012), 4.
A student of Gaston Paris, Joseph Bédier proposed an innovative theory to explain the temporal hiatus between the manuscripts and the matter narrated in the poems. He noted that, when considering the geography of the *chanson de geste*, the places and characters of the various poems and cycles were tied to the major sites of pilgrimage and the routes that connected them. For example, the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela was dotted with shrines and churches that preserved the tombs of many famous heroes: The Basilica of Saint-Romain in Blaye had the remains of Roland and Oliver, while Guillaume d’Orange was buried in the abbey of Gellone.\(^5\) According to Bédier, the *chansons* were a creation of the 11th and 12th centuries, composed by jongleurs and clerics and built around the tales and legends that were preserved in the abbeys and monasteries that safeguarded the relics and tombs of the great heroes of old.\(^6\)

The response of traditionalism was carried out by Spanish philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who criticised the individualist theory for its blindness and overconfidence in the belief of the individual and isolated creation of the poems of the *chanson de geste*. To the idea of a single text by a single author he opposed the fluidity of the text composed and reworked by a plurality of anonymous authors over the course of centuries.\(^7\)

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\(^{5}\) Bédier (1986), 78-79.

\(^{6}\) Ibid., 91-92.

\(^{7}\) Menéndez Pidal (1986), 100.
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regards to the *Chanson de Roland*, he found many inconsistencies in the manuscripts, which demonstrated that even the most reliable of the preserved versions, the Oxford ms., differed greatly from the earlier version, or versions, it was based on. One such inconsistency was the fate of Ogier the Dane, who, according to Menéndez Pidal, was meant to die during the Battle of Roncevaux Pass in earlier texts but was resuscitated in the later ones, creating some continuity problems in the preserved versions.\(^6^2\) Other evidence of the circulation of the *Chanson de Roland* long before the Oxford manuscript include the presence, in documents from the end of the 10th well into the 11th century, of brothers called Roland and Oliver, a testament of the immense success of the poem among the people of the period.\(^6^3\)

Following the neotraditionalist position of Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Andrea Fassò proposed his hypothesis, in contrast to Cesare Segre (who, as seen previously, believed that the Old French epic was influenced by the style of the Hagiographic Poems), that there existed an epic tradition earlier than the 11th century. He noted that early texts such as the *Passion* and *Saint Lethgier* are octosyllabic and octosyllabic is also one of the oldest and most archaic of the *chansons de geste*, *Gormont et Isembart*.\(^6^4\)

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\(^{63}\) Ibid., 108-109.  
\(^{64}\) Fassò (2005), 71.
The basis of his argument is that formulaic expressions allow syllabic extension from the basic four to six with the simple addition of conjunctions, articles, adverbs or adjectives. This means that, considering the number of formulaic expressions in the *chanson de geste*, a line of eight syllables could be easily lengthened to ten, a process that made this kind of rephrasing common practice. Fassò sums up by stating:

Forse le canzoni che noi conosciamo furono composte originariamente in ottosillabi, e successivamente – a partire forse dall’inizio del XII secolo – le sillabe furono portate a dieci, spesso mediante la semplice aggiunta di una o due parole, altre volte con un rimaneggiamento dell’intero verso [...]. Non si può escludere, anzi è verosimile, che rifacimenti ulteriori abbiano visto l’inserimento *ex novo* di nuovi versi nati come decasillabi.  

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65 Fassò (2005), 72.  
66 Ibid., 73.
The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland
II.

The manuscript tradition of the Chanson de Roland

1. The Song of Roland

The Chanson de Roland is the oldest of the known chansons de geste, and by far the most famous. Its immense literary fortune sprouted numerous recasts and refashonings throughout the Middle Ages, while in the 19th century, in pure Romantic fashion, it was elevated to the status of French national epic poem par excellence. This predominant position among the chansons de geste, both in terms of time period and literary excellence, has captivated the attention of critics, who, over the course of two centuries, analysed it and tried to reconstruct what could have been its archetype, based on the copious manuscript tradition that will be examined in this chapter.
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1.1 The story

The action takes place in Spain, during Charlemagne’s military expedition of 778. All the cities and strongholds are now in the emperor’s control, with the exception of Saragossa, which is held by the pagan king of Spain, Marsile. Knowing he cannot defeat the might of Charlemagne’s army, he holds council to decide the next course of action but none of his dukes and barons is willing to give voice to their opinions except for his most trusted advisor, Blancandrin. He suggests the king send an offer of surrender to the emperor with lavish gifts and the promise of allegiance and conversion to the Christian faith. In exchange, Charlemagne would return to Aix and let him keep his lands in Spain as an imperial vassal.

Blancandrin then sets out and takes the gifts and the peace offer to Charlemagne, who sits idle in Cordova after the conquest of the city. The offer is discussed among the Frankish barons, who, except for Roland, the emperor’s nephew, urge Charlemagne to accept Marsile’s proposal and send an envoy to him. Now it is time to decide who should take the reply to Marsile and several barons, including Roland and the archbishop of Reims, Turpin, volunteer but the Emperor is adamant and asks to send some other.

\footnote{As with many other details in the poem, the extent of Charlemagne’s Spanish expedition is greatly exaggerated. What was, historically, a brief campaign of uncertain result is depicted here as a full scale invasion that has brought almost the entirety of Spain under Frankish rule. Also, in the chanson, Charlemagne is said to be over two hundred years old and is given the title of emperor, despite the fact that he wouldn’t be crowned emperor until the year 800.}
Roland then suggests his stepfather, Ganelon, should go, since he was the first to speak in favour of peace with Marsile, and the whole assembly agrees. Ganelon is furious with Roland, thinking he is being set up but accepts nonetheless and openly condemns Roland and the Twelve Peers on his way out.68

Full of resentment, Ganelon begins to plot Roland’s death and, once he delivers the message to Marsile, he persuades him to ambush the rearguard of the Frankish army, which would be commanded by Roland, stating that after suffering such a loss Charlemagne would never dare attack Spain again. Marsile is convinced and Ganelon is sent back to the Frankish camp where he reports the king’s decision to cease hostilities and become Christian, much to the joy of Charlemagne, who can now safely return to France. Roland is chosen to lead the rearguard along with Oliver, the Twelve Peers, Archbishop Turpin and twenty thousand knights, while the vanguard is to be commanded by Ogier of Denmark.69

As the bulk of the Christian army crosses the pass of Roncevaux and heads towards France, the pagans ambush the rearguard with overwhelming

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68 Ganelon’s concern is understandable, since the first two ambassadors, Basan and his brother Basile, were killed by the pagans. His words of hostility towards Roland and the Twelve Peers are phrased like a public challenge, making his future revenge seem like a justified act. (Laisse 24)

69 As seen in the previous chapter, Ramón Menéndez Pidal believed that, in an earlier stage of the poem, Ogier was part of the rearguard and died at Roncevaux.
numbers. Oliver, seeing the size of the Muslim army from a hill, pleads with Roland to blow the oliphant to inform Charlemagne of the threat so he could send reinforcements. Roland, however, refuses, seeing it as an act of cowardice, and prepares for the inevitable battle. Archbishop Turpin blesses the soldiers and soon the pagans launch their attack but the Franks hold their ground and a bloody fight ensues.

Casualties are high on both sides and when Roland realises that the battle is lost and little hope remains, he wants to blow his horn but Oliver rebukes him, stating that it is too late now and that he should have listened to him when it was the time. Archbishop Turpin intervenes between the two and urges Roland to blow the oliphant so that the rest of the army can avenge them and finally defeat the pagans. Roland obliges and blows with all the strength he has left but it is too late, the pagans attack once again with the king on the lead and slaughter the rest of the Christian army. The attack is repelled and Marsile, his right hand chopped off, runs from the battlefield but victory is achieved at a dear price: All lie dead and only Roland, though seriously wounded, is left alive. He tries to break his sword Durendal so that it will not fall into enemy’s hands but to no avail, so he lies under a pine tree, offers his right glove to God and finally dies, his soul carried to heaven by angels.  

It is explained later in the poem (Laisse 203) that Roland had vowed that, if he died in a foreign land, he would do so like a conqueror, his head facing the enemy’s land.
Upon hearing the desperate call for help, Charlemagne and the rest of the army immediately turn around and make haste towards Roncevaux but they arrive too late and find the battlefield littered with the bodies of Franks and Saracens alike. They immediately pursue the remaining pagans, who flee from the avenging Franks and drown as they try to cross the river Ebro.  

As the day draws to a close, the army returns to Roncevaux to bury the dead. Without their knowledge, however, Marsile’s lord, the Emir of Babylon Baligant, whom he had called for help years before, arrives to Spain at the head of an incredibly large army. After discovering of Marsile’s defeat and the massacre of the Frankish rearguard, he decides to take Charlemagne by surprise and orders a full-on assault on the Christian army, while they’re still in Spain. The battle is fierce and bloody and many heroes die until Charlemagne kills Baligant in single combat and the pagan army is routed. With no one to resist them, the Christians finally take control of Saragossa, converting the population and destroying all the idols in the synagogues and mosques, while King Marsile dies from his wounds and the sorrow of his loss.

71 In order to accomplish this, Charlemagne asks God to make the sun stop so he can run down the infidels. He is immediately granted his wish and the sun is fixed in place until the last enemy is killed. (Laisses 178-179)
The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland

After the city is pacified, Charlemagne and the army return to France with Queen Bramimonde, Marsile’s wife, as a hostage. They stop in Blaye to bury the remains of Roland, Oliver and Turpin in the Basilica of Saint-Romain and then proceed towards Aix. There, the trial against the traitor Ganelon is set. Barons gather from all over the empire to pass judgement but Ganelon effectively defends himself, stating that his was not treason but a justified revenge against Roland and the Twelve Peers. In addition, Pinabel, one of Ganelon’s closest friends, threatens to fight anyone who finds him guilty in a trial by combat. The barons, intimidated, try to persuade Charlemagne to have mercy on Ganelon and release him but Thierry of Anjou intervenes and offers to fight Pinabel. The Emperor agrees and the combat begins.

After a long and difficult struggle, Thierry emerges victorious and Ganelon is sentenced to death, along with thirty of his relatives. After that, Queen Bramimonde converts to Christianity and is baptised with the name Juliana. The poem ends with Archangel Gabriel appearing to Charlemagne in his sleep, inciting him to ride to battle to defend Christianity once more, because King Vivien is besieged by Saracens and desperately needs his help.

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72 The sentence is quite gruesome, with Ganelon tied to four horses and torn apart. His relatives, instead, are just unceremoniously hanged. (Laisses 287-288)
1.2 Structure and Themes

The *Chanson the Roland* is the first and most important *chanson* in the Cycle of the King, dealing with Charlemagne and his constant struggle as a defender of Christendom. It is important to note, however, that, even though it may be argued that the entire cycle may have been constructed around it, the *Chanson de Roland* is quite unique in its genre and does not constitute a prototypical *chanson de geste*.\(^73\) In fact, it differentiates itself from the rest of the cycle both in terms of overall tone and for the great emphasis on the religious elements of the narration.

More than any other *chanson*, The *Chanson de Roland* is permeated with the *esprit de croisade*. Its main theme is the fight against the infidels and the defence of the Christian faith, which is carried over to the extreme sacrifice of martyrdom. This is constantly reminded throughout the *chanson*, by both the narrator and the characters, who share the same ideology, which is briefly summed up by Roland’s statement: “Paien unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit.” (v. 1015) [Pagans are wrong and Christians are right].

This dichotomy is the foundation of the poem, with examples of virtue and martial prowess on the one hand and displays of treachery and felony on the other. The poet, however, has no qualms about explicitly

\(^{73}\) FASSÒ (1997), 63-64.
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admiring some of the antagonists, like Baligant, whom the poet regrets is not a Christian:

La forceure ad asez grant li ber,
Graisles <l>es flancs e larges les costez;
Gros ad le piz, belement est mollét,
3160 Lees espalles e le vis ad mult cler,
Fier le visage, le chef recercelét,
Tant par ert blancs cume flur en estët;
De vasselage est suvent esprovét.
Deus! quel baron, s’oüst chrestientët!   (vv. 3157-3164)

[Baligant’s pelvis is very wide; / he is thin at the hips and full at the ribs; / his chest is large, beautifully shaped, / his shoulders broad and his face bright, / his look fierce, his hair curly, / as white as a flower in summer; / he has often proved his courage. / God! What a baron, if only he were a Christian!]

Even the traitor Ganelon is described in a favourable light: “Vairs out <les oilz> e mult fier lu visage, / Gent out le cors e les costez out larges: / Tant par fut bels, tuit si per l’en esguardent.” (vv. 283-285) [His eyes flash and his look is fierce, / his body shapely and his chest broad: / he is so handsome, all his peers gaze at him].

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74 Ganelon is not described as the typical traitor, rather he is made one, just like Judas, after the promise of riches and gold (not to mention his rivalry with Roland). (Laisse 52)
This positive attributes, however, do not change their characters nor the fate that awaits them. There is, in fact, a certain fatalism in the poem, partly due to the fact that the audience is familiar with the story and already knows its developments. The frequent insertion by the poet of brief lines that foretell what will happen next helps create a tragic atmosphere of inevitability that pushes the tone towards the pathetic and the sublime.75

Lines such as “Guenes i vint, ki la traïsun fist. / Des or cumencet le cunseill que mal prist.” (vv. 178-179) [Ganelon comes, who carried out the betrayal. / Now begins the council that brought disaster.] can be seen as redundant but serve their purpose of presenting information that is common knowledge for the audience and the poet, but not for the characters, who ignore the fate that will befall them. So, when the pagan army marches to ambush the rearguard, the poet can cry out “Deus! quel dulur que li Franceis ne l’ sevent!” (v. 716) [God! What sorrow that the French do not know it!].

The poem is structured with parallelisms: Marsile’s council is symmetrically counterbalanced by the one gathered by Charlemagne and so are the embassies of Blancandrin and Ganelon, while the Twelve Peers have their counterpart in the twelve pagan knights that vow to take them down. Lastly, and most famous of all, the two opposite scenes that see Roland and

75 Segre (2005), 21-23.
Oliver argue on whether to blow the horn or not. In the first, Oliver implores Roland to do so in order to alert the rest of the army to the danger they face, whereas in the second the situation is symmetrically reversed, with Roland wanting to blow the oliphant and Oliver refusing him. The two characters perfectly balance each other not only in temperament but also in the role they play in the story. The poet is very straightforward in describing them:

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Rollant est proz e Oliver est sage,
Ambedui unt me veillus vasselage:
Puis quë il sunt as chevals e as armes,
Ja pur murir n’eschiverunt bataille.
Bon sunt li cunte e lur paroles haltes.       (vv. 1093-1097)
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[Roland is valiant and Oliver is wise; / both have extraordinary prowess: / once they are armed and mounted, / they will not avoid battle, even under threat of death. / The counts are able and their words lofty.]

Their companionship is one of the highlights of the poem and certainly one of the reason of its success. As is typical with the *chanson de

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76 FASSÒ (1997), 70. 
77 Ramón Menéndez Pidal argued that Oliver was a later addition to the poem, created to counterbalance Roland’s pride and arrogance with prudence and wisdom. He speculated that there existed a poem in the 10th century that did not feature Oliver, who would then be introduced only during the 11th century. MENÉNDEZ PIDAL (1986), 110.
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geste, there is no introspection in the characters, only action, movement and raw emotions. The poet, with great skill, manages to create scenes of great pathos and impact through the repetition of verses, expressions and even similar laisses. This way, certain episodes get stretched over many laisses and time is slowed down to focus on the details, achieving the desired effect of captivating the attention of the audience with sublime and pathetic language. This is the procedure that the poet utilises to describe important moments such as the betrayal of Ganelon, the scenes of the horn and the death of Roland himself. In a group of laisses (167-175), similar lines are repeated until Roland dies and is taken to heaven: “Ço sent Rollant que la mort li est pres:” (v. 2259) [Roland feels that death is near], “Ço sent Rollant la veüe ad perdue;” (v. 2297) [Roland feels he has lost his sight], “Ço sent Rollant que la mort le tresprent,” (v.2355) [Roland feels that death overtakes him] and finally “Ço sent Rollant de sun tens n’i ad plus.” (v. 2366) [Now Roland feels that his time is up].

Repetition and variation were common tropes in Medieval literature and are used with great effect in the Chanson de Roland. The result is a diverse yet cohesive narration with a structured timeline. The action takes place within a week, each day characterised by a particular series of events. Marsile’s council on the first day, the Frankish one on the second, the

78 FASSÒ (1997), 63.
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Christian retreat on the third, the ambush at Roncevaux on the fourth, the final battle against Baligant on the fifth and Ganelon’s trial on the sixth and final day. For so much action to be packed in only six days, time needs to dilated to meet the story’s requirements and so happens that the fourth day gets unnaturally lengthened with God’s divine intervention. Space too gets extremely warped as the characters travel back and forth from Saragossa to Roncevaux in the blink of an eye. All these supernatural elements create an unrealistic yet mythical atmosphere that pervades the entire poem.  

The Oxford manuscript ends with a cryptic line: “Ci falt la geste que Turoldus declinet.” (v. 4002) [Here ends the tale that Turoldus copies.]. The problems arise from the last verb, which is ambiguous, as it can be translated as “copies”, “transcribes” or “reworks”. Those that believe in the individual and isolated composition of the poem hail Turoldus as the sole author and thus see this last line as his signature, while scholars leaning towards a more traditionalist approach consider Turoldus a compiler or a copyist.

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79 Segre (2005), 18-19.
80 Fassò (1997), 71.
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2. The manuscript corpus

2.1 Editions and textual reconstruction

The text of the *Chanson de Roland* has survived in ten Old French manuscripts and in several other translations and adaptations across Europe.\(^1\) Since Francisque Michel’s edition of the Oxford manuscript in 1837, numerous efforts have been made towards a textual reconstruction that can fill its gaps and fix its errors, taking into account the variants present in the other manuscripts. The first to follow this direction was Theodore Müller, who systematised the relationships between the texts, dividing them into two major groups, one consisting of the sole O and the other comprising all the remaining texts. This bipartite classification, though not without criticism and not universally accepted, lay the foundation for future textual analyses.\(^2\)

The two major critics of Müller’s system were Wendelin Förster and Edmund Stengel, who both proposed a classification in which O and V\(^4\) were grouped together. Léon Gautier, instead, divided the manuscripts in three branches, one consisting of O, the other of V\(^4\) and finally the last grouping together all the remaining texts in rhyme.\(^3\)

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1. DUGGAN & REJHON (2012), 7.
2. DUGGAN et al. (2005), 9-12.
3. Ibid., 15-22.
Adding his contribution to the matter, Joseph Bédier brought back Müller’s bipartite classification in his edition of the *Chanson de Roland* of 1922. He was convinced of the “*précellence du manuscrit d’Oxford*”, as he called it, and defended its readings even in passages that were emended in accordance with the non-Oxford manuscripts. Despite this idolatry, as Cesare Segre put it, his contribution was noteworthy, especially for his critic against the tendency, common to many editors at the time, to over-correct and over-emend the text. Furthermore, he refuted the idea of grouping $O$ and $V4$ together, judging it erroneous, but accepted the families $PTL$ and $CV7$, suggesting they were the product of rival brotherhoods of jongleurs.

Cesare Segre proposed a stemma that was in line with Müller and Bédier but made a few adjustments and corrected some issues in the light of the newer analyses. The stemma is divided in two branches sprouting from the sub-archetypes $\alpha$ and $\beta$: In the family of $\alpha$ only $O$ is found, whereas all the other manuscripts descend from $\beta$. The stemma also divides the assonanced texts from rhymed ones, the latter being located under $\delta$ and further divided in $\delta'$, from which both $C$ and $V7$ derive, and $\delta''$, which is the prototype of all the others. Lastly, Segre’s classification differs from the previous ones for the high position in the stemma reserved for the manuscripts of the “nordic area”, as he called it, $n\ K\ w\ b$. Building on the

84 SEGRE (1971), X-XI.
85 DUGGAN et al. (2005), 24-25.
analyses by Paul Aebischer and Eyvind Halvorsen, he agrees that \( n \) must be based on an exemplar as old and eminent as \( O \). Similarly, he accepts the importance of \( K \) for its early composition date and the fact that, from the v. 3682 onwards, it alone, along with \( O \), presents an unadulterated and non-divergent version of the original tradition. Regarding \( w \) and \( h \), he is more cautious but accept their value in the stemma nonetheless, only refraining from positing a common antecedent for the group due to the hypothetical and speculative nature of the current analyses.\(^{86}\)

2.2 Stemma codicum

Here is presented the stemma codicum of the Chanson de Roland, along with a key detailing the various manuscripts presented in the stemma, taken from SEGRE (1971):

\(^{86}\) SEGRE (1971), XV-XVIII.
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- **O**
  Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 23. The oldest (first quarter of the 12th century) and most considerable manuscript, more often considered as a *codex optimus*.

- **V4**
  Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, ms. 225. Dating to the 14th century, this manuscript is particular for its hybrid Franco-Venetian language and the fact it combines an assonanced text that roughly corresponds to O and, starting from v. 3684, a rhymed text that follows the reworkings of δ.

- **C**
  Châteauroux, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 1. Another Franco-Venetian manuscript of the early 14th century, it
The manuscript tradition of the Chanson de Roland features a rhymed text that diverges from the variant of \( O \) in its last section.

- \( V7 \)
  Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, ms. 251. Like C, V7 features a rhymed text equivalent to \( O \) until v. 3683 and then the reworking common to the other rhymed texts.

- \( P \)
  Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fr. 860. Rhymed manuscript dated to the end of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, it corresponds to \( O \) in the vv. 1052-3680.

- \( T \)
  Cambridge, Trinity College, ms. R 3-32. A late 14\textsuperscript{th} century rhymed manuscript that corresponds to \( O \) in the vv. 766-3658.

- \( L \)
  Lyon, Bibliothèque de la Ville, ms. 984. Dated to the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, this rhymed manuscript contains a unique prologue but entirely lacks the episode of Baligant. For the rest part, it follows the tradition of the other rhymed texts.

- \( l \)
  Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 14658. A fragment, called Lavergne Fragment from its editor, dated to the end of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. It corresponds to the vv. 2056-81 and 2242-86 of the Oxford manuscript.
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- **F**
  Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 5327. Fragment of a 13th century manuscript that corresponds to the vv. 3327-80 of O with the addition of parts from the rhymed tradition.

- **B**

- **n**
  The *Saga af Runzivals bardaga*, an Old Norse translation contained in the 8th branch of the *Karlamagnús saga*. The *Karlamagnús saga* survives in four manuscripts preserved in the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection at the university of Copenhagen: AM. 180 c, fol. (A), AM. 180 a, fol. (a), AM. 180 d, fol. (B) and AM. 531, 4to. (b).

- **K**
  The *Ruolandes liet* by Konrad der Pfaffe. German poem that re-elaborates the matter of the *Chanson de Roland*. The complete text is only found in one manuscript at the university of Heidelberg (P), cod. pal. germ. 112. There also remains a transcription of 4521 lines of the manuscript of Strasburg (A), lost due to a fire in 1870, and several fragments (S, T, E, M, W)
The manuscript tradition of the Chanson de Roland

- **w**

  Campeu Charlymaen. A 14th century Welsh prose romance that contains a summary of the first part of the *Chanson de Roland*.

- **h**

  Fragments of different redactions of a Flemish rework of the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Roelantslied*. The fragments correspond to the vv. 841-2607 of *O*.

2.3  *The French corpus*

As stated earlier, the French corpus of the *Chanson de Roland* comprises ten manuscripts and fragments of various origins and periods. The most notable and authoritative manuscript is the Oxford manuscript, which is also the oldest. The archaic nature of *O* is evident when looking at the metrics and language. In fact, it is the only manuscript to have a fully assonanced text (*V4* is mixed in this regard), albeit with some hypo- or hypermetric lines. Concerning the language, the Oxford manuscript belongs to the Anglo-Norman dialect of Old-French, but the exact geographical location or period is unclear. Since its language does not show the dialectal features that start to appear in other Insular text from the second quarter of the 12th century onwards, it is reasonable to assume that
The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland

the Oxford manuscript either comes from the continent or is Insular in origin but pre-dates this dialectal divergence.\textsuperscript{87}

Not quite as important as the Oxford manuscript but just as interesting is the Franco-Venetian manuscript \textit{V4}. For its hybrid language and compiled nature, \textit{V4} is rather unique in the \textit{Roland} tradition. Structurally, it can be divided into three parts, each probably deriving from a different source. The first part is more important from a philological perspective, as it closely resembles the text of \textit{O} and it may have been based on an earlier assonanced version. The second part is an episode, disconnected from the main storyline, that recounts the taking of Narbonne by Aymeri, forefather of Guillaume d’Orange and protagonist of his own \textit{chanson de geste}. The third part, in line with the other rhymed manuscripts, details the death of Aude, Oliver’s sister and Roland’s fiancée, and the punishment of Ganelon. The language of \textit{V4} is a puzzle, as it is a mix of Old French and some Northern Italian dialects, mostly Venetian. The mixture of languages is not consistent nor uniform, with parts that more closely resemble Old French morphology and others where the Italian elements are prevalent.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} DUGGAN et al. (2005), I/39.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., II/13-16.
Of similar origin to $V4$ are the two manuscripts $C$ and $V7$. They were probably copied in Northern Italy from a common French model and thus feature a defined Italianisation of the original text, due to the scribes’ unfamiliarity with the French language. On top of that, $C$ contains sections taken from another model, possibly an assonanced version belonging to the $\beta$ family. This is most probably due to the incomplete nature of the rhymed model, which made it necessary for the scribe to check the readings on an older, assonanced copy. Differently from $V4$, here the scribe tried to transpose the assonances into rhymes, with little success. The text of $C$ is nonetheless very important as its assonanced model, according to Segre, could possibly have been of higher stemmatic importance than $V4$’s antecedent $\gamma$.\(^{89}\)

Three other texts can be grouped together based on affinity and common antecedents, $P$, $T$ and $L$. Of the three, $P$ is the most interesting, as it appears to have been integrated, similarly to $C$, with assonanced laisses from a model higher up in the stemma.\(^{90}\) $T$, on the other hand, is a more recent manuscript and falls prey to the modernisation or substitution of archaic words in order to be more easily understandable by its

\(^{89}\) Segre points out that both $V4$ and the rhymed manuscripts feature additions or omissions that are not present in $C$, making the latter the bearer of a tradition that could be more genuine than $\gamma$. Segre (1974), 160.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 154-155.
The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland contemporaries.\textsuperscript{91} \textit{L} is quite abnormal, since it opens with an unrelated prologue inspired by Chrétien de Troyes’s \textit{Chevalier au Lion} and deliberately cuts out sections or shorten certain episodes, probably to focus the attention on the individual drama of the characters.\textsuperscript{92}

The corpus also includes three fragments, fortuitously preserved in the binding of other codices. The fragments align themselves with the \textit{PTL} group, providing more insight on the rhymed tradition of the \textit{Chanson de Roland}. \textit{L} appears to be more closely related to \textit{P} and \textit{L} (in his stemma, Segre groups it with \textit{L}), while \textit{B}, for the most part, follows the lection of \textit{T} and \textit{F} that of \textit{P}.\textsuperscript{93}

\textbf{2.4 Other sources}

The tradition of the Chanson de Roland also consists of other sources of lesser philological significance. These include the so-called \textit{Carmen de prodicione Guenonis}, a Latin poem, probably dating to the first half of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, contained in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century Cottonian manuscript Titus AXIX preserved at the British Library. Another Latin text is the \textit{Historia Caroli Magni}, also known as the \textit{Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle}, a fictitious chronicle detailing Charlemagne’s Spanish campaign, allegedly written by

\textsuperscript{91} Duggan et al. (2005), V/30-31.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., VI/18-20.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., VII/11-22.
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Archbishop Turpin himself. Several other versions and translations exist, including the Occitan poem *Ronsasvals*, the Spanish *Roncesvalles* and the Middle-English *Song of Roland*. All these texts, however, are of little use in the textual reconstruction of the *Chanson de Roland*’s archetype, since they are either too short and vague, as is the case of the English *Song of Roland*, or they follow a completely different and unrelated tradition, like the *Pseudo-Turpin chronicle*.94

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94 Segre (1971), XLVII.
The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland
1. The nordic texts

1.1 Konrad’s Ruolandes Liet

Due to its enormous success, the *Chanson de Roland* was translated and adapted in many different languages and areas in medieval Europe. One such text is the *Ruolandes Liet*, a Middle High German poem written by a priest named Konrad. Little is known about him or his work, except for the few information he himself provides at the end of the *Ruolandes Liet*. He says he is a priest and claims to have translated the original French material first into Latin and then reworked it into German. He also states that he was faithful to the source and didn’t change nor left anything out:
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Ob iu daz liet gevalle,
sô gedenket ir mîn alle.
ich haize der phaffe Chunrât.

alsô ez an dem buoche gescriben stât
in franzischer zungen,
sô hân ich ez in die latîne betwungen,
danne in die tiutische gekêret.
ich nehân der nicht an gemêret,

ich nehân der nicht überhaben. (vv. 9077-9085)

[If you like the poem, / then all of you will also remember mine. / I am
the priest Konrad. / As it is written in the book / in the French language,
/ so I translated into Latin, / and then into the German tongue. / I have
not added anything, / I have left nothing out.]

The origin of this French book that he so faithfully translated is
detailed, along with the praise of his patron, a duke named Heinrich, in the
epilogue of the poem. There, the priest explains that the duke, at the request
of his wife the duchess, had procured a copy of the Chanson the Roland:
“Daz buoch hiez er vor tragen, / gescriben ze den Karlingen. / des gerte diu
edele herzoginne, / aines rîchen küniges barn.” (vv. 9022-9025) [He had the
book procured, / which was written in France. / That was the wish of the
noble duchess, / daughter of a mighty king.].

These lines, although detailed, are also ambiguous, as it is unclear
which historical figures the priest Konrad is referring to. While praising his
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patron, he compares him to King David for the greatness of his rule and the penitence that he embraced to cleanse his body and soul of sin. He also praises his efforts of converter of heathens and defender of Christianity (vv. 9039-9076).

Considering the probable, although not certain, Bavarian origin of the Ruolandes Liet, three dukes of Bavaria, all with wives of royal blood, were put forward as possible candidates: Henry the Proud, Duke of Bavaria from 1126 to 1138, married to Gertrude, daughter of Lothair of Supplinburg, King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor; Henry Jasomirgott, Duke of Bavaria from 1141 to 1156, married to the widowed Gertrude and, after her death, to Theodora Komnene, niece of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I; Henry the Lion, Duke of Bavaria from 1156 to 1180, married to Matilda daughter of King Henry II of England.  

The latter seems to be the most plausible of the three, which puts the composition date of the poem around 1170. The rough and archaic nature of Konrad’s versification, however, would suggest an earlier date, like Karl Bartsch’s proposed date of 1130. Although a middle dating around 1150 was also proposed as a compromise, the debate slowly turned in favour of a later date, which is now almost universally accepted. 

95 KARTSCHOKE (2011), 782.  
96 Ibid., 782-783.
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If the identification of Konrad’s patron with Henry the Lion is correct, it is understandable why the Duchess, who was French, or the Duke himself would be interested in the circulation of the *Chanson de Roland* in the German area. A poem centred around the fight against the infidels would have been of great interest to a man who spent much time and effort in combating the pagan Wends and Slavs to the east in a series of crusades sanctioned by the Pope. Furthermore, it would have made a comparison between the Duke and a prestigious and vastly idolised figure such as Charlemagne all the more obvious, making Konrad’s praise not exaggerated or far-fetched.97

About the author himself, little can be inferred from the text. The term ‘*phaffe*’ only means that he was a secular priest but whether he held an office or any kind of position within the ducal chancellery is not known. Moreover, the connection between the priest Konrad and the monumental work of the *Kaiserchronik* (although the old idea of him being its author was set aside) is tiny but irrefutable, in light of the many literal correspondences.98

97 KARTSCHOKE (2011), 783.
With regard to his reliability, there is no reason to doubt Konrad’s words about faithfully transposing the text (vv. 9080-85). After all, Duchess Matilda and her entourage were French and could read the poem directly from the model and the matter was well known among the cultural elite of the Bavarian court. Konrad’s adherence to his French model, whatever it was, can be proved by looking at the mistakes that he inherits from his source.\textsuperscript{99} Nothing is known about this model, other than it must have been an assonanced copy belonging to the $\beta$ family of the Roland tradition and as old as, or even older than, the Oxford manuscript itself (even considering a later dating). Proof of the antiquity of its model is the last part of the poem, where it doesn’t feature the reworkings of $V\sharp$ and the rhymed manuscripts but contains what must have been the original version, in accordance to the lection of $O$.\textsuperscript{100}

Despite faithfully following its authoritative model, however, the Ruolandes Liet differentiates itself from its French counterpart for the most part due to its homiletic tone and a general oversimplification of the characters to fit the dichotomous religious message that the author wanted to convey. The Twelve Peers are portrayed as \textit{milites Dei}, warriors of God, who die as martyrs in the defence of Christendom and get rewarded with

\textsuperscript{99} KARTSCHOKE (2011), 786-787.
\textsuperscript{100} SEGRE (1971), XVI-XVII.
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paradise and life eternal, whereas Ganelon and the pagans are seen as mere
agents of the devil. The contrast between the characters is not given much
attention and Roland’s refusal of blowing the oliphant is seen as an act of
faith rather than a display of pride and arrogance. All the earthly motives of
glory, heroism and blind temerity are substituted with faith and pious
acceptance of death and martyrdom.¹⁰¹

All these changes make the Ruolandes Liet a unique creation rather
than a mere rework of the Chanson de Roland, integrating itself in the genre
of the imitatio Christi with its didactic aim and religious depiction of
chivalry.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the Ruolandes Liet remains an invaluable
testimony in the textual reconstruction of the Chanson de Roland for all the
aforementioned reasons, i.e. its early composition date and its reliance on
an old and authoritative assonanced manuscript as a model.

1.2 Karlamagnús saga

The story of Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers quickly spread
throughout Europe and reached Scandinavia as well. Here it found a fertile
ground, as the fledgling Scandinavian nations strived to emulate powerful
and successful western kingdoms such as France and England. In this
flourishing political and cultural environment, popular foreign works were

¹⁰² Ibid., 788-789.
translated for an audience that was becoming more and more interested in the latest literary trends that were developed in the more refined courts of Western Europe. *Karlamagnús saga*, the saga of Charlemagne, was one such text, translated into Old Norse during the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway, who came to power in 1217 after a series of civil wars that had brought a fair share of changes that had a deep impact on the backward Norwegian society of the time.\(^{103}\)

The saga appears to be based on different *chansons de geste* compiled together in a single work that is structured as a history of Charlemagne. The text survives in four Icelandic manuscript, all collected by Icelandic scholar Árni Magnússon and preserved in the Arnamagnæan Collection of the library of the University of Copenhagen. On top of that, there also exist five fragments, one of which is Norwegian and allows to date the saga with certainty to the 13\(^{th}\) century. The entire saga was first published by C. R. Unger in 1860 under the title *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans*. This edition was based on all four manuscripts and the three fragments edited at the time were added in the appendix. The saga was divided in ten “branches” and the text was normalised by Unger, a fact that was lamented by Halvorsen, who saw this as a devaluation of what was, otherwise, an excellent edition.\(^{104}\)

\(^{103}\) Halvorsen (1959), 1-7.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 32.
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The ten branches are the following, according to Unger’s edition:

I. *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa bans* (pp. 1-49),

II. *Af frú Olif ok Landrés syni bennar* (pp. 50-75),

III. *Af Oddgeiri danska* (pp. 76-125),

IV. *Af Agulando konungi* (pp. 126-370),

V. *Af Guitalín saxa* (pp. 371-432),

VI. *Af Otvel* (pp. 433-465),

VII. *Af Jórsalaferð* (pp. 466-483),

VIII. *Af Runzivils bardaga* (pp. 484-531),

IX. *Af Vilhjálmi korneis* (pp. 541-555),

X. *Um kraptaverk ok jartegnir* (pp. 541-540),

Unger realised that the four surviving manuscripts could be divided in two families, which he called *Aa* and *Bb*, based on the fact that not all the manuscripts feature the same number of branches (most notably, the two older manuscripts, *A* and *a*, lack branches II, IX and X).\(^{105}\)

The four manuscripts are the following:

\(^{105}\) AEBISCHER (1954), 42-43.
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- **A.** This manuscript, AM. 180 c, fol., is the oldest of the four, dated to the second half of the 14th century by Unger, but shows extensive lacunae and only contains branches I and III-VII.

- **a.** Just like *A*, this manuscript, AM. 180 a, fol., is fairly old, having been written during the course of the 15th century. It contains the same branches of *A* with the addition of branch VIII, which, however, lacks an ending. Since the beginning of the *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, contained in AM. 180 b, fol., is also missing, it is probable that branch VIII ended in this manuscript, right where the *Konráðs saga* originally started.\(^{106}\)

- **B.** Much more recent than the first two, AM. 180 d, fol. was copied from an older manuscript (which probably burned in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728) at the request of Árni Magnússon himself, making it more than likely that it was copied not long before the year 1700. Moreover, the manuscript is almost complete, with only a few short lacunae.\(^{107}\)

- **b.** Manuscript AM. 531, 4to was written by Árni’s maternal grandfather Síra Ketill Jörundsson, who died in 1670. This manuscript gives an almost complete account of the saga but unlike

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\(^{106}\) Halvorsen (1959), 32-33.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 34.
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*B*, which puts branch II at the end, it follows the chronological order that was eventually used by Unger in his edition.¹⁰⁸

The five fragments were all preserved either as bindings for registers and other papers in the central administration in Bergen and Oslo or as a part of other manuscripts. *Fr1* is dated to the late 13th century and contains parts of branch VIII. The fragment is Norwegian but the presence of Icelandic forms implies that it was either written by an Icelander or copied from an Icelandic source. *Fr2* was definitely written by an Icelander, probably at the beginning of the 14th century, and features parts of branches IV, VI and VII. The same goes for *Fr3*, although it is somewhat shorter and only contains parts or branch VII. The other two fragments were preserved in a manuscript from the end of the 14th century and feature parts of branch IV, the difference between the two being that *Fr4* follows the *Bb* version, while *Fr5* seems to adhere to *Aa*.¹⁰⁹

As stated earlier, the *Karlamagnús saga* is a translation of different French sources on the topic of Charlemagne and his men. The fact that it is a translation rather than a liberal adaptation, means that the text is more or less faithful to the source material, which is true to some extent. The problem lies, however, in the enormous cultural and literary differences between France and Norway in the 13th century, a problem that the

¹⁰⁸ Halvorsen (1959), 34-35.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 35-36.
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Norwegian translator (or, more likely, translators) could not have solved without tailoring the text to his audience. The most notable intervention is the use of prose instead of verse, a choice dictated by the literary conventions and fashions of the time in Scandinavia. Although it is not known exactly what was the literary taste of Norwegians in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, it is highly probable that it included popular tales and traditions such as those that would make the bulk of the Icelandic \textit{fornaldarsögregur}.\textsuperscript{110}

As such, the translator would have had to adjust his work to the already established literary style that was familiar to his audience. This style entailed a simple and straightforward story, narrated in the most objective way possible and with little intervention of the narrator, so that the events could speak for themselves and the audience could focus entirely on the action rather than the psychology of the characters.\textsuperscript{111}

Thankfully, the \textit{chansons de geste} lend themselves well to this particular style, sharing the same linear structure and focus on action rather than psychological introspection. What was lost in the Norse translation, instead, were the refined literary and poetic devices utilised by the French poets: all the pathos-generating elements such as repetitions, exclamations and direct interventions of the narrator that make the \textit{Chanson de Roland}

\textsuperscript{110} Halvorsen (1959), 105.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 106.
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such a highly praised masterwork are removed in favour of a drier and more concise narration.

On the other hand, the translator adds certain elements that are typical of sagas in order to make the text more easily understandable for his audience. Examples of this can be found in the following lines from the famous scene of the horn:

Dist Oliver: — Paien unt grant esforz;

1050  De noz Franceis m’i semblet avere mult poi!

Cumpaign Rollant, kar sunez vostre corn,

Si l’orrat Carles, si returnerat l’ost. —

Respunt Rollant: — Jo fereie que fols!

En dulce France en perdreie mun los.

1055  Sempres ferrai de Durendal granz colps;

Sanglant en ert li branz entresqu’a l’or.

Felun paien mar i vindrent as porz!

Jo vos plevis, tuz sunt jugez a mort. —  (vv. 1049-1058)

[Says Oliver: “The pagans have a great force; / it seems to me our French are very few. / Companion Roland, sound your horn / and Charles will hear it, the army will return.” / Replies Roland: “I would be acting like a fool! / In sweet France I would lose my reputation. / Soon I will strike great blows with Durendal; / the blade will be bloody up to the gold hilt. / It is to their misfortune that the pagan felons came to the passes: / I promise you, all are condemned to die.”]
The *Karlamagnús saga* translates as follows:

> Ok enn mælti Oliver: “Heiðnir menn hafa mikinn styrk, en vér höfum lítinn her í móti þeim. Nú blás þú horni þínu, ok mun Karlamagnús konungr heyra ok snúa aprt her sínum”. Þa svarar Rollant: “Þa gerða ek sem fól, ef Frakkland hit góða skyldi týna lofti sínu fyrir minar sakir, heldr skal ek veita stór högg með Dýrumdala sverði mínu ok gera blóðugt alt frá oddinum ok til hjaltanna, ok skulu heiðingjar falla med skömm ok mikla úsœmd, því at þeir eru allir dœmdir til dauða”.

(p. 506)

[And again Oliver said: “The pagans have great strength, and we have but a small army against them. Now blow your horn and King Charlemagne will hear it and turn back with the army”. Then Roland replies: “I would be acting like a fool if good France were to lose her reputation for my sake, I will rather strike great blows with my sword Durendal and make it bloody from the tip to the hilt, and the pagans will fall with shame and great disgrace, for they are all doomed to death.”]

As is immediately apparent from the example above, the saga remains faithful to the original but adds some minor details. These are typical saga phrases like *Ok enn* (“and again”) at the beginning, which adds continuity since Oliver has spoken before, or explanations like *sverði mínu* (“my sword”), which is somewhat unnecessary, considering that it is already known whom Durendal belongs to. Moreover, this passage shows the translator’s uncertain knowledge of Old French, as he mistook the subject
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of two sentences. In the first (v. 1052) Charlemagne is treated as the subject rather than the army and in the second (v. 1054) it is not Roland who will lose his reputation, but France itself.¹¹²

On top of that, the translator completely ignored the word *porz*, probably because he didn’t fully understand its meaning, and paraphrased the last two lines. In fact, this is not the only instance where this word seems to have troubled him, as he mistook it for *porte* “gate” in v. 1152: “As porz d’Espaigne en est passét Rollant” [Roland has entered the passes of Spain] is translated as the rather absurd “Til borgarhiðs af Spanie er kominn Rollant” (p. 508) [Roland has come to the city gate of Spain].¹¹³

Seen under this light, the *Karlamagnus saga* is a rather faithful translation of its French sources but, at the same time, it is plagued by mistakes and changes that are due, for the most part, to the enormous cultural differences between the sources and the audience for which they were translated, not to mention the translator’s poor knowledge and understanding of both the language and culture that had created the original poems.


¹¹³ Ibid., 129. Halvorsen thinks that this mistake is due to the fact that the Norwegian translator was unfamiliar with the mountain passes depicted in the *Chanson de Roland* and thus could not properly understand the word *porz*. This is yet another instance of the cultural differences between the translator and the matter he was trying to adapt. The same mistake was also noted by Aebischer but he did not provide an explanation. AEBISCHER (1954), 164.
1.3 The Danish and Swedish Karl Magnus

As the modern Scandinavian countries slowly emerged and became powerful nation-states during the course of the middle ages, the epic of Charlemagne was adapted and translated into the increasingly diverging Scandinavian languages. As with the Norwegian Karlamagnús saga, the matter of Charlemagne saw a widespread diffusion in Denmark and Sweden as well, with the creation of a literary tradition in Danish and Swedish.

The Swedish Karl Magnus is preserved in four manuscripts from the 15th century: The Codex Holmiensis (D4) from the first decades of the 15th century, the Codex Verelianus (Ver) dated approximately 1457, the book of Fru Elin (El) of 1476 and the Codex Askabyensis (Ask) from 1492. All the manuscripts are incomplete and fragmentary, with D4 and Ver only lacking a small part and Ask showing the largest lacuna.\textsuperscript{114} Dating the texts is extremely difficult, as all the surviving manuscripts were put in writing relatively late. Nonetheless, hints can be found that may be an indication of an earlier tradition. Several possible dates have been proposed, mainly the late 14th or the beginning of the 15th century.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{114} Kornhall (1959), 98-99.

\textsuperscript{115} “Att datera S, dvs. att yttra sig om när översättningen till svenskt språk har gjorts, är ett mycket vanskligt företag. Klemming gissar i sin utgåva s. 360 på slutet av 1300-talet och Geete i Fornsvensk bibliografi s. 128 på början av 1400-talet.” Ibid., 100.
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Unlike the Norwegian and Danish versions, the Swedish *Karl Magnus* only features two episodes of the saga, the one about Charlemagne’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the tale of the battle of Roncevaux, which follows the events narrated in the *Chanson de Roland*. The Swedish *Karl Magnus* is thus an abridged version of the saga, even though it goes into more detail than the Danish *Karl Magnus kronike*.

Three main versions survive of the Danish *Karl Magnus kronike*: The Børglum manuscript, which contains an annotation with the exact date of its copying, 1480, and is now preserved at the Royal Library in Stockholm, Cod. Holm. Vu 82; Gotfred of Ghemen’s edition, of which only a fragment of a 1509 printed exemplar survives, that, although related to it, does not appear to have been based directly on the Børglum manuscript; Christiern Pedersen’s 1534 edition, based on Ghemen’s edition, called *Keyser Karl Magnus Kronike*, of which two copies remain, one complete and the other incomplete.

The relationship between these texts can be explained as follows: The Børglum manuscript and the Ghemen fragment show enough similarities to argue that they do not reflect two different traditions but rather descend from a common archetype, which Poul Lindegård Hjorth calls *Dx*.

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116 KORNHALL (1959), 83.
117 Ibid., 103-104.
118 LINDEGÅRD HJORTH (1965), 103.
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fact, the Ghemen fragment can be utilised to fill the small lacunae present in the Børglum manuscript. Pedersen’s edition is clearly based on Ghemen’s, although not necessarily the 1509 edition, since several printed versions were circulating at the time. Pedersen’s 1534 edition is riddled with corrections (sometimes overcorrections) and orthographical adjustments, which may or may not be attributed to Pedersen himself, making it difficult to establish a direct connection between 1509 and 1534. However, some of the common errors found in the two editions cannot be ignored and are sufficient to demonstrate that 1509 may well have been the direct source material of 1534.119

The relationship between the Danish and Swedish versions, however, is still unclear. While it is undeniable that the Norwegian version, both for its earlier date and heavy extra-Scandinavian influences, stands as the foundation of the Swedish and Danish versions,120 it is somewhat more difficult to discern all the nuances and features that may, or may not, link the latter two together.

Ever since the first studies on the Karl Magnus texts were published, the idea of a Swedish influence on the Karl Magnus kronike was hypothesised. In fact, back in the 16th century Christiern Pedersen himself first noted, in the epilogue of his 1534 edition, that the text he was editing

119 LINDEGÅRD HJORHT (1965), 117-120.
120 KORNHALL (1959), 104-105.
The importance of the Germanic sources in the Chanson de Roland contained many Norwegian and Swedish words.\textsuperscript{121} The theory grew in popularity and was given wide recognition after Gustav Storm put forward his argumentation of a Swedish intermediary between \( n \) and \( D \). He first established the common origin of \( S \) and \( D \) based on many linking errors, then he deduced the dependence of \( S \) from \( n \) for its heavy Norwegian influence and that of \( D \) from \( S \) for the presence of many Swedish terms in the Danish chronicle. This theory, however, was not without its shortcomings, as the Swedish influence can be easily explainable by suggesting an east Danish origin of \( D \), more specifically in the Scania region (the monastery of Børglum, the home of the eponymous manuscript, belonged to the Premonstratensian Order, which had three other monasteries in Denmark, all located in Scania).\textsuperscript{122}

The criticism of Storm’s theory, mainly by Carl Joakim Brandt and Karl Steitz, underlined its hypothetical nature and pointed out its indemonstrability, advocating the independence of the two texts, a fact with which Aebischer and other romanists concurred.\textsuperscript{123} Nonetheless, there still were scholars who accepted this theory, or, like Halvorsen, that did not see the counter arguments as compelling.\textsuperscript{124} Both the Swedish and the

\textsuperscript{121} LINDEGÅRD HJORTH (1965), 161-162.
\textsuperscript{122} KORNHALL (1959), 299-300.
\textsuperscript{123} AEBISCHER (1954), 69-71.
\textsuperscript{124} HALVOREN (1959), 74.
Danish versions derive from the same archetype but re-elaborate the matter to their own specific needs and goals. The Swedish *Karl Magnus* appears to be closer to the original but at the same time is very summarised and cuts out entire episodes and key themes (the betrayal of Ganelon and its causes for instance), because the focus is centred around the fight scenes and the battle itself. The Danish *Karl Magnus krønike*, on the other hand, is linguistically more divergent but, as Aebischer pointed out, its importance overshadows the Swedish version, because it alone allows to shed light on the general lines and structure of the original Old Norse archetype, since neither manuscript *a* of *n* nor the Swedish *Karl Magnus* have retained the ending.\(^{125}\)

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\(^{125}\)“Nos deux remaniements ne sont donc pas exactement superposables. Et, je le répète, si importante pour nous que soit la version suédoise, elle est surpassée par la Krønike, puisque celle-ci est seule, absolument seule, à nous faire deviner les lignes générales de la traduction norroise en son état primitif, dont *a* n’a pas conservé la fin, pas plus que ne l’a conservée le *Karl Magnus.*” AEBISCHER (1954), 72-73.
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2. Textual analysis

2.1 Relations between the Scandinavian texts

The textual reconstruction of the original Old Norse translation is a rather difficult and complex affair. It has already been established (thanks to Fr1) that the original translation dates back to the mid-13th century and that (thanks to Fr2) the text had reached Iceland by the beginning of the 14th century. It is at this point that the texts start to diverge, as there are notable differences between the fragments and the manuscripts.

Fr1 is the oldest text and is definitely Norwegian, a fact that gives more authority to its lection, as it is closer to the original in both date and style. The Icelandic manuscripts, on the other hand, re-elaborate the matter more freely, as can be seen in these examples: O “— Sire, — dist Guenes — dunez mei le cungjééd: Quant aler dei, n’i ai plus que targer. —” (vv.337-338) [“Sire,” says Ganelon, “give me leave to go: since I must go, I have no reason to delay.”] corresponds to Fr1 “Karlamagnus konungr segir hann. gef mer leyfi. æf ec scal fara. þa vil ec eigi dveliaz lengr.” (p. 557) [“King Charlemagne,” he says “give me leave to go, if I shall depart, I do not want to delay any longer.”] and a “En síðan mælti hann við Karlamagnús konung: «Herra» segir hann, «gef mér leyfi, at ek fara í brott sem skjótast, alls þó em

126 Halvorsen (1959), 75-76.
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ek nú skyldaðr til þessarrar farar, þá vil ek eigi lengr hér dveljast” (p. 489) [And then he said to King Charlemagne: “Lord, give me leave to go, that I may depart as fast as possible, since I am now obliged to this journey, I do not want to stay here any longer.”].

These examples show that, while Fr1 translates the text with little changes, a, even if it roughly maintains the meaning, expands on the original material to give a better flow to the scene. It is interesting to note, however, that in some instances the lection of a is better than that of Fr1; in fact, the title herra in a is closer to the original than the Karlamagnus konungr found in Fr1.127

Concerning the remaining Icelandic manuscripts, i.e. the Bb tradition, they present a version that is unfortunately inferior to a and Fr1 (A and the remaining fragments completely lack the episode of the battle of Roncevaux and will thus not be considered). The Bb manuscripts shorten, or even completely omit, certain passages that are preserved in a with little change from the original text. They can, nonetheless, be of use wherever there is an agreement with the other versions, in which case a link can be established between these texts.128

The examples below compare the text of the Icelandic manuscripts aBb (which is almost identical in this passage) with that of Fr1 and O. It can

127 Halvorsen (1959), 85.
128 Ibid., 88.
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be seen that \textit{aBb} agree in opposition to \textit{Fr1}: O “Er matin sedeit li emperere suz l’umbre: / Vint i ses niés, out vestue sa brunie” (vv. 383-384) [The other morning the emperor was sitting in the shade: / his nephew came to him, dressed in his chain mail]; \textit{Fr1} “Karlamagnus konungr sat í ger undir tre æinu oc fiolment um hann. þa com Rollant” (p. 558) [King Charlemagne sat under a tree and a crowd around him. Then Roland came]; \textit{aBb} “þat var í gær,» segir kann, <<er Karlamagnús konungr sat undir <olifo>tré einu ok fjölment um hann harðla mjök, þá kom þar farandi Rollant frændi hans” (p.493) [It was yesterday,” he says, “when King Charlemagne sat under a (olive) tree and a great many people around him, that’s when his nephew Roland came up].

The first thing to notice is that the Old Norse versions agree on several elements, which can, therefore, be derived from the original translation. These are, specifically, the use of proper names for the characters (a feature that is typical of saga prose), the addition of more people to the scene and the removal of any mention of Roland’s armour. On top of that, the Icelandic version further expands the scene, adding more elements to make the narration smoother. Their text is almost identical, the only difference being that \textit{Bb} adds even more detail to the scene, specifying that the tree, under which Charlemagne is seated, is an olive tree.\footnote{Halvorsen (1959), 88-89.}
Comparing the common lections of the Icelandic manuscripts with that of Fr1, it becomes clear that the changes in Aa and Bb can be traced back to their common antecedent, which, considering the fact that the text had already reached Iceland by the beginning of the 14th century and that the remaining manuscripts also belong to that century, must have been compiled in the years around 1300.130

The Danish and Swedish versions are considerably younger and less authoritative but, since they are free of any Icelandic influence, they can nonetheless provide relevant information about the original translation. S and D do not feature the saga-like additions present in the Icelandic manuscripts and S in particular is quite useful, although not always preferable, in deciding between the different variants of a and Bb.131

A clear example can be found in O (v. 1526) “Un Sarrazin i out de Sarraguce,” [A Saracen of Saragossa is there]. B presents the form Saragiz, that, according to Halvorsen, is a corruption that possibly originated in the first Icelandic edition, since the original Norwegian translation probably

130 HALVORSEN (1959), 89.
131 “S is chiefly useful as a check on the readings of the Icelandic MSS. Where the translation was inexact from the very beginning, it is often impossible to decide whether a or Bb has preserved the reading of the original Kms, and in such cases, reference to S may solve the problem. If a, Bb, and S have different readings, none of them decidedly closer to the French original than the others, it is quite likely that S, having escaped the influence of the Icelandic saga-imitators, may have the correct reading, but since S is, at best, no more than a copy of a translation of the Kms, an S reading can only be used if it is firmly based on a French verse in cases where a and Bb have obvious corruptions.” Ibid., 93.
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maintained the correct form. The scribes of a and b then must have changed the word to höfðingi [chief], probably because it was unknown to them, completely changing the meaning of the passage. Both D and S, however, feature the correct lection hed(h)en [heathen].\textsuperscript{132}

Unfortunately, S completely lacks the first part of the Runzivals þátr, corresponding to the first 800 or so verses of O, and D, while presenting a complete account of the saga (in fact, more complete than the Icelandic manuscripts), is a very summarised version of it. Nonetheless, these text can be invaluable testimonies of unique variants and can confirm, or disprove, the lections of the other manuscripts.

2.2 Overview of K’s variants in comparison to n, D and S

By analysing its lection, it is possible to locate K within the β family with relative ease. Its specific position among the non-Oxford manuscripts is, however, quite problematic. Müller and Bédier put it in a subordinate position to V4 but above the rhymed manuscripts, while Stengel put the two in different families (grouping V4 with O).\textsuperscript{133} Segre, as seen in the previous chapter, put K in a higher position in the stemma, along with the other nordic manuscripts.

\textsuperscript{132} Halvorsen (1959), 93-94.
\textsuperscript{133} Merci (1975), 198-199.
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*K*, for the most part, agrees with the lection of *β* (hence its classification as part of the family), although it sometimes agrees with a lection of *α* opposed to *β*, due to possible horizontal contaminations with *O* or a lost exponent of the same branch. Apparent proof of this contamination with *O* is found in the scene of Ganelon’s challenge: While it maintains the order of the non-Oxford tradition in the vv. 292-295, *K* also follows the order found in *O* in the vv. 280-291. In light of the fact that many consider the non-Oxford order to be correct, the repositioning of the aforementioned lines by *K* seems odd, especially since it has been established the dependency of *K* from *β*. Paolo Merci argued that it was entirely possible that the seemingly odd order was an accidental result of the priest Konrad’s extensive rework of the poem, making the hypothesis of a contamination less plausible.\(^\text{134}\)

Other instances of agreement between *K* and *O* can instead be derived (with the help of *n* and the other nordic manuscripts) from the archetype

\(^\text{134}\) “[…] se teniamo conto del numero considerevole di spostamenti attuati dal rimaneggiatore tedesco nel corso del poema e del trattamento cui egli sottopone tutta l’assemblea dei baroni franchi (di cui questo episodio è conclusione, e che è caratterizzata in *K* dall’introduzione di discussioni e contrasti più ampi e drammatici di quelli della fonte francese), non pare scandaloso presumere la casualità di questo parziale ritrovamento dell’ordine originale. E poi, se *K* (o la sua fonte) aveva davanti davvero un testo con l’ordinamento di *O*, perché mai avrebbe rimesso a posto solo questi undici versi, e non gli altri quattro, in cui Rolando si dichiara pronto a sostituire Gano (ciò che è possibile, come osserva Segre, n. lassa XX, solo prima della ratifica di Carlo, cioè nella posizione che questi versi hanno in *O*, e non dopo, come invece accade in tutti i codici di *β*)?” MERCİ (1975), (2): 208.
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and are thus more interesting. Oftentimes, K and n show various lections of α that are omitted (or corrupted) in γ, from which the rest of the β manuscripts derive. Therefore, the presence of these lections in both the α and β families is enough proof to attribute them with relative certainty to the archetype.\textsuperscript{135} Segre lists many of these lections in his critical apparatus and acknowledges the deep relation that links the nordic manuscripts but shuns from grouping them all together under a single sub-archetype.\textsuperscript{136}

Nevertheless, the fact that K shows great affinity with n and the other nordic manuscripts is irrefutable and the close relationship between these texts is now accepted almost without question.\textsuperscript{137} Two lines in particular may show trace of a possible linking error between these texts: “D’Affrike i ad un Affrican venut, / Ço est Malquiant, le filz al rei Malcud.” (vv. 1550-1551) [From Africa an African has come, / this is Malquiant, the son of King Malcud]. The Danish and Swedish manuscripts, as well as manuscript a of n, do not mention Malquiant’s name, only that he came from Africa. B and b, instead, call him with the name Affikanus, which was, according to Aebischer, a later fabrication to cover a lacuna in the Norse tradition, since none of the surviving Scandinavian texts ever mention his proper

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\textsuperscript{135} MERCİ (1975), (3): 367.  
\textsuperscript{136} SEGRE (1971), xviii.  
\textsuperscript{137} MERCİ (1975), (3): 345. Halvorsen, however, expressed his scepticism regarding a possible connection between K and n, considering the superficial similarities between the two texts of little to no importance. HALVORSEN (1959), 272-273.
name.\textsuperscript{138} A similar situation can be found in $K$, where he is called \textit{Alfric von Affriča} (v. 5297). Comparing the two versions, the relation becomes apparent and it is likely that the error, or lacuna, can be traced back to a common antecedent of both $K$ and $n$.\textsuperscript{139}

2.3 Continuity and innovation in the nordic texts

As stated earlier, Konrad’s \textit{Ruolandes Liet}, both for its early date and its lack of the later rhymed reworkings, must have been derived from an old and authoritative assonanced manuscript. Although the \textit{Karlamagnús saga} was compiled, at the earliest, in the mid-13\textsuperscript{th} century (and thus almost a century after the \textit{Ruolandes Liet}), it too was probably based on, for what concerns the \textit{Runzivals þáttr}, an old assonanced manuscript. By the time the French manuscript that was translated in the \textit{Karlamagnús saga} was written, no later than the first years of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the rhymed adaptation was already replacing the original assonanced version in France, even though assonanced manuscripts have survived outside of France, like $O$ in England and $V\textsuperscript{4}$ in Italy. Since Norway at the time had far more relations with England than France, it is highly likely that the manuscripts that served as models for the \textit{Karlamagnús saga} came from there and were

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Aebischer} (1954), 183.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Merci} (1975), (3): 346.
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already superseded and considered old-fashioned by continental standards.  

In theory, this should give more authority to the lection of the 
*Karlamagnús saga* (which in many cases is true) but the situation is far more complex. In fact, there are instances in which its text seems to agree with the rhymed manuscripts, the most important of which are the scene where Charlemagne throws Durendal into a lake after he finds Roland’s body (pp. 527-528) and the following episode in which the corpses of the fallen pagans are covered in bushes by God’s will, so that the French can identify their own and bury them (pp. 529-530). Both these episodes are absent from *O* and seem to be an innovation of the rhymed version, which goes into more detail than the dry and summed up Scandinavian version. In fact, *C* reports that after the Christian are buried, hazelnut trees grow on the graves and are subsequently used to build coffins for Roland and the Twelve Peers, an event that was completely omitted in both *n* and *D*.  

*D*, however, also shows instances of agreement with *O* but against *n*. These lections were examined by Inger-Marie Willert Bortignon and include, among others, the ascription of the killing of Malprimis to some Engeler (v. 1261), whereas all the other texts give it to Gerin. Segre, like most editors, corrected the text using the lection of the latter: “E [Gerins] fiert  

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140 Halvorsen (1959), 141.  
141 Willert Bortignon (1193), (3): 416-418.
Malprimis de Brigal;” [And Gerin strikes Malprimis of Brigal;]. Willert Bortignon, however, argues that the error may as well derive from the archetype and that, in this case, $O$ and $D$ preserve the correct version.\textsuperscript{142} To this she also adds, as a possible link between $D$ and $O$ against $n$, the entire scene of Aude’s death, which is omitted in the \textit{Karlamagnús saga} but not in the \textit{Karl Magnus kronike}. However, as already discussed, this episode must originally have been in the \textit{Karlamagnús saga} as well, only to be lost in the unfortunately incomplete Icelandic manuscripts. In fact, on this point, Aebischer thinks that $D$ is the only text that allows to reconstruct the ending of the saga, which otherwise would be patchy and incomplete.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{142} \textsc{Willert Bortignon (1193), (3): 414.}
\textsuperscript{143} \textsc{Aebischer (1954), 72-73.}
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The nordic texts as a whole, as classified by Segre, position themselves very high in the *stemma codicum* of the *Chanson de Roland*. This is due for the most part to the fact that they all derive from old assonanced manuscripts. In the case of Konrad’s *Ruolandes Liet*, the early date is enough to prove that it was based on an assonanced manuscript. In fact, even considering the latest date proposed, 1170, it still would be very implausible that the priest Konrad could have written his poem in the same period as the original rhymed version while basing his work on it.\textsuperscript{144}

As for the *Karlamagnús saga*, it was, in all likelihood, based on a manuscript from England that was written, at the latest, during the first years of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. That alone makes it highly unlikely that this model manuscript was a rhymed manuscript and, even in the remote possibility that it was, it would still be older than the surviving French rhymed versions.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{144} Merci (1975), (3): 391.
\textsuperscript{145} Halvorsen (1959), 141.
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The Danish *Karl Magnus krønike* and the Swedish *Karl Magnus*, on the other hand, while showing enough similarity with *n* to posit a common archetype, differentiate themselves in many aspects, so that they can all be considered independent from each other. Even though Storm’s old theory of *D* being derived from a lost Swedish translation was heavily criticised, some scholars, like Halvorsen, did not feel there was enough evidence to completely put it aside. In fact, he organised the Scandinavian manuscripts in a *stemma* that acknowledges both the independence of *D* and *S* from the Icelandic texts *AaBb* and the existence (although with some suspicion) of Storm’s hypothetical Swedish translation.\(^{146}\)

\[^{146}\text{HALVORSEN (1959), 74-75.}\]
On a similar note, Inger-Marie Willert Bortignon is convinced that $D$ is not derived from $n$ but rather reflects a parallel tradition and as such she puts them together in her revised version of Segre’s stemma:\textsuperscript{147}

This stemma, although accurate, mainly focuses on $D$ and only takes into account its connection with $n$, not delving into the complicated relation with $S$. As such, for the purposes of this work, a few adjustments are needed, especially in light of Halvorsen’s detailed stemma presented above. Putting together all the information presented, we can now establish

\textsuperscript{147} WILLERT BORTIGNON (1193), (3): 421.
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a new *stemma codicum* that takes into consideration all the data collected about the nordic manuscripts and, at the same time, maintains the general outline of Segre’s original *stemma*:

In this context, the tag *nx* is used to identify the original Old Norse translation of the *Karlamagnús saga*, while *Sx* refers to the lost Swedish version of it.

This new *stemma* will hopefully show with some clarity the relationships that tie the nordic manuscripts together and help get a better understanding of the manuscript tradition of the *Chanson de Roland* as a whole. The *stemma* is by no means definitive but it can nonetheless serve as
a tool to navigate the vast *Roland* tradition and as a template for future improvements.

Overall, the nordic manuscripts form their own textual microcosm that can be quite intricate and confusing at first glance, especially when compared with the equally complex macrocosm of the entire *Roland* tradition. Nevertheless, once their ties and differences are structured and understood, their lections become ever so invaluable to the monumental effort of reconstructing the text of the literary masterpiece that is the *Chanson de Roland*. 
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