

Ogier van Denemarken

Hans van Dijk

University of Groningen (Emeritus)

Ic keerde te Lodine in die zale
Met minen baroenen, met minen lieden.
Godefroot dedic echt onbieden,
Dat hi te mi soude comen.
God die moetene verdomen:
Hi was in die stat, al wistics niet.
Doe men die maeltijt liet,
Satic up mijn ors van prise—
Het gaf mi Goudebuef, die Vriese.
Met spele voer ic uter poort.
God weet, eer ic voort
Ghereet ene alve mile,
Quam Godefroot gelijc enen pile
Ghereden up sijn destrier
Ende riep: “Coninc, ghi blivets hier!”
Biden goeden Sint-Denise,
Ic keerde tors van prise
Ende vlo met crachte
Wat dat tors gelopen machte.
Ende als dat sach die pautenier,
Dat ic hem soude ontvlien,
So scuddi sinen spiet.
Mijn ors dat zere liep,
Scoot hi onder mi doot.
Daer succoersde mi in de noot
Dorghelieuse Gautier
Ende Namels van Bayvier;
Si brochtem mi ghevaen.

Ic wildem ghelden dat hi adde mesdaen.
 Doe knielde die verrader vor mi,
 Met hem Namels, die rudder vri,
 Beueloen, sonder baraat, ende Gautier
 Ende Gwideloen, de coninc fier.
 Si baden over hem zere
 Dor den loon van onsen Here,
 Dat hi mijn scalc soude wesen.
 Van sinen hoofde al mijn leven
 Dat hi mi sjaers zoude bringen
 Viere hare uut sinen baerde, sonder dingen,
 Tote Sint-Denijs in die stede.
 Dus gavic hem vrede.
 Dies gaf mi die pautenier
 In ostagen sijn kint Ogier.
 Ic ontfinct, bi onsen Here,
 In ene wieghe clene.
 Die casteleine Grommemare
 Hevet ghehouden XVII jare
 Te Sint-Omaers int palas. (31-78)¹

I returned to the castle in Laon with my barons and soldiers. Then I sent for Godefroot. God may punish him for he had arrived in town even though I did not know it. After dinner I mounted my magnificent horse—bestowed upon me by Goudebuef, the Frisian—and went out riding by way of diversion. As God is my witness, before I had gone half a mile Godefroot came riding on his steed like

¹ Text from the Middle Dutch *Ogier van Denemarken* is quoted from van Dijk's diplomatic edition (see Works Cited). Spelling and punctuation have been adapted to increase the readability of the text.

the wind and exclaimed: “King, this is where you will die.” By the good Saint Denijs, I turned my splendid horse and fled as swiftly as the horse allowed me. When the scoundrel realised that I was escaping him, he threw his spear at me. My horse was killed beneath me while at a full gallop. Then the proud Gautier and Namels of Beieren came to my rescue; they brought Godefroot before me as a prisoner. I wanted to get even with him because of what he had done to me. Then the traitor knelt before me, accompanied by the noble knight Namels, the honourable Beuveloen and Gautier and the proud King Gwideloen. They passionately defended him and said that God would reward me if I took him on as my servant. Every year he would come to Saint Denijs and without ado bring me four hairs from his beard as long as I lived. Thus, I made peace with him. For that reason the villain gave me his child Ogier as hostage. By God, it came to me in a cradle. Viscount Grommemare took care of it for seventeen years in the castle of Saint Omaers.²

It is Charlemagne himself who is speaking here. He has decided to hang the seventeen-year-old hostage Ogier, because Ogier’s father, Godefroot of Denmark, is opposing Charlemagne’s reign. However, he has to postpone the execution of his decision because the Franks are unexpectedly marching against the Saracens who have driven the pope from Rome and have occupied large parts of Italy. On the way, during a break on the Grand Saint Bernard, the king orders the preparation of the gallows, but many of his barons (among them Namels, the Duke of Bavaria, and his cousin Gautier) plead in favour of the innocent Ogier. Charlemagne subsequently explains to them the reasons for his dispute with his Danish vassal. In the passage quoted above, he tells them how he

² All translations from the Middle Dutch are the author’s.

kindly sought a reconciliation with the treacherous Godefroot and how Ogier came to be a hostage at the court on this occasion.

However, influenced by Ogier's powerful friends at court, Charlemagne is again forced to abandon the hanging. Ogier performs his first heroic deeds in the struggle against the Saracens which is why Charlemagne knights him. The young hero also excels in duels with the bravest of the Saracens and acquires the sword Certeine and his loyal horse Broyfort. With the help of Gloriande, daughter of the heathen leader, Ogier conquers the obstacles on his path. Finally, the Saracens are defeated and return to their country. These are the broad contours of the history of the youth (*Enfances*) of our hero from Denmark. (ll. 1-4136)³

As an adult, Ogier becomes involved in a feud with Charlemagne, whose son Charloot kills Ogier's son because the latter has twice defeated him at chess. Ogier does not bend and demands Charloot's head. However, Charlemagne refuses and Ogier flees to Saxony. He persuades the kings of Saxony and Hungary to join him in his fight against the Franks. During this struggle Ogier avoids a fight with his relatives. The Christians win, but Ogier manages to escape to the castle Monfert, assisted by Willem van Oringen (Guillaume d'Orange) who is well disposed towards Ogier. For years he defends himself while the fortress is under siege by Charlemagne and Charloot. One day he manages to ward off the enemy by opening the sluices in a nearby watercourse, thereby flooding the battlefield. More than a thousand enemy soldiers drown as a result. Finally, however, he is taken prisoner by the bishop Tulpijn. (ll. 4137-13996)

The Saracens, led by King Brohier of Babylon, threaten to capture Paris. Charlemagne's knights realise that only Ogier will be able to save them, and they persuade Charlemagne to release the captive hero. However, Ogier is only willing to help if he is allowed to take revenge on Charloot. Forced by circumstance, Charlemagne agrees. In order to save

³ This brief summary of the content is based on *Ogier von Dänemark*, ed. Weddige, pp. XVIII-XXIX.

his kingdom he sacrifices his son. However, God interferes just when Ogier is about to behead his archenemy. An angel tells Ogier that he has to content himself with slapping Charloot. From then on nothing stands in the hero's way and he turns on the heathen. He defeats the giant Brohier in a duel. Ogier marries a daughter of the English king and becomes king of England. Their son Baudewijn is born a year later. (ll. 13997-20974)

Seven years later Ogier leaves for the Holy Land to do penance for his sins. After visiting the Holy Grave he moves on to Babylon (Cairo), where he is recognised and ends up in prison. He finally returns to Paris after many adventures. He becomes so old that his brows reach his chin. After his death God sends an angel to fetch his soul. (ll. 20975-23731)

Details

What has been preserved of the Dutch *Ogier* are 628 partly incomplete verses in seven fragments of three separate manuscripts.⁴ On palaeographic grounds it can be determined that all of these date from the fourteenth century. On the basis of their linguistic characteristics we assume that they are Flemish. It seems likely that the Dutch *Ogier* is of Flemish origin, since rhyming pairs show Flemish characteristics. This means that the *Ogier* belongs to the large group of Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances that entered the Dutch-speaking region from France through Flanders. France greatly influenced Flanders which explains the latter development. Flanders was the only Dutch-speaking region that

⁴ For descriptions of the Middle Dutch fragments see Besamusca, *Reperitorium*, pp. 83-85; Kienhorst, *De handschriften*, I, pp. 148-52, and II, pp. 104-06; and *Ogier von Dänemark*, ed. Weddige, pp. XXIX-XXXI. The fragments are published in "Ogier," ed. van Dijk (A,B,C,D); *Ogier von Dänemark*, ed. Weddige (A,B,C,D) and "Ogier," ed. van Dijk and Kienhorst (E,F,G). The identification of the eight fragments belonging to a fourth manuscript, found in Alba Julia in Romania, is uncertain. See "Bruchstücke," ed. Hübner and *Ogier von Dänemark*, ed. Weddige, pp. XXXI-XXXII.

belonged to the French kingdom. All the other ones were part of the German empire.

For the date of the Dutch adaptation we have to rely on Jacob van Maerlant who translated the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent de Beauvais into Middle Dutch in the 1280s. He added an interesting chapter on the historical sources for that period to his discussion of Charlemagne. Maerlant states strongly that he preferred the Latin prose of scholars such as Einhart and Vincent to the fantasized rhymes of the vernacular romances. In addition to the stories about Fierabras, Renout van Montalbaen, Wiselau, Willem van Oringen, and Roelant, he also mentions “van Dene-maerken Ogier.”⁵ It is highly likely that Maerlant refers to written Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances and, thus, this nice fact about the reception is a *terminus ante quem* for the Middle Dutch *Ogier*. To date this text in the middle of the thirteenth century is certainly not too early.

We can determine the date and the place with a certain confidence, but it is far more difficult to recover the remaining information about the Middle Dutch *Ogier* within the context of literary history. In order to determine the social context in which this text functioned, we are relying on the laboriously acquired knowledge about the genre. In a finely balanced argument, Frits van Oostrom concludes on the basis of a variety of external evidence and facts drawn from the text itself that the Dutch Charlemagne epic functioned as literature for the elite, though not primarily for the mainly French-speaking court of the counts, but rather for the lesser nobles and rich burghers of Flanders (*Stemmen op schrift*, pp. 223-33).

⁵ Jacob van Maerlant, *Spiegel historiael*, ed. de Vries and Verwijs, Vol. 3, pp. 204; 4e Partie, Book I, Cap. 29, v. 52. For an interpretation of this added passage see van Dijk, “Maerlant en de fantasten”; van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld*, pp. 338-39; and Dauven-van Knippenberg, “Von Kenntnislücke zum Expertenspiel.” The thirteenth-century verse narration about Christ’s passion *Vanden levene ons Heren*, ed. and trans. Jongen and Voorwinden, v. 10, also contains a reference to the *Ogier*.

Because of the fragmentary state of the surviving text, we have to construct the content of the lost Middle Dutch poem. Four of the seven fragments belong to the history of the youth of the hero (his *enfances*). They describe parts of Charlemagne's anger at the Danish king who refuses to fulfil his duties as a vassal (A and B) and the fight against the Saracens in Italy when Ogier performs his first heroic deeds (C and D). In the other three fragments (E, F, and G) the story is situated in the Orient where Ogier ends up according to later versions of his *histoire poétique*.⁶ There is an unmistakable connection with the fragments in the French tradition, but the similarities are so general that it is impossible to select any French *Ogier* version as a possible source to the Dutch poet.

This is the point at which research into the connection between French and Dutch texts often ends unsatisfactorily, but in the case of the *Ogier* fortune comes to our aid. A German translation of the Dutch text has been preserved in a manuscript (H) from 1479 written by a scribe who called himself Ludwicus Flügel.⁷ It belongs to a small group of codices with three Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances that were translated into German. Nowadays they are in the collection of the University Library in Heidelberg. Apart from the *Ogier*, *Madelgijs* and *Renout van Montalbaen* were also translated. This was probably done around 1460 in southwestern Germany. The exact location is uncertain, but the milieu in which the translation took place must have been that of the high nobility, perhaps in the household of the Elector of Heidelberg or of the countess palatine Mechthild who resided in Rottenburg.⁸ A comparison of the German and Dutch versions shows a considerable number of similarities between them. The German translator aims for such a faithful rendering

⁶ For instance in *Roman d'Ogier en décasyllabes*, dated around 1310. Unfortunately, there is no edition of this text; for contents see Togeby, *Ogier le Danois*, pp. 136-47. See also below.

⁷ Heidelberg, University Library, Ms. CPG 363; see *Ogier von Dänemark*, ed. Weddige.

⁸ Duijvestijn, "Niederländische Dichtung" and Beckers, "Frühneuhochdeutsche Fassungen."

of his original that he often adopts Dutch words and expressions (*Mit festen*, l. 561) or rhyming words even when this results in an impure rhyme (*gefangen : missetan*, ll. 577-78). In order to give an impression of this German translation, an extract will be quoted corresponding to lines 40-59 of the Middle Dutch text quoted at the beginning of this article:

Mit festen reit ich uß der port,
 Mere ich kam so wijt,
 Das ich gereit ein mijle.
 Da kam glich als ein pfijle
 Gotfrid geridden uf sinem destrier
 Und rief: “fel kúnig, ir blivedes hier!”
 Da ich das sahe, by Sant Dyonise,
 Kerte ich min roß von prijse
 Und satzte mich gereit zuer flúht,
 Was das roß gelauffen moht.
 So bald er sahe, das ich mich wold
 Entfliehen, schoß er also bald
 Sinen spieß und schoiß
 Min roß under mir zutod.
 Da einschutt mich Gautier
 Und Dunamelß von Bavier.
 Dise brachten mir ine gefangen.
 Ich wolte ime gelten des das er hatt missetan. (561-78)⁹

We may assume that the German *Ogier* is a highly reliable representation of the Middle Dutch Charlemagne romance. Therefore, the summary of the content of the Dutch *Ogier* above is based on the text of the Heidelberg manuscript.

Even so, it is remarkable that the Middle Dutch fragments E, F, and G have no parallel in the German text. The plot of these 278 verses takes

⁹ German text of *Ogier von Dänemark* cited from Weddige's edition.

place in the Orient. Ogier stays at the palace of the sultan Brohier in Babylon whom he later fights. In this fight the heathen sultan Moisant joins the Christians. The setting and a large number of the characters such as Ogier, Brohier, Baudewijn, Clarine (= Clarisse, daughter of the English king and who becomes Ogier's wife and the mother of their son Baudewijn), and Moisant unmistakably refer to the literary world of Ogier, but the specific content of these fragments can be found neither in German nor elsewhere in the *Ogier* tradition. The most likely explanation is that the German translator abridged his exemplar. It is precisely the last part of the story about Ogier's adventures in the East that is presented in a rushed and incomplete way in H. If this assumption is correct, H presents a faithful but incomplete rendering of the Dutch original (van Dijk and Kienhorst, eds., "Ogier").

Manuscript H contains a remarkable division between folio 80 and 81. There are two unnumbered, blank pages at the end of the history of Ogier's youth on folio 80 with a caption in red on folio 81 ("Hie vahet sich an die hystorie wie Ogier sines vatter künigrich Denmarck empfang, etc." ["This is the beginning of the story of Ogier's inheritance of his father's kingdom of Denmark, etc."]) whereupon the text opens (l. 4137) with a red initial consisting of nine lines (Weddige, ed., *Ogier*, p. XIV, p. 118 and illus 2). Furthermore, this text opens with an extensive general prologue. Everything points to the beginning of a new romance and to the existence of not one but two Dutch-German *Ogier* romances. The text itself distinguishes between Ogier's *Kintheit* and his *Oltheit*.¹⁰ The romance about Ogier's *Oltheit* begins, moreover, with a part showing a general correspondence to the Old French *Chevalerie Ogier* (ll. 4137-20974) and a continuation about Ogier's adventures in the Orient (ll. 20975-23731).

It is highly likely that the prologues of the two romances were originally Dutch and were consequently translated into German. Scholars are

¹⁰ L. 4205 ("Die kintheit...von Ogier") and l. 4232 ("Von Ogiern dem Olthede") (Weddige, ed., *Ogier von Dänemark*).

fortunate to have them, because the Middle Dutch Charlemagne epics have not handed down prologues of any significance. Bart Besamusca has carefully analyzed the two prologues, deducing factual information about the history of their inception and the oral nature of the texts. He assumes that two different poets composed the texts. In addition, he shows that the prologues present two different types of narrators. Whereas the prologue of Ogier's *Kintheit* states that the story is told by jongleurs, the other prologue describes a group of nobles amusing themselves with songs and stories (Besamusca, "Zingende minstrelen").

The tradition

What is the exact relation between the Dutch-German and the international branch of Ogier's literary history? As is often the case when we try to answer questions like these, no version of the story corresponds completely to the Dutch-German texts. At the same time it is also evident that a strong relationship exists. The characters and their mutual relations and the general outline of the story correspond to the most important Ogier versions. Ogier already appears in the early *Nota Emilianense* (around 1070) and the Oxford version of the *Chanson de Roland* (around 1100).¹¹ However, the oldest preserved text that is completely devoted to the Danish hero is *La chevalerie d'Ogier de Danemarque*, dated around 1200.¹² Weddige carefully compared its content with H (*Ogier von Dänemark*, pp. XXXVI-XLIX). He concludes that while the similarities between the plots are great, there are also considerable differences. There are, for instance, no verbal correspondences between the texts, and Gautier and Willem van Oringen do not appear as characters in the *Chevalerie*. Ogier's flight to Saxony and the subsequent war against Charlemagne, take place in the French version in North Italy with King Desiderius of the Lombards. The greatest difference can be found at the

¹¹ See "Chevalerie Ogier" in the *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises*.

¹² See *La chevalerie d'Ogier de Danemarque*, ed. Mario Eusebi.

end. The *Chevalerie* ends with the marriage of Ogier and the daughter of the English king. At this point H continues with a long episode of three thousand lines about Ogier's journey to the Orient and his death. We find a comparable Orient continuation of the story in the *Roman d'Ogier*, a fourteenth-century text which exists in two forms: a 10-syllable line version dated 1310 and a 12-syllable line version of twenty-five years later. Both are unedited, but Knud Togeby's overview gives us an impression of the content of these texts (*Ogier le Danois*, pp. 134-55). Again the similarities are evident, even though the differences are also quite significant. It is remarkable that the Middle Dutch fragments E, F, and G, which do not have a parallel in H, seem to have a counterpart in the extended story of the *Roman d'Ogier*. The character of Moisant, the sultan of Mecca, is a strong indication for this. In both the Dutch and the French continuation of the story he is fighting against the Saracens alongside the Christians. This supports the idea that the last part of H was shortened in comparison to its Dutch source text.

There are unmistakable similarities between plots, characters and their mutual relations, and setting, but verbal correspondences or literal translations are nowhere to be found. On the contrary, there are many often considerable differences between the French and the Dutch-German versions. This type of textual relationship corresponds strongly to the relationship between *Renout van Montalbaen* and *Madelgijs* and their French counterparts. Past explanations of this phenomenon assumed that the Dutch adaptors had translated a French example that we no longer have. However, Irene Spijker offered another explanation in her 1990 dissertation on the *Renout*. According to Spijker, the Dutch texts were only written down after the story had been transmitted orally from a French to a Dutch jongleur (*Aymijns Kinderen*, pp. 193-254).¹³ It is very plausible that the transmission of *Ogier* had an oral middle stage as well.

¹³ Gerritsen first suggested the oral transmission from the French to the Dutch, also in the case of the *Ogier* ("Les relations littéraires").

I would like to suggest that the history of the inception of the Dutch and German versions of *Ogier* can be summarized as follows. In the thirteenth century (before 1285) two Dutch poets independently composed romances about Ogier's youth (*Kintheit*) and life (*Oltheit*) on the basis of their knowledge of orally transmitted narrative material. Fragments A-B and C-D belong to the two separate manuscripts narrating the story of his youth. Fragments E, F, and G belong to a manuscript containing the story of Ogier's life. Both texts were translated into German in the fifteenth century. Judging from the strong verbal similarities this must have been a transmission from written Dutch to written German. In 1479 the scribe Ludwicus Flügel copied both texts in one and the same manuscript.

Works Cited

Beckers, Hartmut. "Frühneuhochdeutsche Fassungen niederländischer Erzählliteratur im Umkreis des pfalzgräflichen Hofes zu Heidelberg um 1450/80." *Miscellanea Neerlandica. Opstellen voor Dr. Jan Deschamps ter gelegenheid van zijn zeventigste verjaardag*. Ed. Elly Cockx-Indestege and Frans Hendrickx. Vol. 2. Leuven: Peeters, 1987. 237-61.

Besamusca, Bart. *Repertorium van de Middelnederlandse Karelepiek. Een beknopte beschrijving van de handschriftelijke en gedrukte overlevering*. Utrecht: HES, 1983.

---. "Zingende minstrelen, een jonge dichter en een voordracht in Vlaanderen. Over de twee prologen van *Ogier von Dänemark*." *Karolus Rex. Studies over de middeleeuwse verhaal-traditie rond Karel de Grote*. Ed. Bart Besamusca and Jaap Tigelaar. Hilversum: Verloren, 2005. 141-52.

"Chevalier Ogier." *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises*. Vol. 1. *Le Moyen Age*. N.p.: Fayard, n.d.

La chevalerie d'Ogier de Danemarche. Ed. Mario Eusebi. Milano: Istituto editoriale cisalpino, 1963.

Dauven-van Knippenberg, Carla. "Von Kenntnislücke zum Expertenspiel. Eine Notiz zu 'Charlemeine' in Jacob van Maerlants *Spiegel*

historiael.” *Karolus Rex. Studies over de middeleeuwse verhaaltraditie rond Karel de Grote.* Ed. Bart Besamusca and Jaap Tigelaar. Hilversum: Verloren, 2005. 195-204.

Duijvestijn, Bob. “Niederländische Dichtung in der Privatbücherei der Pfalzgräfin Mechtild (1418/19-1482).” *Miscellanea Neerlandica. Opstellen voor Dr. Jan Deschamps ter gelegenheid van zijn zeventigste verjaardag.* Ed. Elly Cockx-Indestege and Frans Hendrickx. Vol. 2. Leuven: Peeters, 1987. 251-61.

Gerritsen, W.P. “Les relations littéraires entre la France et les Pays-Bas au Moyen Age.” *Actes du Septième Congrès National de la Société française de littérature comparée.* Mesnil sur l’Estrée: Didot, 1967. 28-46.

Hübner, A. “Bruchstücke eines neuen mnl. Karlsromans.” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 60 (1923): 249-58.

Jacob van Maerlant. *Spiegel historiael.* Ed. M. de Vries and E. Verwijs. Leiden: Brill, 1859-63.

Kienhorst, Hans. *De handschriften van de Middelnederlandse ridder-epiek. Een codicologische beschrijving.* 2 Vols. Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1988.

“Ogier van Denemarken. Diplomatische uitgave van de Middelnederlandse fragmenten en van de overeenkomstige passages in de Duitse

vertaling.” Ed. H. van Dijk. *De nieuwe taalgids* 67 (1974): 177-202.

“Ogier van Denemarken. Nieuwe fragmenten.” Ed. H. van Dijk and H. Kienhorst. *Wat duikers vent is dit! Opstellen voor W.M.H. Hummelen*. Ed. G.R.W. Dibbets and P.W.M. Wackers. Wijhe: Quarto, 1989. 3-24.

Ogier von Dänemark. Nach der Heidelberger Handschrift CPG 363. Ed. Hilbert Weddige with Theo J.A. Broers and Hans van Dijk. *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters Band LXXXIII*. Berlin: Akademie, 2002.

Spijker, Irene. *Aymijns kinderen hoog te paard. Een studie over Renout van Montalbaen en de Franse Renault-traditie*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1990.

Togebly, Knud. *Ogier le Danois dans les littératures européennes*. Munksgaard: DSL, 1969.

Vanden levene Ons Heren. Ed. and trans. Ludo Jongen and Norbert Voorwinden. Hilversum: Verloren, 2001.

van Dijk, Hans. “Maerlant en de fantasten.” *Poëtica-onderzoek in de praktijk*. Ed. F.A.H. Berndsen, H. van Dijk, and G.J. de Vries. Groningen: Passage, 1993. 33-38.

van Oostrom, Frits. *Maerlants wereld*. Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1996.

---. *Stemmen op schrift. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300*. Amsterdam: Bakker, 2006.