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Before *Roland:* What Happened 1200 Years Ago Next August 15?

Fourteen years ago I made a study of the tactics described in the *Chanson de Roland,* in which I tried, I hope successfully, to show that these, essentially the charge with the couched lance and the attempt to unhorse the opponent, can be dated as coming into use between about 1050 and 1100; the Bayeux Tapestry of circa 1186 shows a transitional stage, with the lance used both couched and as a missile.[1]

At the same time I pointed out that the terrain described in the *Roland—rocks* and narrow passes, high mountains, steep hillsides and deep ominous valleys (Oxford version, vv. 814-815, 2271)—is quite unsuited to such tactics, which require open and reasonably level country, and I suggested that in those passages we have a survival from an earlier *Roland,* closer to the historical account of the Basque ambush which destroyed the rearguard of Charlemagne's army in a Pyrenean pass on August 15, 778.

Three years later, I went further into the matter and, in an article intended to explain the part played by Roland's vassal Gautier del Hum in the battle of Roncevaux as described in the *Roland,* I arrived at what may have appeared a somewhat conjectural account of what really happened.[2] It is this study that I now want to revise and expand, although I am still convinced that what I then wrote is essentially correct.

I would begin with Einhard's account of the affair. I know he uses Suetonian clichés and imitates the style of that author, but I can see no reason to doubt his account of historical facts, even if his characterisation of personalities is sometimes imitative:

> Nam cum agmine longo, ut loci et angustiarum situs permittebat, porrectus iret exercitus, Wascones in summi mentis vertice positis insidiis—est enim locus ex opacitate silvarum, quarum ibi maxima est copia, insidiis ponendis oportunus—extremam inpedimentorum partem et eos qui, novissimi agminis incedentes subsidio, praecedentes tuebantur desuper incursantes in sub-

> jectam vallem deiciunt consertoque cum eis proelio usque ad unum omnes interficiunt ac, direptis inpedimentis, noctis beneficio quae jam instabat protecti, summa cum celeritate in diversa disperguntur. Adjuvabat in hoc facto Wascones et levitas armorum et loci in quo res gerebatur situs; econtra Francos et armorum gravitas et loci iniquitas per omnia Wasconibus reddidit inpares.
>
> (For when the army was making its way strung out in a long column, as the terrain and the narrowness of the pass alone permitted, the Basques, having set an ambush at the top of the mountain—for the place is suited to ambush tactics from the density of the woods which are very thick thereabouts—charging down from above on the rear of the baggage train and those [i.e., the rearguard] who, advancing to the aid of the rear of the army are protecting those who are marching on ahead [i.e., the main body of the army], drive them down into the valley below, join battle with them, wipe them out to a man, and, having seized the baggage, disperse in different directions with all speed, being protected by the night which was already approaching. In this action the lightness of their arms and the nature of the terrain in which the event occurred assisted the Basques. On the other hand, the weight of their arms and their disadvantageous position made the Franks unequal to the Basques in every way.)

And Einhard goes on to give his brief casualty list:

> In quo proelio Eggihardus regiae mensae praepositus, Anshelmus comes palatii et Hruodlandus Brittannici limitis praefectus cum aliis conpluribus interficiuntur.
>
> (... Eggihard the king's seneschal, Anselm count palatine, and Roland, governor of the Breton march, among many others.)[3]

I am quite aware that the historicity of Roland has been seriously called into question by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Paul Aebischer, and André de Mandach, on the grounds that he does not appear in the better *B* family of manuscripts of Einhard.[4] De Mandach even regards the, to me, convincingly old Germanic form *Hruodlandus,* attested in manuscripts from C9/10, as suspect![5] For present purposes, Roland's authenticity is irrelevant, but I do remember the fragility of theories based on textual criticism—how the whole of the argument of volumes four and five of the Princeton edition of the *Roman d'Alexandre* crashed in ruin when the full text of the Latin version of Eustache's "Forraging of Gaza" poem emerged in a neglected manuscript in the Vatican[6]—so I find it not absolutely obligatory to believe in Roland the fictional creation.

Leaving aside for the moment the tradition associating the battle with the pass of Roncevaux, we may note that the facts reported by Einhard would fit the approach to almost any mountain pass, in which the road normally runs up a valley and diagonally up a hillside so as to gain height enough to cross the watershed at the head of the pass. Below the treeline such a road would normally run through woods, in which a force could be concealed in ambush on the flank above the road with the valley on the other flank below it. This is exactly the situation described by Einhard in his account of the disaster.

Now I want to call attention to some passages in the Oxford *Roland* and in other *Roland* te ts which are relevant to my argument. First there are Marsile's last words to Ganelon, vv. 654-658 in the Oxford version:

> Tenez les clefs de ceste cité̋t large,
> Le grant aveir en presentez al rei Carles;
> Pois me jugez Rollant a rereguarde.
> Se·1 pois trover *a port ne a passage,*
> Liverrai lui une mortel bataille.[7]

Manuscript V_4 agrees with that version,[8] and the pass is mentioned also in the Châteauroux text,[9] but it has dropped out of, or never been present in, all the other authorities. Nevertheless an attack "in a pass or a narrow way" (v. 657), as here promised by Marsile, would agree with what Einhard says actually occurred.

Again, and I think particularly significant, are vv. 709-716 in the Oxford manuscript:

> Franc se herbergent par tute la cuntree,
> Paien chevalchent par cez greignurs valees,
> Halbercs vestuz e . . .
> Healmes lacez e ceintes lur espees,
> Escuz as cols e lances adubees.
> *En un bruill par sum les puis* remestrent,
> .iiii.c. milie atendent 1'ajurnee.
> Deus, quel dulur que li Franceis ne·1 sevent! AOI.

This passage, to which I paid no attention in my previous work on the problem, now seems to me vital, as it clearly refers to the setting of an ambush by the enemies of the Franks "in a wooded place (a thicket) at

the summit of the hills" (v. 714), or *in summi montis vertice,* as Einhard has it.

The other *Roland* texts disagree with the Oxford version. Even V_4 substitutes for the vital line 714: "En celle noit dorment a la rosee" (v. 644). Châteauroux, v. 1036, brings the Saracens down into the valley: "Mot pres des porz a une grant valee," with which V_7, laisse 62, v. 13, essentially agrees: "Au pié des porz en une grant valee."[10] The other *Roland* manuscripts omit the passage, and nothing corresponds to it in Kuonrat's *Rolandesliet,* the *Karlamagnús saga,* or the *Carmen de prodicione Guenonis.* It is noteworthy that the Châteauroux/V_7 variant brings the site of the battle down into a valley where the tactics described in the *Roland* could be employed effectively. If, however, we turn to the Pseudo-Turpin account of the affair, we find a passage which agrees approximately with the Oxford *Roland* and with Einhard:

> Quid plura? Dum Karolus portus cum viginti milibus Christianorum et Ganalono et Tulpino transiret, et prefati ultimam custodiam facerent, Marsirius et Belegandus etiam cum centum et decem milibus Sarracenorum summo mane exierunt de nemoribus et collibus, ubi consilio Ganaloni duobus diebus totidemque noctibus latuerant, et fecerunt duas turmas bellicas: unam viginti [milium] et aliam nonaginta [milium].
>
> (What more should I say? While Charles with 20,000 Christians and Ganelon and Turpin was crossing the pass and the force just mentioned was acting as rearguard, Marsile and Baligant, together with 110,000 Saracens emerged in the early morning *from the woods and the hills* where by Ganelon's advice *they had lain hidden* for two days and as many nights: they formed up in two divisions, one of 20,000 and the other of 90,000 men.)[11]

The Pseudo-Turpin's source evidently also included the ambush which has been eliminated from all the other *Roland* texts except Digby 23.

But this is not all: the position of this passage in the Oxford and the other *Roland* texts is curiously illogical. It follows on Ganelon's return from Saragossa with his false report of his negotiations, and it is immediately preceded by a *reprise* resuming the situation, vv. 703-708 in the Oxford version:

> Carles li magnes ad Espaigne guastede,
> Les castels pris, les citez violees.

Ço dit li reis que sa guere out finee.
Vers dulce France chevalchet 1'emperere. 706
Li quens Rollant ad 1'enseigne fermee,
En sum un tertre cuntre le ciel levee.

Now little of this, except Charles's unjustified conviction that the war is over, is in agreement with the rest of the text. Charles does not in fact set out until v. 829 of the Oxford text, and Roland has not yet been appointed to command the rearguard, so there is no particular reason for him to set up his standard in this formal manner.

Furthermore we hear not a word more of the Saracen ambush. Instead we return to Charles, who in v. 706 was riding towards sweet France and who now has his two premonitory dreams, vv. 718-736. Then comes the nomination of Roland by Ganelon to the command of the rearguard and Charles's reluctant acceptance of this, vv. 737-791, a scene which incidentally seems to take place on the march: "Li empereres mult fierement chevalchet" (v. 739). We would expect the arrangements for the return to be made before the army breaks camp.

Next comes the scene where the peers, Turpin, and Gautier del Hum volunteer for rearguard duty and select twenty thousand to accompany them, and Gautier is sent by Roland on a special mission to which we shall return (vv. 792-813). The army sets out, and we note the preliminary description of the terrain in vv. 814-815:

Halt sunt li pui, e li val tenebrus,
Les roches bises, les destreiz merveillus,

not exactly the place one would choose to lead the charge of a regiment of lancers! Charles expresses his fears for the rearguard and for Roland in particular, left behind in Spain, and the passage ends with an anticipation of Ganelon's treason and its results (vv. 814-847).

Then at last we come back to the Saracens, whom we left in ambush high in the hills above the pass, and what happens? Marsile has somehow returned to his capital (v. 852), and now he goes through the whole process of summoning a feudal army, taking three days to do so (v. 851: ".iiii.c. milie en ajustet en .iii. jurz"); and then at last they set out and make contact with the French rearguard, vv. 855-859:

Puis si chevalchent par mult grant cuntençun
La tere certeine e les vals e les munz.
De cels de France virent les gunfanuns. 857
La rereguard des .xii. cumpaignuns
Ne lesserat bataille ne lur dunt.

Now, presumably on the field of battle, follows the scene of the self-appointment of the twelve Saracen peers who are doomed to fall at the hands of the twelve peers of France; but note how eight of them one after another (vv. 892, 901, 912, 923, 934, 944, 963, and 985) say in effect: "I *shall* go to Roncevaux and there I *will* kill Roland," to Roncevaux where, according to v. 857, they can already see the pennons of the French lances. Then at length they arm for battle, vv. 990-1005 (although in vv. 710-713 they were described as already armed), and, when they sound the charge, Oliver (vv. 1006-1007) at last notices what is going on and suggests that there may be trouble.

Now to me all this muddle and confusion in the account of events before the battle can mean only one thing: a reviser has been at work, and, while recasting and adding elements to the story (often most successfully, for this "remanieur" was in fact a very great poet, who was, I believe, responsible for much of what is finest in our best French epic), he has not always been careful to eliminate passages in his model which did not agree with the story of the defeat as he proposed to tell it. In particular I suggest that laisse LV (i.e., vv. 703-716), with Charles's premature setting out, Roland's setting up his standard before he has even been appointed to his command, and above all the clear reference to the Saracen ambush high in the hills, belongs to an older *Roland* in which the course of events differed relatively little from what Einhard tells us actually happened on that fatal August 15, twelve hundred years ago. This, I suggest, is further confirmed by the account in Pseudo-Turpin, and we have noted that the later revisers of Châteauroux and V_7 bring the battle down into the valley, where the tactics described in the *Chanson* could be employed. What else our reviser may have been responsible for, apart from the whole account of the fighting with its up-to-date tactics, is a matter of conjecture, but I suspect him of inventing the twelve Saracen peers of vv. 860-989, a passage designed to enhance the greatness of

Roland with its insistence by each of them that he is the real enemy, a passage also filled with dramatic irony, as appears when these pagan chieftains are killed, each in turn with one exception, by his opposite number among the twelve peers of France at the beginning of the battle in vv. 1188-1319.

And now I would return to Gautier del Hum, for he too I believe belongs to what I would call the Einhard-*Roland* version of the disaster.

Gautier del Hum is a rather mysterious person, and, apart from my short article of 1966 and some attempts to identify him historically, little has been written about him, though he has the signal honor of being among the last to die in the battle, survived only by Archbishop Turpin and Roland himself.

He first appears in vv. 800-801, volunteering for rearguard duty:

> "E jo od vos," ço dist li quens Gualters,
> "Hom sui Rollant, jo ne li dei faillir."

In the next laisse (vv. 803-813), Roland sends him on a special mission, and we are told how he will carry it out:

> Li quens Rollant Gualter del Hum apelet:
> "Pernez mil Francs de France nostre tere,
> Si purpernez les desertz[12] e les tertres,
> Que 1'emperere nis un des soens n'i perdet." AOI.
> Respunt Gaulter: "Pur vos le dei ben faire."
> Od mil Franceis de France la lur tere,
> Gualter desrenget les desertz e les tertres,
> N'en descendrat pur malvaises nuveles
> Enceis qu'en seient .vii.c. espees traites.
> Reis Almaris del regne de Belferne
> Une bataille lur livrat le jur pesme.

The other *Roland* texts differ little from the Oxford version but are rather vague, as if not understanding the passage. V_4 reads for *O,* v. 805: "Si porprendi lo destrer de la Spagne," which Gasca Queirazza translates: "E occupate il passo della Spagna."[13] Typical is Châteauroux, vv. 1172-1173:

> "Porprenez moi cez poiz et cez lariz:
> N'est droiz qe perde li rois de seint Doniz."[14]

Gautier's mission is lacking in Pseudo-Turpin and the *Carmen de prodicione Guenonis,* and the whole episode is untraceable in the confusions

of *Ronsasvals,* but Kuonrad's *Ruolandeslied,* vv. 3371-3378, gives a reason for Gautier's orders:

> er sprach <ze> Walthere:
> "nu ile du, helt mere,
> wel dir tusent man-| -ne
> unt sume dich nit zelange.
> uah uns die | perge,
> ê sin di haiden innen werden,
> daz wir | di hohe begrifen,
> ê uns di haiden unter slic-| -hen.[15]
>
> ([Roland] said: "Walther, now be quick; choose a thousand men and waste no time. Make your way round these mountains before the pagans expect it, that we may occupy the heights before the pagans infiltrate into them.")

Walter is mentioned also among the volunteers for rearguard duty in v. 3271.

The *Karlamagnús saga* also throws a little light on Gautier's mission: Aebischer's translation reads: "Et alors Roland parla à Valtari: 'Toi va en garde et avec toi mille chevaliers, et surveille tous chemins et sentiers, pour que les païens ne viennent pas vers nous par surprise, s'étant donné qu'il est mal d'avoir confiance en eux.' Et il s'en alla et rencontra aussitôt Almare, roi de Balverne, et combattit contre lui."[16]

Walter, then, is sent out with a detachment on some sort of special guard duty. Let us try to see what his orders really mean, and to do so let us attempt to reconstruct the historical situation.

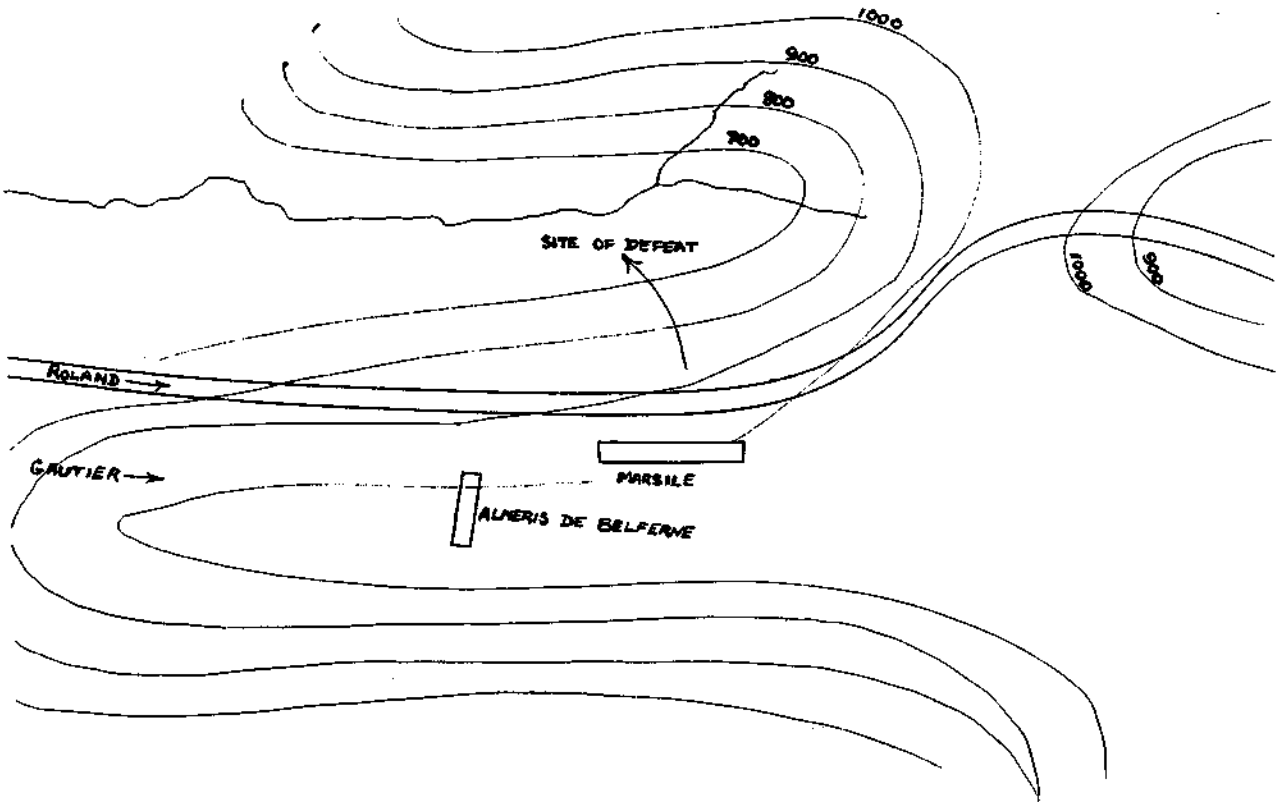
Somebody must have been in command of the Frankish rearguard on August 15, 778. Let us for argument's sake accept epic tradition and call him "Roland." We know nothing really about his character, if he indeed existed, and we may regard that "desmesure" which causes the tragedy and the grandeur of the Oxford version as no less a literary creation than the character of Oliver, whose "sagesse" is its foil and its opposite. We may therefore credit him with ordinary military common sense and examine the situation from his point of view.

He must know the route the main body of the army has taken and that his own force is to follow. Charles in fact met with little opposition in

his operations in Navarre and Aragon, so an attack on the main body of the army could be discounted.[17] In any case the protection of its flanks was Charles's affair, not his. His duty was, first, the normal one of a rearguard, to prevent an attack on the rear of the army and, secondly, to see to the safety of his own force.

He knows that the route, with a tree-covered slope on one flank and a steep valley on the other, is dangerously open to an attack from above as his force, strung out along the road and difficult to concentrate quickly for defense, makes its way up towards the head of the pass. [See the hypothetical reconstruction, Map I, p. 180.] Such an attack is the more likely as his command is relatively small in numbers, being only a rearguard. He therefore adopts the obvious precaution and sends out a detachment on the threatened flank to act as flank guard, with orders to advance through the woods near the crest of the ridge, above and parallel to the road. Its task is to locate, and if possible to dislodge, any enemy force posted there in ambush. What more natural than that "Roland" should select to take command on this difficult and responsible mission a friend and vassal whose courage and ability he knew he could rely on? We now see, I suggest, why Gautier was sent out with his thousand men to occupy "les desertz et les tertres."

Let us now see how the situation presents itself to the enemy commander, whom we may for convenience call "Marsile." He has posted his men in a good position for a flank attack on the column as it moves up the road, and his force is well masked by trees and undergrowth: "en un bruill par sum les puis," as v. 714 of the Oxford manuscript has it. It is probably not a large force and, consisting of mountaineers, is, as Einhard tells us, not heavily armed, but if it can achieve tactical surprise, it may, by taking advantage of the favorable terrain, succeed in breaking up the formation of the heavily armed Franks before they can concentrate for defense. But his position is also vulnerable at one point. If the Franks have a flank guard out advancing along the ridge or below its crest, above and parallel to the road, his own flank will be exposed to it, and at the best the essential advantage of surprise will be lost.



Map I
Ideal Hypothetical Plan of the Battle of Roncevaux.

He therefore posts a detachment—may we say under "Almeris de Belferne"?—a reasonable distance down the route up which the Franks will be advancing in order to meet this possible danger, to block the advance of "Roland's" flank guard and if possible to overwhelm it, and at the worst to give "Marsile's" force time to disperse if the ambush is no longer capable of being carried out. This force will, of course, be posted above the road, facing the direction of the advance of the Franks, and will have orders not to attack troops moving on the road.

Let us now take the risk of trying to reconstruct the battle itself. The main body of Charles's army first marches unmolested up the road and over the pass, as described in the Oxford version, vv. 814-822:

> Halt sunt li pui, e li val tenebrus,
> Les roches bises, les destreiz merveillus.
> Le jur passerent Franceis a grant dulur,
> De .xv. liu[e]s en ot hom la rimur.
> Puis que il venent a la tere majur,
> Virent Guascuigne, la tere lur seignur.
> Dunc lur remembret des fius e des honurs
> E des pulcele[s] e des gentilz oixurs:
> Cel n'en i ad ki de pitét ne plurt.
> Sur tuz le altres est Carles anguissus:
> As porz d'Espaigne ad lessét sun nevold,
> Pitét 1'en prent, ne poet müer n'en plurt. AOI.

The Frankish army has no flank guard out, but such was really unnecessary as possible enemy forces are known to be too small to risk attacking the main body of the army, a point incidentally made by Ganelon in vv. 563-569:

> "Bel sire Guenes," dist Marsilies li reis,
> "Jo ai tel gent, plus bele ne verreiz;
> Quatre cenz milie chevalers puis aveir.
> Puis m'en cumbatre a Carle e a Franceis?"
> Guenes respunt: "Ne vus a ceste feiz:
> De voz paiens mult grant perte i avreiz;
> Lessez la folie, tenez vos al saveir,"

a passage which, epic numerical exaggeration apart, may well reflect the facts of the situation.

For the same reason, "Marsile" makes no move against the main army. Even if, with the aid of surprise, he succeeded in breaking through

and driving a part of it down into the valley, he would there be trapped and overwhelmed by the rest of the Franks with no chance of escape.

There follows the baggage train and the rearguard. "Marsile" has strong reasons for attacking the baggage, as not only will its capture make the whole operation a profitable one, but with it are a number of important Saracen hostages whose recapture will free his hands for future operations.[18] Menéndez Pidal has established, from the accounts of the campaign in Moorish chronicles, the presence of Moors as well as Basques in the attacking force and of important Moorish hostages with the Frankish army who were, in fact, recaptured in the attack on the rearguard. Have we a reminiscence of this in the hostages given by Marsile to Charles and mentioned by Ganelon in his report? The Oxford text, vv. 677-679, reads:

> "De Sarraguce ci vos aport les clefs.
> Mult grant aveir vos en faz amener
> E .xx. hostages, faites les ben guarder!"

The last line could almost be ironical, if the older *Roland* which I postulate contained an account of their recapture.

"Marsile" then gives the order to charge the rear of the baggage train—*extremam inpedimentorum partem,* says Einhard—and the rearguard. He achieves complete tactical surprise, and the Frankish force is destroyed, after which his men disperse with the booty and the recaptured hostages.

But what went wrong? What happened to "Gautier's" force, and why did it fail to warn "Roland" of the ambush? I suggest that there was an error of timing, and that on giving his orders to "Gautier," "Roland" forgot, or failed to realise, that troops can move much more quickly along an unobstructed road than they can advance over rough ground, hacking their way through thick undergrowth as they go. If "Roland" and "Gautier" started together or almost together, "Roland" would inevitably quickly outstrip his flank guard and reach the place of "Marsile's" ambush, perhaps even before "Gautier" made contact with "Marsile's" flank guard under "Almeris de Belferne."

"Gautier" did, however, run into "Almeris's" force in due course, probably at about the moment when "Marsile" launched his attack on "Roland's" men on the road. Had he met it much earlier, he would have

had time to warn "Roland" of the ambush; and had he made contact much later, the sound of the battle in the valley would have drawn him down to the rescue, when, charging down on the rear of the enemy, he might have changed the fortunes of the day. His force was in the event not large enough to deal with that opposed to him and was cut to pieces after a hard fight. "Gautier" himself, the sole survivor, made his way down to join "Roland" in his final stand in the valley.

As we know, it is at the end of the fight that he reappears in the Oxford version and most other texts of the *Chanson de Roland,* and his reappearance fits in well, I think, with my conjectural reconstruction of the course of the battle. Laisse CLII, vv. 2035-2055 of the Oxford version, reads:

> Ainz que Rollant se seit aperceüt,
> De pasmeisuns guariz ne revenuz,
> Mult grant damage li est apareüt:
> Morz sunt Franceis, tuz les i ad perdut,
> Senz 1'arcevesque e senz Gualter del Hum.
> *Repairez est des muntaignes jus,*
> A cels d'Espaigne mult s'i est cumbatuz.
> Mort sunt si hume, si-s unt paiens vencut;
> Voeillet o nun, *desuz cez vals s'en fuit,*
> Si reclaimet Rollant qu'il li aiut:
> "E! gentilz quens, vaillanz hom, u ies tu?
> Unkes nen oi poür la u tu fus.
> Ço est Gualter ki cunquist Maëlgut,
> Li nies Droün, al vieill e al canut;
> Pur vasselage suleie estre tun drut.
> Ma hanste est fraite e percét mun escut,
> E mis osbercs desmailét e rumput;
> Parmi le cors ot lances sui ferut,
> Sempres murrai, mais cher me sui vendut."
> A icel mot l'at Rollant entendut,
> Le cheval brochet, si vient poignant vers lui. AOI.

In that manuscript the battle begins again in the next laisse (laisse CLIII, vv. 2056-2065), and Gautier, charging with Roland and Turpin, kills six of the enemy, vv. 2058-2059. The Saracens withdraw and try to overwhelm the three survivors with missiles (laisse CLIV, vv. 2066-2082), and Gautier is the first to fall, v. 2076: "As premers colps i unt ocis Gualter."

The other witnesses to the tradition are important here in preserving a laisse which I am convinced is original, though it has been lost in the textual tradition of Digby 23, in which the resumption of the fighting at v. 2056 is very abrupt. That manuscript gives us a picture of Roland, who has just heard Gautier's voice and ridden up to him, suddenly breaking off and charging the enemy again, instead of asking him the obvious question: "What has happened to your force?"

In V_4, which in the whole episode is closest to the Oxford text, the additional laisse contains precisely Roland's question and Gautier's report of the loss of his men which we would expect:

"Sire Gauter," ço dist li cont Rollant,
"Bataille (ai) [as] faite per le men esiant,
Vos deveç estre vasal et combatant;
Mille chevalier ne mena(i)stes vaillant,
Lier a moi, per ço le vos demant;
Rendez li a moi, che besong ni a grant."
Respond Gauter: "N'en vereç mais hom vivant,
Laseç les ai in lo doloros camp.
De Saraçins nu trovames tant,
Turs e Ermines, Chanine e Persant,
De çil de Bede li meltre combatant,
Sor lor civals erabiç et corant.
Une bataille avum faite si grant,
Ni oit paiens que devers nos s'en vant;
Sexanta mille en remist mort sanglant;
Illuc avons perduç trestut nos Franch.
Vençeç [nos] somes as nos açarin brant.
De mon uberg n'en son rompu le mant.
Plaies ai mortel al costeç et al(e) flant,
Da totes part m'es foris li cler sant;
Stretut li cors m'en a inflebiant;
Sempre me moro per lo men esiant.
Jeo sui vestre home, si vos tint a garant;
Nen m'en blasmeç, se ge m'en vei fuiant."
— "Ne farei mie," ço dist li cont Rollant,
"Mes oi m'aieç a tot vestre vivant."[19]

Of the other *Roland* manuscripts, Châteauroux,[20] V_7,[21] and Cambridge[22] agree essentially with V_4. Paris,[23] Lyon,[24] and the Lavergne fragment[25] expand Gautier's report into two laisses and add a passage in which Roland binds Gautier's wounds, which in the Paris manuscript follows Gautier's report and runs:

A icest moi chaï Gautiers pasmez,
Rollans 1'enlieve, si pleure de pitez;
De son bliaut avoit .I. pan copé;
Gautier en bande les flans et les costez.[26]

I shall return to the Paris manuscript shortly. Examining the remaining witnesses we find that the whole episode is missing in Pseudo-Turpin and only the death of Gautier occurs in vv. 425-426 of the *Carmen de Prodicione Guenonis.*[27] Kuonrad in the *Rolandeslied,* vv. 6528-6590[28] agrees with the Oxford text and, for the missing laisse, with V_4, though with a somewhat expanded text. The *Karlamagnús saga*[29] agrees with the Oxford version in omitting the laisse containing Gautier's report and also says nothing of his coming *down from the hills,* as in v. 2040 of Digby 23. Otherwise it has nothing to add, but the saga is in general an abbreviated résumé at this point. None of these variants appear to contain anything to invalidate my reconstruction of the battle.

One more passage I would like to consider. It appears in only three manuscripts, V_7, Châteauroux, and Paris,[30] and is no doubt an interpolation in them, but, as it fills in a gap in the story of Gautier del Hum, I think we should look at it. It is an account of the action between Gautier's force and that of King Amaurris, of which we have seen an anticipation in the Oxford version, vv. 812-813, and in Gautier's report in the missing laisse as preserved in V_4 and elsewhere. The Paris manuscript, vv. 810-849 reads:

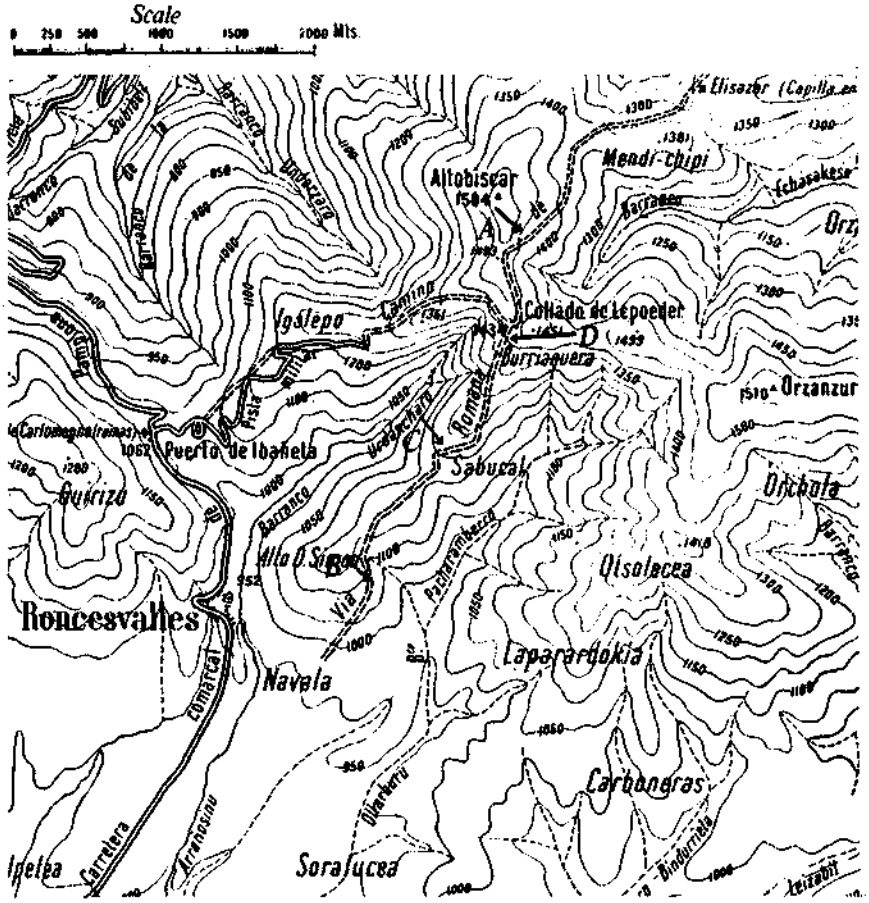
Marsillions, cui toute honors souffraingne,
Prinst .XX. M. Turs lais e de pute gaingne;
Ne croit en Deu, ne la soie compainge.
Par .I. destroit merveillouz et estraingne
Vait a Gautier, qui garde la montaingne.
Rois Amaurris porta le jor 1'enseingne,
Il les ajouste par devers la champaingne;
Les destrois garde devers les pors d'Espaingne.
"Deus!" dist Gautiers, "sains Malos de Bretaingne!
Ganes li cuens, cui toute honors souffraingne,
De nos a faite dolirouse bargaingne."
Sa gent escrie, que chascons d'euls s'estraingne.
Rois Amaurris est sor le mont venus,
O lui .XX. M. de paiens mescreüs.
Fransois assaillent a force et a vertus:
Par grant aïr les ont le jor ferus,
Touz les ont mors, ocis et confondus.

Sor touz les autres fu Gautiers irascus,
L'escu embrace, si fu trais ses brans nus,
Vers les rans maistres s'en vient, les saus menus,
A euls jousta, ne lor rant pas salus:
N'i ot celui qui nul point fust ses drus,
Ainz les haoit si que ne pooit plus.
Si con Gautiers fu a euls ajoustez,
Païen 1'assaillent environ, de tous lez.
Ses fors escus li est frains et quassez,
Ses blans haubers desromps et depanez;
.III. espiés ot parmi le cors coulez,
Touz ot perciez les flans et les costez;
Li cuers li faut, que .III. fois s'est pasmez.
Nes pot souffrir Gautiers li alosez;
Ou voille ou non, s'en est dou champ tornez;
Mais moult s'en va corresouz et irez;
Grant aleure est le mont avalez,
Car moult redoute les cuivers deffaez;
Rollant escrie: "Ou iestez voz alez?
Fiuls a baron, et car me secorrez."
Gautiers costoie delez .I. tertrissel;
Desor l'arson li gisent li boel,
Et Fransois font des Sarrasins maisel.

The last line refers to what is going on at the point where the passage is inserted, between lines 1378 and 1379 of the Oxford text.

Now I do not for a moment suggest that this obviously corrupt passage is original, but it does show that some reviser felt that an explanation of the problem of Gautier del Hum was desirable and has tried to fill the gap in the story. Nor can we be sure that some account of Gautier's action may not once have been present in the *pre-Roland* whose former existence I am trying to make plausible.

Finally I would like to see how far my reconstructed action fits the traditional site of the battle in the pass of Roncevaux. Menéndez Pidal[31] has discussed the relationship of the topography of the pass of Roncevaux to Einhard's account of the disaster with convincing thoroughness. He dismisses the Port de Velate, favored by Bédier, as it was apparently not in use before the twelfth century, and concentrates on the routes over the Pyrenees from Roncevaux itself. He also rejects the main road by Ibañeta and Val Carlos which was, until modernised in 1883, no more than a mule-track, and so we are left with the road leading by the passes of Lepoeder



Map II

Roncevaux. Arrows show direction of possible attacks.

A. Site above the treeline; proposed by Menéndez Pidal.

B. Site below the treeline, but near the open plain; no escape route.

C. Site below the treeline.

D. Site below the treeline, with escape route down the road to Ibañeta.

and Bentartea from Roncevaux to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, which was in continuous use from Roman times. This road throughout most of its length northward from Roncevaux by Ibañeta to the pass of Lepoeder and on to the pass of Bentartea, is a ridgeway, running along or close to the crests of the hills and so not suitable for the employment of the tactics described by Einhard. The necessary conditions do occur about a half a mile north of the pass of Lepoeder, where the road runs between the peak of Altobiscar to the west and the valley of a torrent called Barranco to the east [See Map II, Position A]; but the ground there is now definitely above the treeline and was probably always as open and without cover as it is today. The same unsuitable conditions obtain on the road from Ibañeta to the pass of Lepoeder. Menéndez Pidal has however pointed out[32] that, as one goes south towards Spain, the road originally forked at the pass of Lepoeder, where an old Roman road, now abandoned, turns to the left and continues to follow the direct route over the height of Donsimon and down into the plain of Roncevaux a mile and a half further on. It is on this stretch of road that he would situate the Basque and Moorish ambush and the destruction of the rearguard of Charles's army.

The abandoned road is still thickly wooded, and, if we examine its course on the map, we shall see at least three points where it leaves the ridge and offers conditions suitable for the setting of an ambush such as Einhard describes.

Starting from the plain of Roncevaux towards the Lepoeder pass the road first climbs diagonally up the side of the Alto Donsimon with the crest on its left to the west and the valley of a tributary of the Pacharamberro torrent on the right to the east [See Map II, Position B]. The topographical conditions are suitable, but the position is rather near the open country of the plain of Roncevaux, and the only escape route for the ambuscade, whether successful or not, is along the road itself.

There are, however, two points on the road within a few hundred yards of the Lepoeder pass and the road-junction where the same conditions occur. The first is about six hundred yards south of the pass, where the road runs between the ridge to the west and the Pacharamberro torrent to the east [See Map II, Position C]. The road then crosses the

ridge and runs in similar conditions between the ridge to the east and the Urdancharo torrent to the west [See Map II, Position D]. This last point lies close by the Lepoeder pass and the road-junction and would allow the attacking force the added advantage of an easy way of escape down the road to Ibañeta. I would suggest, then, that the ambush may well have been set at one of the last two suitable points near the Lepoeder pass.[33]

I have now well and truly stuck my neck out in attempting to reconstruct an eighth-century battle from a ninth-century biography and miscellaneous débris in various versions of an eleventh-century epic. I may have brought some comfort to the "individualists" with my reviser responsible for much of our existing *Chanson de Roland,* but I hope I have also made plausible the existence of an older *Roland* which was closer to historical fact and made a reasonable suggestion to account for the presence in the *Chanson* of the rather enigmatic figure of Gautier del Hum.

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[1]D. J. A. Ross, "L'Originalité de Turoldus': le maniement de la lance," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale,* 6 (1963), 127-138.

[2]"Gautier del Hum, an historical element in the *Chanson de Roland?" Modern Language Review,* 61 (1966), 409-415.

[3]Einhard, *Vita Caroli,* Chap. 9, éd L. Halphen, *Eginard: Vie de Charlemagne* (Paris, 1923), 12-13. Translation mine.

[4]R. Menéndez Pidal, *La Chanson de Roland et la Tradition épique des Francs* (Paris, 1960), 287-291. P. Aebischer, "Roland, mythe ou personnage historique?" *Rolandiana et Oliveriana* (Genève, 1967), 99-138. A. de Mandach, *La Geste de Charlemagne et de Roland* (Genève, 1961), 21-32.

[5]De Mandach, p. 28.

[6]D. J. A. Ross, "A New Manuscript of the Latin *Fuerre de Gadres* and the text of the *Roman d'Alexandre Branch II," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 22 (1959), 211-253.

[7]A11 quotations from the Digby 23 manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland* are from the F. Whitehead edition (Oxford, 1942). The italics are mine, here as in all other medieval citations in this article.

[8]La *Version de Venise IV,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 2 (Paris, 1941), p. 18 (vv. 585-590).

[9]*Le Manuscrit de Châteauroux,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 4 (Paris, 1943), p. 25.

[10]*Le Manuscrit de Venise VII,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 5 (Paris, 1942), facsimile, fol. 17 recto, line 30.

[11]*La Chronique de Turpin et les grandes chroniques de France,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 3 (Paris, 1941), 60. Translation and italics mine.

[12]The Digby 23 manuscript reads *desertz* in v. 805 and *destreiz* in v. 809. The Whitehead edition changes v. 805 to make it agree with v. 809, but I believe that it is v. 809 which should be changed to conform with *desertz* in v. 805. An abbreviation misread in the textual tradition (e.g., *dest'z* for *des'tz,* read as *destrez* and "corrected" to *destreiz)* could have accounted for the error.

[13]Ed. G. Gasca Queirazza (Turin, 1954).

[14]Le *Manuscrit de Châteauroux,* op. cit., p. 33.

[15]Kuonrad, *Ruolandeslied,* vv. 3371-3378, ed. C. Wesle, *Das Rolandeslied des Pfaffen Konrad,* Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 69 (Tübingen, 1967), 147-148.

[16]P. Aebischer, *Rolandiana borealia* (Lausanne, 1954), p. 145.

[17]R. Menéndez Pidal, op. cit., pp. 187-204.

[18]Ibid., pp. 204-212.

[19]*La Version de Venise IV,* op. cit., p. 64 (vv. 2178-2198).

[20]Le *Manuscrit de Châteauroux,* op. cit., pp. 97-98 (vv. 3430-3455).

[21]*Le Manuscrit de Venise VII,* op. cit., folio 56 recto, line 4, to folio 57 recto, line 6.

[22]*Le Texte de Cambridge,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 7 (Paris, 1943), pp. 46-47 (v. 1642-1660).

[23]*Le Texte de Paris,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 6 (Paris, 1942), pp. 119-120 (vv. 2200-2254).

[24]Le *Texte de Lyon,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 8 (Paris, 1944), pp. 30-31 (vv. 1184-1230).

[25]*Les Fragments lorrains,* ed. R. Mortier, Les Textes de la Chanson de Roland, 9 (Paris, 1943), pp. 1-2 (vv. 1-27).

[26]*Le Texte de Paris,* op. cit., p. 60 (vv. 2219-2222).

[27]*La Chronique de Turpin et les grandes chroniques de France,* op. cit., p. 116.

[28]Ed. C. Wesle, pp. 241.

[29]P. Aebischer, op. cit., pp. 206-208.

[30]*Le Manuscrit de Venise VII,* op. cit., folio 37 verso, line 22 to folio 38 recto, line 28. *Le Manuscrit de Châteauroux,* op. cit., pp. 67-68 (vv. 2340-2376). *Le Texte de Paris,* op. cit., pp. 23-24 (vv. 810-849).

[31]Op. cit., pp. 217-230 and plate I (reproduced here as Map II).

[32]Op. cit., pp. 222-228.

[33] A possible reference to one of these torrents may occur in the Oxford version, v. 2225: "En Rencesvals ad un'ewe curant, . . . "