

Lexical Problems in the Chansons de Geste

I. The term *carinaut* in *Mainet*

In one passage of the epic fragment *Mainet*,¹ the Saracen princess Galienne (*OFr* Galiene) expresses her scorn for an older pagan suitor and her preference for the young Christian warrior Mainet in the following terms:

Miels aim le soldoier tout nu en son bliaut
Que les trente roiaumes a Braiman l'escorfaut:
Tant est vieus et roigneus k'il samble carinaut;
Ainc de mes ieus ne vi nul si tres lait marpaut:
Lais est et r. [sic] mes com leus warous en gaut;

(IIIa, vv. 20-24)

The word *carinaut* in v. 22 presented somewhat of a problem to the editor of the poem, Gaston Paris, who remarked in a footnote "Je ne crois pas avoir rencontré ce mot ailleurs: en tout cas je ne le comprends pas."²

F. Godefroy, in his *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, rather arbitrarily concluded that the term "semble désigner une vieille rosse."³ A more recent lexicon assigns the same meaning to *carinaut*, on the model of Godefroy presumably.⁴ In the Tobler-Lommatzsch *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* no definition is offered and the reader is referred back to Godefroy.⁵

We must surmise that the translation "une vieille rosse" (an old nag) rested on an analogy between *carinaut* and *carin*, which latter term in Old French designated a "charroi", or horse-drawn convoy, and is amply substantiated in Godefroy.⁶ Logical support for such a translation could be drawn from the general tone of the passage. Indeed, the image that might first come to mind to a young and sensuous woman in her contemptuous characterization of an older (*vieus*, v. 22), ugly (*lais*, *tres lait*, vv. 23 and 24), and mangy or balding (*roigneus*, v. 22) suitor might quite plausibly be that of an "old nag." The application of this type of epithet to a disliked individual is not exceptional in the chanson de geste, it might be noted. In *Girart de Vienne* for example, a rather paunchy Lombard is derisively said

to be "gros comme un roncin liart."⁷ Here, of course, scarcely any ambiguity exists. A "roncin liart" (literally, a greyish horse of little worth) clearly designates an "old nag."

Godefroy's translation of *carinaut* as "une vieille rosse," in spite of the appropriateness of that image to the particular circumstances, must necessarily remain open to question. One cannot be absolutely certain that the term meant, to the medieval poet, what it is claimed to mean. In the absence of more solid evidence, consideration might be given to another possible translation.

It seems to us that a link could be established between *carinaut*, uniquely attested in Old French literature, and *careignon* (vars. *quareignon*, *quarignon*, *carengnon*, *carenon*, *quargnon*, etc.),⁸ designating, among other things, 'a square of parchment', 'parchment folded into four', and the message or missive itself. Certain of the variants of the term, notably *carrenon* and *carrinon* which occur in Jean Bodel's epic *les Saisnes*,⁹ come sufficiently close, not only in form but in pronunciation, to our problem word to justify such a rapprochement. We have no conclusive proof that the *carinaut* recorded in *Mainet* ever truly existed or functioned in medieval times as an independent term. How can one be certain, for instance, that it is not merely a scribal corruption, a copyist's inadvertent misspelling of *carrinon*? Or perhaps it is merely an uncommon variant of *careignon*, which term, it has been seen, possesses multiple variants. A few more recorded instances of *carinaut* in medieval texts would help indeed in solving the problem.

There are certain logical factors to be considered as well in support of our hypothesis. A comparison between the aged Saracen suitor's decrepit physique and physiognomy and a piece of parchment is not altogether incongruous, no more so than a comparison to an old nag. In fact, the generally wrinkled texture, mottled appearance, and distinct coloration of parchment are attributes which could be transferred with relative ease to the human portrait, to emphasize age or ugliness. As a standard of comparison, moreover, the image or notion of parchment must have been one immediately accessible within the *trouvère* or *jongleur's* imagination, a familiar object of reference, a symbol almost of his profession. What bard,

for instance, might not at one moment or another have been reminded, in glancing at one of numerous, well-worn "manuscripts de poche," of the similarity of this parchment to the time-ravaged human face, and retained that image in mind?

We shall probably never know what the author of *Mainet* envisioned as a *carinaut*. The modern reader ultimately may have to opt for "une vieille rosse" or a "piece of parchment." But it can be said, at least, that the choice of translation has been increased twofold.

II. *Cenor* in *Doon de La Roche*

Another lexical problem, though of lesser complexity than the preceding, occurs in v. 3588 of the *chanson* of *Doon de La Roche*.¹⁰ We cite here the relevant passage:

Or parlera li dus, cui soit bel ne cui plaise, Si que l'eve del cuer li coule aval la face: "A la moie foi, dame, molt est ces païs gaste[s]	
"Et povres et maldiz e alez a Deables.	3580
"Li duz s'en enfouï per son malvais corage; "Quant il vos ot a fame ce fu duel[s] et damage[s]; "Se il [i] revient mais a Noël ou a Pasque, "Se vous le recevez, ce ert duel[s] et damage[s]	
"Or pouez seignor prendre sans [honte et sans] damage, "Molt sera fous Pepin[s] se il ne[l] vos porchace."	3585
Quant l'entendi la dame, le siglaton deslace Et vo[l]t ferir le duc, mais cenor ne li laisse: "Par mon chief, dans truans, dit avez grant oltrage.	
"Molt fu prodons mes sires et de gentil corage, "Mais li ber fu traïs par .j. mauvais linage; "Glouton, alés gesir, n'ai soing de vostre ostage, "Jamais n'avrez de moi .j. seul denier qui vaille."	3590

The sense of the term *cenor* in v. 3588 evidently presented a certain difficulty to the editors of the poem, Paul Meyer and Gédéon Huet, for no translation is provided in their glossary. The word is followed by an interrogation mark, its meaning an apparent enigma to these scholars.¹¹ It seems rather surprising, one must admit, that no attempt was made to define the term, for the sense of *cenor*—*the* pronunciation alone should provide a clue—is readily obvious.

As an individual term in Old French, *cenor* has no existence. It is not attested in other chansons de geste nor is there reference to it in any of the standard Old French dictionnaires (Godefroy, Tobler-Lommatzsch, etc.). The reason is quite simple. *Cenor* is merely a corruption of *s'enor*, meaning his or her honor.

The elision of the possessive adjective in a position immediately preceding a noun commencing with a vowel is a rather common phenomenon in Old French. In the case of *enor* (one of multiple variants, cf. *onor*, *onur*, *onnor*, *onneur*, *honor*, *honur*, etc.), examples are not lacking:

Enquoi perdrat France dulce s'onur

[*Chanson de Roland*]¹²

Qui li rois ai mandez por conquere t'enor

[*Floovant*]¹³

Li cos chante en s'ennor

[Phillipe de Thaün, *Le Bestiaire*]¹⁴

etc.

It seems apparent that we are dealing in *Doon de La Roche* with a scribal error, and that *cenor* should be corrected to read *s'enor*. To be certain, however, let us see whether this term, meaning "her honor," makes any sense within the context of the verse and the passage.

Doon de La Roche treats the familiar medieval theme of the woman falsely accused, banished, and ultimately restored to her former position. Here, it is Doon's wife Olive who is repudiated by her husband as a consequence of false charges of adultery. In the episode of particular interest to us, Doon, disguised as a pilgrim, has sought hospitality with his wife and, to test her fidelity, he speaks ill before her of her husband (himself!). Olive, angered, unclasps her brocade mantle (v. 3587) and is about to strike the would-be pilgrim (v. 3588)

mais cenor ne li laisse

whereupon she berates him (vv. 3589-93).

The second hemistich of line 3588 may be translated as "her honor does not allow her (let her)," or "her honor prevents her," i.e., from striking the pilgrim. Such a translation is perfectly consistent with the mood of the passage, and particularly with the image of Olive that the poet

wishes to convey. In fact, one may say that it enhances Olive's portrait in the epic, that of a noble, morally upright, and eminently dignified lady.

Upon hearing evil said of her spouse, and in spite of the fact that it is he who has brought her grief by having repudiated her, Olive's first reaction is to strike the calumniator (Doon himself). But immediately, her good upbringing, her instinctive consciousness of what it means to be a noble lady, the realization perhaps that the speaker is a pilgrim (cf. v. 3544: "Je m'en vais a Cologne a saint Piere proier"), and, not least, the fact that he is her guest, check her in this gesture. Where another of lesser strength of character might have carried the act to fulfillment, that is struck the blow, Olive refrains herself. It is her "honor" (*s'enor*), her innate dignity and awareness of her social self, that does not allow her to act ordinarily: mais cenor (*s'enor*) ne li laisse

Clearly, *s'enor* is the term that belongs in this passage, for it harmonizes perfectly with the events and with the moral portrait of the heroine.

Gerald Herman
University of California, Davis

¹"*Mainet*, fragments d'une chanson de geste du XII^e siècle," ed. G. Paris, *Romania*, 4 (1875), pp. 305-37.

²*Ibid.*, p. 324, note 1.

³F. Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, (Paris, 1885), I, p. 784.

⁴R. de Gorog, *Lexique français moderne: ancien français*, (University of Georgia Press, 1973), p. 408.

⁵A. Tobler, E. Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, (Berlin, 1925—) II, p. 46.

⁶Loc. cit.

⁷*Girart de Vienne*, ed. F. Yeandle, New York, 1930, v. 805.

⁸Godefroy, I, 783.

⁹*La Chanson des Saxons*, ed. F. Michel (Paris, 1839), laisses 224, 237.

¹⁰*Doon de La Roche*, ed. P. Meyer et G. Huet, Paris, 1921.

¹¹The editors indicate in a note to v. 3588 that the manuscript may have been altered at that point.

¹²Ed. J. Bédier, v. 1223.

¹³Ed. F. Guessard, H. Michelant, v. 603.

¹⁴Ed. E. Walberg, v. 249, see note.