Gérard J. Brault


It is generally known that, not long after the *Song of Roland* was composed, a Latin prose work, the *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi*, appeared recounting many of the same events. Since it purported to be by Archbishop Turpin, the chronicle seemed to clerks throughout the Middle Ages to provide a more reliable version of the story and related incidents. However, it was long ago established that the account was a hoax and a rather obvious one at that.

In recent years, scholars have begun to reappraise the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. To begin with, it was one of the most highly regarded historical narratives of the time: more than 300 manuscript copies, including numerous independent translations, attest to its extraordinary popularity and wide dissemination. It was one of the first literary translations in French prose in the thirteenth century. It exerted a great
influence on vernacular European literature and medieval art. Finally, it is viewed by some as offering valuable insight into the manner in which contemporary clerks interpreted the *Song of Roland*.¹

Since 1960, *Pseudo-Turpin* scholarship has focused on the French translations, more than a dozen of which have now been identified and studied. The version edited by Claude Buridant was composed before 1229-37, that is, after the translations of Nicolas de Senlis (ca. 1200), Johannes (1206), and William de Briane (1214-18). Relying to a great extent on a classification devised by André de Mandach, Buridant situates his version in the latter's so-called HA family of manuscripts, the Picardy-England subgroup to be more precise. Buridant also endeavors to establish a link with de Mandach's O-Saint-Denis family, studied by Rudolf Rehnitz in 1940, which includes Primat's translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin* in the *Grandes Chroniques de France* (1274).

Comparison with Primat's version is fraught with difficulty as the text of Jules Viard's edition of that chronicle is not reliable. In 1960, having noted that Girart d'Amiens followed Primat's translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin*, I confronted these two authors' texts with the Latin original and was able to propose many emendations to Viard's edition.² However, Buridant is the first to concede the tentativeness of his proposed filiation.

Some fifty pages of Buridant's introduction are devoted to the language of the text. The editor's cautious conclusion: it has clearly Burgundian characteristics "mais ces traits coexistent avec ceux, largement répandus, de la koiñe traditionnelle des textes littéraires" (p. 80).

Though promising a word-for-word rendition, the translator introduced numerous short amplifications to improve the narrative flow and to develop moral reflections. Buridant provides a meticulous examination of such translating techniques as fragmenting phrases for the purpose of clarification and synonymic repetition to add emphasis.


His analysis of the author's syntax offers many pertinent observations apropos of translating the ablative absolute, present and past participles, appositions, temporal and relative clauses, and word order.

For readers of this journal, the most interesting part of Buridant's introduction will no doubt be the brief section dealing with the translator's amplifications of a dramatic nature and his use of epic motifs and formulas. In a paper read at the Seventh International Congress of the Société Rencesvals at Liège in 1976, Buridant analyzed similar phenomena in this and other thirteenth-century French prose chronicles contained in this manuscript. While familiar—the process has been detailed in other studies of the French versions of the Pseudo-Turpin—this new evidence underscores the casualness with which translators treated the line separating epic and chronicle during this period.

Buridant's edition is a welcome addition to the growing list of studies pointing to the great vogue of the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in the Middle Ages and helping to assess its significance.

Gérard J. Brault
The Pennsylvania State University