

James A. Bellamy

A Note on *Roland* 609-10

When Ganelon was sent by Charlemagne as ambassador to Marsile, the Saracen king of Saragossa, he took advantage of the occasion to betray his stepson Roland, and so prepared the way for the tragic events at Roncevaux. The plot between Ganelon and Marsile was sealed by oaths. Ganelon swore on his sword, the hilt of which contained holy relics; the Muslim Marsile swore on the Koran. As the king prepares to swear, we read in Ms *Q*:

Un faldestoed i out d'un olifant.  
Marsilies fait porter un livre avant: 610  
La lei i fut Mahum e Tervagan.  
Ço ad jurét li Sarrazins espans.<sup>1</sup>

Not everyone has been satisfied with line 609. Stengel took it to be apocryphal,<sup>2</sup> and Segre remarks that it appears to be "inopportuno."<sup>3</sup> One has to admit that the verses read a bit awkwardly, since there is nothing in 610 to link it with 609. The whole passage would run more smoothly if either 609 or 610 were left out.

Ms *Q* is the only witness to one branch (designated a) of the two-branched stemma set up by Segre.<sup>4</sup> All the other witnesses,

<sup>1</sup> Cesare Segre, ed., *La Chanson de Roland* (Milano/Napoli, 1971) 116.

<sup>2</sup> E. Stengel, ed., *Das Altfranzösische Rolandslied*, Bd. 1 (Leipzig, 1900) 63.

<sup>3</sup> Segre 116.

<sup>4</sup> Segre xiv.

which include reworkings of the story and translations, belong to the other branch (8), and here we find the story of the oath related in somewhat different terms.

V<sup>4</sup>

Marsilio se fa porter un libre grant,	
Là o' è Machon et son deo Trivigant;	530
Soto una oliva, desovra un scu blant,	
Soto lui çura li Saraçin de Spant. <sup>5</sup>	

C

Marsille rueve poit un libre avant	895
Soz une olive sor l'erbe verdoiant.	
Sor un escu de fin or reluisant;	
La lois Mahom i fu et Trivigant	
Et de cil deu qi aorent li Persant.	
Desor eus jurent li païen mescreant. <sup>6</sup>	900

V<sup>7</sup>

Marsille fait un livre porter avant	895
Sor une olive sor l'erbe verdoiant.	
Sor un escuz de fin or reluisant;	
La lois Manon i fu et Tarvigant	
Iloc iura li rois toz en oant. <sup>7</sup>	900

*n*

<sup>5</sup> G. Gasca Quirazza, ed. and trans., *La Chanson de Roland* (Torino, 1955) 28, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Raoul Mortier, éd., *Les textes de la Chanson de Roland*. 10 vols. (Paris, 1940-43) 4: 25.

<sup>7</sup> Mortier vol. 5, fol. 15r, ln. 11 ff; cf. Segre 116.

En síðan var fram borin bók mikil en hún var lögð á hvítan skjöld. A þeirri bók voru lög Maúmets og Terrogans.<sup>8</sup> (Then there was brought forward a great book and it was laid on a white shield. In this book was the law of Maumet and Terrogan.)

In the medieval Welsh prose version, the book is placed on a golden shield,<sup>9</sup> and the whole episode has been lost from the Flemish verse rendition.<sup>10</sup>

The poetic witnesses of  $\beta$  are even more awkward than  $\underline{Q}$  and clearly contain some corruptions.  $\underline{V}^4$  530 contradicts the tradition elsewhere found in *Roland*, according to which Mahom and Tervagant were both divinities, and there is no mention of the law. Perhaps the verse originally read: *La o e la lois Machon e Trivigant*. In 532 *soto* must surely be read *sovra*. In  $\underline{C}$  900 *eus* refers to *deu*, so the connection between the oath and the law and book is lost. The same verse further weakens the story by having all the pagans swear instead of Marsile alone.

Despite the differences between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , the relationship between them is so close that we cannot delete either 609 or 610 from  $\underline{Q}$ , if we acknowledge that the stemma has any validity at all.  $\underline{Q}$  610 is found with only minor changes in  $\underline{V}^4$  529 and  $\underline{C}$  895, and the faldstool of  $\underline{Q}$  609 has the same function as the shield of  $\beta$ ; there is even an echo of *d'un oliphant* in the *blant* of  $\underline{V}^4$  531 and the "hvítan" of  $n$ , though the *fin or* of  $\underline{C}$  897 comes from 115, in which another faldstool is made of *or mer*.

The differences do, however, present us with the problem of deciding whether the shield of  $\beta$  or the faldstool of  $\alpha$  is closer to the

<sup>8</sup> Bjami Vilhjálmsson, éd., *Karlamagnús Saga* (Reykjavik, 1961) 797.

<sup>9</sup> A. C. Rejhon, ed. and trans., *Cân Rolant. The Medieval Welsh Version of the Song of Roland*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology 113 (Berkeley, 1983) 161.

<sup>10</sup> See H. van Dijk, ed., *Het Roelantslied* (Utrecht, 1981).

original. In what follows I shall try to make a case for Q (=α) by showing how the faldstool could become a shield, but that the opposite could scarcely have happened; then I shall cite further evidence that "faldstool" is really correct despite appearances, and finally suggest an improvement in the text of Q to remove the anomaly mentioned above.

The substitution of the shield for the faldstool can be reasonably explained. Faldstools are mentioned six times in the Oxford *Roland*, in 115, 407, 452, 609, 2653, and 2804. However, there are only four of them, since 407 and 452 refer to the same one, as do 2653 and 2804. With one exception, each faldstool is placed in its setting and it is stated that someone is sitting on it. In 115 Charlemagne sits on a faldstool, under a pine, beside a sweet briar; in 407 Marsile occupies another, draped in Alexandrian brocade, in the shade of a pine; and in 2653 Baligant sits on still another, under a laurel, in the middle of a field, where a piece of silk brocade has been spread. The single exception is the faldstool in 609, which stands out from the rest by not being sat upon and by not having its location described; this last probably because the meeting-place of Marsile and Ganelon has already been specified in 407.

The redactor of β must have come *upon faldstoed* in 609, which he did not understand, since to him it was a seat, but realizing that it was some object on which a book could be placed, he cast about for an expedient that would make sense, and came up with a shield, not a bad choice by any means. He, and others who came later, then filled out the passage with bits and pieces drawn from other parts of the poem. We have already noted the source of *blant and fin or*, an olive tree, under which travelers descend after a journey, occurs in 2571 and 2705.

A textual error may have contributed to this process. *Faldestoed* is usually so spelled in *Roland*, but we find *faldestoet* in 407 and *faldestod* in 2804. It is possible that in the copy from which the redactor of β worked the word had become corrupted to *faldescut*, since *t* and *c* are easily confusable in some medieval hands, and *o* and *u* are often interchanged in Old French. Since a

"folding shield" makes no sense, the redactor dropped the first element and proceeded then as described above.

If we try, on the other hand, to take *escut* as the original reading—that is, assume that  $\beta$  is correct—we cannot come up with any reasonable explanation as to how it was lost, along with the additions to the story, and replaced by *faldstool*. A simple error of omission in the tradition of *a* is impossible, since that would still leave *faldstoed* unexplained. Furthermore, it is hardly possible that the redactor of *a* could have had before him a version resembling that of  $\beta$ , and then decided to eliminate the trimmings together with the shield, which would have been more intelligible to him and his readers than the *faldstool*. Finally, *faldestoed*, as the *lectio difficilior*, deserves more consideration than *escut*. Thus we have to accept *faldestoed*, or some other spelling of the word, as the original text, despite the uncertainty that surrounds it.

The two exceptional points noted above, that the *faldstool* of 609 was not sat on and its location not described, and further, that the Koran was placed on it, are evidence that we are dealing with something quite different from the others.

I believe that this particular *faldstool* was not a chair, but a lectern or book-stand. The only scholar, as far as I know, who takes this view of the word is Fr. Viré, who translates 609-10 into modern French as follows:

Près de là fut un fauteuil d'olifant;  
Marsile y fait porter un livre avant:

and then goes on to explain that "Marsile fait porter le Coran sur un lutrin d'ivoire."<sup>11</sup> Later translators have not followed Viré, possibly because *fauteuil* does not mean "lutrin" in French, preferring to use "throne" or some equivalent, or simply "*faldstool*." Viré does not

<sup>11</sup> Fr. Viré, "A propos de Tervagan idole des Sarrasins," *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* I: 2 (1953): 152.

deal with the word as such in his article, which is an attempt to prove that the name of the Saracen god Tervagant is derived from the Arabic, and he mentions the word only in passing, but I believe that his insight was correct.

*Faldestoed* is derived from the old Frankish *\*faldistól*, which means "folding chair." It passed into the Romance languages, in which it is often used, as usually in *Roland*, in the sense of a king's throne. The meaning "lectern, book-stand" is a later development, and is not found in Old French according to the dictionaries.<sup>12</sup> It does occur, however, in Old Provençal and modern Spanish.

In a list of items belonging to the church at Nîmes, dated 1218 (1219), the inventory-taker notes that he found in one place *septem farestols*<sup>13</sup> and in another *unum farestol*.<sup>14</sup> These two occurrences might possibly refer to chairs, but the third mention is unambiguous. "Inveni in clauastro...librum concathenatus ad farestol, in quo psalterium, cum colletano & officiali."<sup>15</sup> The Spanish word is *facistol* "lectern," which, in the form *facistor* is first attested in a document dated 1497.<sup>16</sup>

It appears, consequently, that *faldestoed* in *Roland* 609 is the earliest documented occurrence of the word in the meaning "lectern," not only in Old French, but in any Romance language.

<sup>12</sup>Godefroy 3: 712; *FEW* 15: 2, 103-104; Tobler-Lomatzsch 3, cols. 1650-51.

<sup>13</sup> L. Ménard, *Histoire civile, ecclésiastique, et littéraire de la ville de Nîmes*, Tome I (Paris, 1750) preuves 67a, ln. 27; also E. Levy, *Provenzalisches Supplement-Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1902) Bd. 3: 397-98.

<sup>14</sup> Ménard 67b, ln. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ménard 67b, ln. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Joan Corominas and J. A. Pascual, *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (Madrid, 1980) 2: 833-34.

There is an interesting parallel development in the Arabic *kursi* which is the common word for "chair." In the Koran 2:255 it is used of the throne of God, and it later comes to mean a lectern on which the Koran was placed for reading or recitation. This is a piece of furniture resembling a camp-stool which folds out into an x-shaped stand, in the upper angle of which the book is placed. It is, in effect, a folding chair, or faldstool.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that the author of *Roland* was aware of the important place in Muslim ritual held by the Koran, though he mistakenly calls it "la lei Mahum" instead of the word of God. In Spain in the Middle Ages Muslims and Christians lived in such close contact that no Christian can have been unaware of the existence of such lecterns, and communication between France and Spain was easy. It is not impossible that the meaning "lectern," which is first attested in a description of a Muslim ritual, was in fact borrowed from the Muslims of Spain and attached to the Frankish or Old French word that was the closest equivalent of *kursī*.

Finally I would suggest that 610 be emended to read: *Marsilie i fait porter un livre avant*, which provides the necessary connection between 610 and 609; cf. Viré's modern French version, cited above, in which he felt obliged to insert *y*.

In *Roland* the adverb *i* frequently occurs after final unstressed *e*, which is then elided (see 734, 1399, 1791, and elsewhere). Reading Marsilie instead of Marsilies is consistent with the orthography of Q, where we find Marsilie in the nominative 27

<sup>17</sup> The *kursī* is defined by the classical Arabic dictionaries, among other things, as a 'Pult auf das d. Qur'an gelegt wird/desk on which the Qur'an is placed', *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache* (Wiesbaden, 1957-) fasc. 3, p. 127; 'Espèce de pupitre sur lequel on pose un Coran précieux..., et aussi un autre meuble qui sert à transporter un tel pupitre,' R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2ème ed. (Paris, 1927) 2: 455. For a picture of such a folding *kursī*, see Nāḥī Zayn al-Dīn, *Mutūn al-khatt al-ʿArabi* (Baghdad/Beirut, 1980) 274; a thirteenth-century Arab book illustration representing Aristotle and his pupil Alexander seated beside a *kursi* with a book on it is reproduced by Basim Musallam, *The Arabs* (London, 1983) 127.

times as against Marsilies, which occurs only 18 times.<sup>18</sup> It is not likely that the preponderance of Marsilie is due simply to the idiosyncratic spelling of a copyist; rather it reflects the author's uncertainty about, or more likely his indifference to, the nominative singular ending in foreign names. Another example is Baligant, which is always—22 times—spelled thus in Q, never Baliganz. Some editors regularize these endings, but Bédier reasonably argues against too much archaizing, and notes, somewhat ironically, that correct use of the case endings is limited, except for a couple of very early texts, to modern grammars of Old French.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Q 610 does write *Marsilies* provides a clue to how the corruption came about. If the *i* were a bit too tall, and stood too close to Marsilie, it would resemble an *l*, which would make no sense here. A later copyist would most likely emend to *s*, thus making the verse grammatically correct, but breaking the connection with 609.

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### Editorial Note

Romanists interested in the preceding article will likewise wish to be aware of Prof. Bellamy's "Arabic Names in the *Chanson de Roland*: Saracen Gods, Frankish Swords, Roland's Horse, and the Olifant," which has just appeared in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, 2 (1987): 267-77. In this article Prof. Bellamy proposes that the names of two Saracen gods (Tervagan and Apollin), three swords (Roland's Durendal, Turpin's Almace, and Ganelon's Murglies/Murgleis), Roland's horse Veillantif and the Olifant can be explained as corruptions of Arabic originals.

<sup>18</sup> Segre 687.

<sup>19</sup> J. Bédier, *La Chanson de Roland commentée* (Paris, 1927) 242ff., 248.



Prof. Bellamy's basic assumption is that the Saracen names in the *Roland* are letter-by-letter transliterations from the Arabic. However, he postulates that in transmission certain letters became garbled and suggests a number of necessary emendations to accommodate the proposed etymologies. In some cases the emendation is considered "obvious," in others he admits that "the mistake is not readily apparent" (268). Not being an Arabist, I shall not attempt to evaluate the probability of the emendations proposed, but will content myself here with indicating the sources suggested.

After rejecting several earlier attempts to trace Tervagan and Apollin to Arabic originals, Bellamy argues that they are deformations of the names of two of the most prominent associates of the Prophet, (Uthman) Ben ʿAffān and Abū Bakr. The latter was his father-in-law and the first caliph; the former, his son-in-law and third caliph. As for the swords, Bellamy derives Durendal from the Arabic *ḍū l-jandal*, which means "possessor, master of stone," or more freely "stone-master," Almace stems from the Arabic *al-mādī*, meaning "(the) cutter, cutting, sharp;" while Murgleis is traced back to *māriq ʿalyas* 'valiant piercer.' To answer the obvious objection as to why Christian heroes would have swords with Saracen names, Bellamy cites *Aspremont*, in which Roland intervened to save Charlemagne from the Saracen Aymes, and received as his reward the spoils of battle: his sword, his horse Veillantif, and the Olifant (ed. Brandin, vv. 6076-79). Veillantif can be derived from *deyl lanṭif* 'fine/delicate tail'; and our Olifant is traced back to *al-bīqān*, which means "the trumpets, horns."

Attempts to trace more than 100 other unknown names in the *Roland* to Arabic sources proved fruitless. Bellamy reaches two conclusions: that "the author of *Roland* did not know Arabic, nor did he have access to anyone who did. He used some Arabic names that were widely known in his time, as well as a few others that were corrupt but had already become part of the Charlemagne/Roland tradition;" and, "if we granted the possibility of accidental resemblances, we should expect them to be distributed evenly over the whole range of names, and not fall on *all* the gods' names and *all* the non-French sword-names, but be wanting in all other cases except for the names of one horse and a horn" (277)

Editor.

### Personalia

Annalee C. Rejhon (Berkeley, CA) is currently completing an edition plus translation and study of the medieval Welsh version of the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, and has just published an article on that poem, entitled "The French Reception of a Celtic Motif: The *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*," in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* (1986). Her book, *Cân Rolant: The Medieval Welsh Version of the Song of Roland*. U. Calif. Publ. in Modern Philology 113. (Berkeley, 1984) won the 1986 University of Wales Vernam Hull Prize.

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Publications continue to roll regularly off the pen of our Book Review editor, John Miletich (Utah). Two recent books are *Hispanic Studies in Honor of Alan D. Deyermond: A North American Tribute* (Madison, 1986), which includes his own contribution, "Oral Aesthetics and Written Aesthetics: The South Slavic Case and the Poema de Mio Cid" (pp. 183-204), and *The "Bugarstica": A Bilingual Anthology of the Earliest Extant South Slavic Folk Narrative Song* (Urbana-Champaign, 1987). Recently published articles include "The Mermaid and Related Motifs in the Romancero: The Slavic Analogy and Fertility Myths," *Romance Philology* 39, 2 (1985): 151-69; "Muslimanska usmena epika i srednjovjekovna epika" ["Moslem Oral Epic and Medieval Epic"], in *Izraz* [Sarajevo] 58, 9-10 (1985): 163-79 —with the English version forthcoming in *MLR*; and "Sobre 'Los cantores épicos yugoeslavos y los occidentales,'" in *Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre la Juglaresca* (1986) 23-39.

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