Geert H. M. Claassens

The Middle Dutch Crusade Epics: A Survey

In recent years the broad genre of the crusade epics has received considerable attention from scholars of Old French. Under the editorial supervision of Emanuel Mickel and Jan A. Nelson, a group of scholars is at present working on a new critical edition of the entire "premier cycle de la croisade." Complementing this large-scale project, a number of texts of the "deuxième cycle" are also being reedited. It is expected that, in the near future, the entire corpus of the Old French crusade epics will appear in editions that conform to present-day standards. Thus, these texts can at last assume the position to which they are entitled because of their scope, their diversity in literary styles, and their importance as sources of historical information.

The Middle Dutch crusade epics have received far less attention in the past thirty years. Many scholars might not even be aware of the fact that large parts of the Old French crusade cycle were translated into Middle Dutch. This relative unfamiliarity is due mainly to the fragmentary nature of the texts that have come down to us: none of the Middle Dutch crusade epics is complete in manuscript form. The only complete texts we have of the genre are in early printed editions. Of course, the Middle Dutch crusade epics, being translations and adaptations, are heavily indebted to the Old

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1 An earlier version of this paper was read at the Seminar on Comparative Studies in the Romance Epic, during the 24th International Congress on Medieval Studies held at Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 1989.

2 Of this new edition the following volumes appeared between 1977 and 1987: Tuscaloosa / London: University of Alabama Press, 1. La naissance du Chevalier au Cygne (ed. E. J. Mickel and J. A. Nelson); 2. "Le chevalier au Cygne" and "La Fin d'Elias" (J. A. Nelson); 5. Les Chétifs (G. M. Myers); 7. part I La Chrétienté Corbaran; part II" La Prise d'Acre, La Mort Godefroi and La Chanson des Rois Baudouin (both volumes edited by P. R. Grillo).
French cycle, but this by no means implies that they are merely straightforward translation in the modern sense.

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I shall begin with a brief listing and description of the Middle Dutch crusade epic fragments, in order to give some impression of the significance the genre must have had in the Low Countries of the Middle Ages. Then, using three texts from this list, I wish to consider in more detail the particularities, idiosyncrasies, and wider interest of the Middle Dutch crusade epics.

1. *Godevaerts Kintshede* (Middle Dutch trans. of the *Enfances Godefroi*), 59 vv. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS. 15.393, ML

2. *Roman van Antiochië* (Middle Dutch trans. of *La Chanson d'Antioche*). 175 vv. Four sets of fragments have survived:
   (b) Vv. 49-115. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS. 15.393, III-IV.
   (c) Vv. 116-75. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS. IV 209, 10
   (d) Ghent, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, MS. 1647. These two strips of parchment (c and d) belonged to one and the same leaf, fitting neatly together.

   *Nota bene:* All fragments' mentioned under 1 and 2 belonged to one and the same codex.

   Of the manuscript that must have contained at least the translations of the *Enfances Godefroi* and the *Chanson d'Antioche*, eight strips of parchment have been recovered in well over a hundred years.³ On the basis of codicological evidence, it is very

likely that the manuscript in question contained additional texts, in which case, of course, translations of other crusades epics would be the first to come to mind. The 232 total lines that have been handed down to us do not justify a final judgement about the nature of the translation. The hypothesis that it is a fairly literal translation can be maintained for the time being.

3. Boudewijn van Seborch (Middle Dutch trans, of the Baudouin de Sebourc). 431 vv., partly damaged, divided over two codices:
   (a) Vv. 1-134. Munich, Universitätsbibliothek, 2° Cod. MS. 756.
   (b) Vv. 315-430. Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek, E q 73a.
   Nota bene: These two fragments belonged to two different codices.

Boudewijn van Seborch, the Middle Dutch translation of the Old French Baudouin de Sebourc, has come down to us in

4 H. Kienhorst states in his De handschriften van de Middelnederlandse ridderepiek (Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1988) 64 that the original codex probably had a page size of 260 x 180-90 mm and was written down in two columns of about 48 lines. Using a comparison with the Old French MS. Paris B.N. f. fr. 12569, which comprises all well-known parts of the "premier cycle" and totals 42,315 lines, one can argue that if the original MS. contained the entire cycle, it too must have had well over 42,000 lines. At 48 lines per column, the Middle Dutch codex would have contained 210 to 230 folios. Within the Middle Dutch tradition, this is an unusual length for a codex with the above-mentioned size and format (cf. P. F. J. Obbema, "De Overlevering van de middelnederlandse letterkunde," in A. Demyttenaere et al., Literatuur en samenleving in de middeleeuwen [Wassenaar: Servire, 1976] 101-17). However, it is not impossible that such a codex was produced. Nor should we exclude the possibility that the middle Dutch codex might not have contained all parts known. Even if the codex belonged to the type customary in the Netherlands, the number of verses would have totaled some 20,000; this is still 9,000 to 10,000 more than the Enfances Godefroi and the Chanson d'Antioche combined. A final possibility would be that the entire cycle was translated and subsequently split up into two volumes.

5 See Claassens and Kienhorst, "Fragmenten."
fragments from two different codices. The larger fragment, now in Munich, consists of one leaf with 314 verses. From a codicological point of view, this fragment is of a different nature than the fragments that are found in Amsterdam. The Amsterdam fragments, two strips from a single leaf, contain 127 partly illegible verses. What both fragments have in common is the nature of the translation: in both fragments the Middle Dutch texts represent an amplified text by comparison with the original Old French.

4. Roman van Saladin (Middle Dutch trans. of the Saladin), 160 vv. Prague, Lehrstuhl für historische Hilfswissenschaften und Archivistik. z. s.

Since 1961 a fragment of a Middle Dutch crusade epic has been known that is to be regarded as very closely linked to the Old French Saladin-en-prose. In 1972 Robert F. Cook pointed out the importance of this fragment, which is kept in Prague, but his remarks suggested that it would forever remain an unsolved puzzle in literary history. The Old French source text of this fragment has never been found, so that the relation between the Old French crusade cycle and the Middle Dutch text of this Prague fragment is still unclear. Further on in this survey, I will show that Middle Dutch literature may contribute towards solving this problem.


In 1979 two strips of parchment, which are now kept in Leyden, were discovered in the binding of a book. Because of the names in the fragments (e.g. Godevaert, Boudewijn, Heinric van Assache), their discoverer, Professor P. Obbema, head of the manuscript department of the Leyden University Library, felt there must be a relationship with the crusade epics. Closer study of the texts of the fragments led to the conclusion that they were not direct translations from the Old French cycle. The names, however, point unmistakably towards the crusades. Could it be that we are dealing with an original Middle Dutch crusade epic? Further study will give this fragment its proper place within the history of Middle Dutch literature.9

6. De Ridder mener Swane (Summarizing adaptation of Les Enfances du Chevalier au Cygne, Le Chevalier au Cygne, and La Fin d’Elias. Perhaps a direct translation of Pierre Desrey's Généalogie. This post-incunabulum has only survived in a single fragment, the edition by G. J. Boekenogen (Leyden, 1931) is based on a printed edition of 1651.

Even after the invention of printing the crusade epics continued to appeal to the Dutch public. In the post-incunabulum De Ridder mener Swane, the growing group of readers is presented with a summarized adaptation of the first three epics of the Old French "premier cycle."10 From the many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reprints of this work extant, we can judge how popular the legend of the Swan Knight was.11

9 The author is working on a new edition of this fragment in cooperation with H. Kienhorst.


11 This text was edited by G. J. Boekenogen: Een schone ende miraculeuse historié van de ridder metter Swane (Leiden: Nederlandsche Volksboeken III, 1931). This edition was based on a printed text of 1651. Of the earliest printed version, from the first half of the sixteenth century, only one
7. *Dystorie van Saladine* (summarizing adaptation of the *Saladin* in Grand Rhétoriquer style). A damaged copy is kept in the Stadsbibliotheek of Haarlem; a complete copy is in the Rosenwald Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.\(^\text{12}\)

The ca. 1483 incunabulum *Dystorie van Saladine* presents a kind of summary of the Old French *Saladin-en-prose* in 211 eight-line stanzas and a single stanza of four lines. Apart from its merits as a literary work, it contains valuable information about the Prague fragment (no. 4 above), for it is possible to link that fragment to the text of this incunabulum.

It is hoped that this initial summary has made it clear that, in spite of the fragmentary survival, the crusade epics in Middle Dutch should not be looked upon as insignificant. It would seem plausible that manuscripts containing translations of larger parts of the Old French crusade cycles circulated in the Dutch-speaking areas. Since translations into Middle Dutch from the beginning of the first part of the "premier cycle" to the end of the "deuxième cycle" are all represented among these fragments, and since the great epic of *Baudouin de Sebourc* was certainly translated into Middle Dutch, why should we not presume that the other parts of the Old French crusade cycles were also translated and that they played their part in the literary life of the Low Countries of the Middle Ages?

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Turning now to three texts mentioned above, the *Boudewijn van Seborch*, the Prague fragment, and *Dystorie van Saladine*, I shall discuss in greater depth the nature of the Middle Dutch crusade epics and their importance to studies of the crusade epics in general.

leaf has been preserved. Boekenogen included this fragment as an appendix to his edition.

BOUDEWIJN VAN SEBORCH

In his 1940 study on Baudouin de Sebourc, E. R. Labande devotes a very short section to Boudewijn van Seborch, the Middle Dutch translation of this long Old French epic. He characterizes the translation as follows: "La traduction est très lâche, cependant le texte du MS. A est, dans l'ensemble, reconnaissable." Thus Labande assumes the twentieth-century, unmedieval, point of view that a translation must be a highly accurate and literal rendering of the original text in another language. This point of view keeps him from judging the Middle Dutch Boudewijn van Seborch on its own merits.

A more accurate assessment of this translation should be based on a premise respecting the medieval view on translation. Such a point of view can be found, for example, in the medieval dictionary tradition, which can provide us with a definition of medieval translation theory: "translatio est expositio sententie per aliam linguam," "translating is expounding the meaning through another language." If we take this view, we will be careful before attributing deviations in a translation to ignorance on the part of the translator. Labande did so in relation to the Middle Dutch Boudewijn van Seborch, and his assessment needs to be revised. Indeed, by medieval standards the Boudewijn van Seborch is a good translation, and it is precisely through study of those instances where the translator does not stick literally to the original text that we can gain insights into aspects like aesthetics, the role of patronage, how a work was received, and the like. Here I will deal only with the translator's technique of adaptation.

Before proceeding to a brief comparison of the Middle Dutch translation and its Old French source, three reservations must be entered. First of all, it is not absolutely certain that the Old French


Baudouin de Sebourc, as we know it from two manuscripts, is the direct source of the Middle Dutch Boudewijn. Deviations in the translation may not be due to the translator but might be a result of his having made use of some lost version of the Old French Baudouin de Sebourc. Secondly, the Old French Baudouin as we know it today is a very lengthy epic poem of nearly 26,000 lines. Only 450 lines are extant in Middle Dutch translation. On the basis of this ratio, it is impossible to make general statements concerning the quality of the translation. We simply do not know whether the translator maintained a certain continuity and balance throughout his work. Thirdly, the relationship between the Middle Dutch and the Old French texts is somewhat problematic. The fragments that have been preserved originate from two different codices. Does this imply that two different and independent translations of the Baudouin de Sebourc were made? Or are we dealing with two manuscripts of one and the same translation? The texts of the Amsterdam and Munich fragments do not overlap: the Munich fragments correspond to Canto I, lines 112-259 of the Boca edition of the Baudouin, whereas the Amsterdam fragment corresponds to Canto IV, lines 189-294. Thus, a comparison with respect to content is not possible. One striking feature is that both fragments differ widely with respect to prolixity: in the Munich fragments the translator uses 315 lines to render 147 of his Old French source, in the Amsterdam fragment he uses but 135 lines to translate 105 of Old French. For the time being, therefore, we cannot prove that this is a case of two independent translations, although we should keep the possibility in mind. For the sake of clarity and only for that reason, I will start from the assumption that there was one translation by a single translator.

In my opinion, Labande's view that the translator often did not understand his original text is not correct. It would be far more precise to say that the reason for the large number of alterations lies in the translator's method and the goals he set himself. A few examples may clarify this.

In lines 156-59 of Canto I of the Old French text, the young Baudouin is introduced as "a two-year-old child, beautiful and smart." The translator devotes more attention to him: "he is bigger and stronger than any of his older brothers and of such a comely appearance that everybody wants to help him" (vv. 72-79). In lines 106-10 he adds that Boudewijn was rather "masculine" for his
age and that he was to become an excellent knight, the best of all. A final comment on the youthful Boudewijn is found in the threat that Gaufrot utters under his breath against King Arnout and his children: he will certainly kill Boudewijn because, in spite of his youth, he is already so strong and fierce (vv. 135-36). These extensions are not meaningless additions to the Old French source. They show that the translator purposely altered the text of his source. He is centralizing the main character of his story right from the beginning and he immediately makes it clear to his public that it should take good notice of this character, since he is going to play such an important part in the rest of the story. It also goes to show that the translator knew the whole text of his source before he began to translate. This is also apparent from another of the translator's additions. In lines 113-15, King Arnout asks God that his children may live so long that they will be feared by the Saracens. This is an unmistakable reference to the confrontations of Arnout's children with the Saracens, which take place further on in the story. We may, therefore, assume that the translator was well-prepared for his work and tried to take the overall structure into account when translating every passage.

Another aspect to be noted of the method of translation and adaptation is the translator's wish to rationalize the text of his source. The meaning of this "rationalization" will become apparent from the following example. Line 166 of the Old French text begins a scene in which King Hernous and Queen Rose are having a meal. They will be interrupted by an injured messenger from the Holy Land, who brings the news that Baudouin de Biauvais, the King's brother, has been taken prisoner by the Saracens at Civetot. In the Old French text it is not explicitly stated that Gaufrois is present. It only becomes clear when the traitor ends Hernous's prayer with an "amen" and a whispered threat to Hernous's children in line 173. Gaufrois's presence is once more implied when, after Hernous has sworn to come to the aid of his captured brother, Gaufrois immediately and publicly—and therefore he must be present—promises to help the king. In the Middle Dutch translation, this scene starts in line 95 with the same wording; however, the translator explicitly indicates that Gaufrot, too, was a guest at the banquet, whereas this is not stated in the Old French text. Apparently the translator was not satisfied to have Gaufrois suddenly appear as if from nowhere in his source; so, right from the start, he draws his public's attention to the fact that the traitor
also partook of the meal. Just before the messenger enters, the translator repeats this information and he adds the seating arrangement.\footnote{It might be possible that the translator is making explicit an idea that was apparently common knowledge among the Old French public, namely: when the king is dining, all high-ranking courtiers (Gaufroi is "seneschal") attend. Would the Middle Dutch public not have been aware of this? In my opinion, the translator was concerned with the image the scene evokes rather than making (apparently) implicit information explicit. Compare: B. Besamusca, "Hoge Nood," in S. Buitink, A. M. J. van Buuren and I. Spijker, eds., Rapiarijs. Een afscheidsbundel voor Hans van Dijk (Utrecht: Instituut De Vooys voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, Ruygh-bewerp 16, 1987) 12-13. Besamusca's main interest is "implication": the omission of data with which the public was familiar. This does not necessarily imply that this technique was also used in reverse.}

We should consider a number of other interventions that are in line with the ones already mentioned. The translator occasionally reshuffles the information from his source; that is to say, he includes all of the facts, but rearranges the elements in a different order. When, in lines 80-88 of the Middle Dutch translation, Arnout says the first prayer for his children, the translator combines the information of both the first (vv. 160-61) and second prayers (vv. 171-73) of the Old French source. This technique of extracting similar data, scattered about the Old French text, and turning them into neat units, occurs frequently in the translation. In this particular instance, the translator uses the space created by the contraction for another end: he replaces the second prayer in the Old French text with a new prayer, entirely of his own making. I have already mentioned lines 113-15 of this prayer, which contain a reference to the conflict with the Saracens. In lines 116-19 of this prayer, however, the literary context within which the translator worked is clearly manifest, for he explicitly indicates here that the children of Arnout and Rose are descendants of the Swan Knight. It is true that this fact is elaborately but not altogether clearly indicated in the prologue to the Old French source, but the phrasing of the Middle Dutch translator is quite different. It is of course quite possible that the translator derived his information from his source's prologue; but another, very likely, possibility may be that he had a broad knowledge of the
other parts of the "Cycles de la Croisade" and found his information there. This latter assumption is supported by another addition. In lines 172-73 the translator not only mentions King Cormorant (=Corborant d'Oliferne) but also Solomant, King of Nikes. There is no king by that name in the entire Old French Baudouin de Sebourc! So the translator must have been familiar with either the Chanson d'Antioche or Le Chevalier au Cygne et Godefroi de Bouillon, in which the name Solomant does occur. There is no other satisfactory way to account for the presence of King Solomant. This fact suggests at the least that the author took this kind of information to be common knowledge among his public.

It is to be hoped that through this rather brief discussion of different kinds of textual interventions I have been able to show that the Middle Dutch translator of the Boudewijn van Seborch was not a poetaster who killed off his source text in a half-hearted attempt at translation, and that it is more likely we are dealing with a skillful translator who treated his source in a well-considered manner in order to offer his public an adequate translation of an attractive text—a text, moreover, that is linked up with the literary context of both his public and himself.

THE PRAGUE FRAGMENT AND DYSTORIE VAN SALADINE

In 1972 Professor Cook suggested that the Prague fragment might be a remnant from a Middle Dutch translation of a lost Old French Saladin-continuation—supposedly the further adventures of Gérard le Bel Armé and Seghin, the two sons of Huon de Tabarie. This would make the Prague fragment the only remnant of this story. I would like to propose a different option: that the Prague fragment is not based on a lost Old French Saladin-continuation, but rather on an Old French proto-Saladin, which has likewise been lost. It should be noted that the derivation is probably indirect. To illustrate this thesis, I shall include another Middle Dutch text in my argument: the Dystorie van Saladine. After a short introduction to this incunable and to the Prague fragment, we shall consider the combined data from both texts.

Dystorie van Saladine was printed around 1483 by the famous master printer Arend de Keysere during his stay at Oudenaerde, in present-day Belgium. The author of this text is as
yet unknown. As far as we can tell, _Dystorie van Saladine_ is the only Middle Dutch epic written in rhetorician's verse. The text is more of a summary than anything else. The title itself suggests a certain relation to the Old French _Saladin-en-prose_, but this relationship is merely indirect.

In 1972 Professor Crist published an edition of the two most important versions of the _Saladin-en-prose_. A rough comparison of the Middle Dutch incunabulum with both Old French versions shows that neither of the two prose texts was the source of the Middle Dutch epic. The incunabulum has its ending in common with the Old French _Saladin-1_: both texts give an account of Saladin's death. But it is the beginning that the Middle Dutch incunabulum has in common with the Old French _Saladin-2_: neither of the two texts speaks of Saladin's birth, youth, and his dash for power.

The Prague fragment, a strip from a double leaf, consists of 160 lines. This late fourteenth-century Flemish fragment relates the fight between the Islamic King Clariant and a man by the name of Solimant, on the one hand, and Seghin and Geeraerd, the sons of Hughe van Tabarie, on the other. There is also reference in this fragment to Seghin's kinship with his Saracen opponents through his wife Morinde, who is Clariant's cousin. There is no corresponding passage in either of the Old French prose texts. The Middle Dutch _Dystorie van Saladine_, however, does contain such a corresponding passage. In lines 1289 to 1304 we learn how King Clariant and his son enter into face-to-face combat with Seghin and Geeraerd. When the sons of Hughe have won the combat, the

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17 The Old French _Saladin-2_ gives a very short summary of the first crusade and the political intrigues in the newly-established kingdom of Jerusalem. These intrigues are very briefly hinted at in lines 45-56 of the Middle Dutch incunabulum.

18 A rough comparison of the course of the story between the _Saladin-en-prose_ and the Middle Dutch incunabulum tells us that this passage belongs to the end of chapter 27 and the beginning of chapter 28 of the Old French text.
Saracen troops intervene and attack the victors in large numbers. Clariant is very displeased with such a betrayal by his men and turns on his own people. Hughe van Tabarie comes to his aid with his troops. When the treacherous Saracens have been defeated, Clariant converts to Christianity.

This observation leads to a number of hypotheses about the relation between the Middle Dutch incunabulum and the Prague fragment. The text of which the Prague fragment once was part may very well have been the source of the incunabulum. It is well-established that a number of other early printed books are adaptations of manuscript versions of Middle Dutch epic poems. The poet of the incunabulum himself indicates that he adapted an existing text. Moreover, the presence of the passage mentioned before is an indication that this relationship exists, particularly inasmuch as the Old French prose versions have no equivalent to this passage. This may also have consequences for our knowledge of the Old French *Saladin-en-prose*. Is it not likely that the incunabulum and the Prague fragment constitutes an adapted version of the *Proto-Saladin*? It is improbable, to say the least, that the last part of the second crusade cycle was originally composed in prose, when all other parts are verse texts. The *Proto-Saladin*, as Suzanne Duparc-Quioc and Larry Crist have suggested, might very well have been a text in verse, which served as a source for both the Old French prose versions and the Middle Dutch verse version. Through this latter, as preserved in the Prague fragment, the *Proto-Saladin* would ultimately become the source as well for the printed *Dystorie van Saladine*. An in-depth investigation into the language of the Middle Dutch verse text (i.e. the Prague fragment) as well as that of the incunabulum may reveal more about the history of these texts. An extensive comparison with the two Old French prose versions may show that the translator added certain passages to the Middle Dutch version, but this comparison may also bring out relics of the *proto-Saladin*. This is a matter to which I intend to return in a future study.

It has been the intent of this study to show something of the scope and characteristics of the Middle Dutch crusade epics. Middle Dutch literature must not be treated as a small and isolated field of research. Medieval literature is always, and especially in the Low Countries, first and foremost European literature, and research will have to take this connection into account.

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Restructuration de la Section Française


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Colloque sur la Geste des Lorrains

The French Section of the Société Rencesvals will be hosting a conference on the Geste des Lorrains at Paris-Nanterre on November 17, 1990. American colleagues wishing to participate are urged to contact the conference host, Professor François Suard, Département de Français, Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 200 Avenue de la République, 92001 Nanterre, France.