Willem van Oringen

Theo Broers
Dordrecht

Met sinen knape vor hi sire strate.
Hi haestem utermaten sere
Ende soude dien abt, sinen here,
Gerne die vessce te tide bringen,
Wils hem God gehingen.
Soe lange reet die edele man,
Dat hi int dal ten Sigeren quam.
Hi reet onder dit geberchte groet
Ende hi en duchte en gene noet.
Mar die knape hadde vaer;
Dat seggic u overwaer.
Hi waender wel doet bliven
Ende datmenne soude ontliven.
Doe sprac hi tien edelen man
Herde vervarlike an:
"Here, ic en can niet geduren
Van vare terre uren."
Ten knape sprac hi vriendelike:
"Vrient, ic biddu hertelike,
Dat gi een lidekijn singet,
Dar gi u selven mede bringet
Uten vare, dar gi in sijt
Ende mi dar mede verblijt.
Ic hope an Gode, die ons geboet,
Wi en selen hebben gene noet." (ll.1-25)[1]

(Accompanied by his servant he [= Willem] set off. He was in a great hurry and he wanted very much to bring the fish to the abbot, his Lord, if God would allow it. The noble man rode for such a long time that he came into the valley of the River Sigré. He rode along the foot of the mountains and he did not have any fears. But his servant was very frightened, I tell you truthfully. He thought for sure that he would die; he thought they [= the highwaymen] would kill him. Very terrified he spoke to Willem: "My Lord, I feel

most uncomfortable. At this moment I almost succumb to my fears." Kindly he answered his servant: "My friend, I earnestly request you to sing a song, so that you will forget your fears and put me in a cheerful mood. I put my trust in God, Who has created us, that we will come to no harm.")

These lines are the beginning of the Middle Dutch fragments of *Willem van Oringen.* The two men in the valley are Willem van Oringen (William, Count of Orange/Guillaume d'Orange, le "marchis-au-court-nés") and his servant. After the death of his wife Guibourc, Willem enters a convent and becomes a monk in the monastery of Aniane. He tries to live in peace with the other monks, but very soon dissension arises: the other monks in the monastery become angry and jealous, because Willem eats and drinks too much. Sometimes Willem has fights with the other monks and finally the abbot decides to part with Willem. He knows that in the woods of the valley of the River Sigré there live some highwaymen, who rob and murder passers-bys. He intends to send Willem to the coast to buy fish; when Willem would pass through the woods, the highwaymen would attack and kill him, and the monastery would be freed of the troublesome monk. Willem, however, sees through the abbot's evil intentions and makes a plan to save his life. Knowing that the abbot had forbidden him to defend himself, except when the highwaymen robbed him of his trousers (only then was he allowed to fight against them, but only with flesh and bones), Willem secretly has a precious belt of gold made, set with jewels which he attaches to his trousers. If the highwaymen would rob his belt, he would be allowed to kill them.

Willem longs for the fight with the highwaymen, but on the outward voyage, he does not meet any of them. On their way home he incites his servant to sing in order to lure the highwaymen (see II. 19-23 above). [Continuation of the first Dutch fragment:] In the meantime the highwaymen had come home after a foray and they had heard the servant's ballad. They had murdered a nobleman and his family and they had stolen his belongings. They were used to committing such crimes. They were seated at the table and were just about to have their meal. The robber-chief is named Gonnart; he is the most ruthless man ever seen and a villain of the worst kind; he is very good at lying in ambush and nobody can escape him. He never feels any compassion for his victims. He is so depraved, that God may damn him and persecute all his accomplices. Undoubtedly they have heard the servant's

ballad. The highwaymen jump into the saddle and ride to the singer. They are very glad to see a monk with his servant, because even though minstrels do not have much money, these two would have enough. They attack from two sides and they overpower Willem and his servant. They tie up both his hands and feet and treat him with contempt. Then they throw him into a trench. Willem says: "You have done my servant an injustice; give me back my servant, then you will do well." When Gonnart hears this, he says: "You have to sing another tune, before you will get off scot-free. By the devil, you must take the bad consequences and you will lose all your possessions. You will leave us nude and you should be glad to escape with your life." After these malicious words, the highwaymen rob Willem of his money, goods, and clothes, leaving him only with his trousers. Willem thought the time for revenge had come and he said: "I still have my trousers with the precious belt. This precious belt is worth more than all the money and goods you have stolen from me." Everyone is eager to get the belt, but the robber-chief says: "The belt is mine." The noble count, however, says: "If you leave me entirely nude, it will be a great disgrace to you." And the blockhead says: "That is not my intention, I will give you mine, therefore we will exchange belts." And Gonnart dismounts and hurries to the count. He kneels before the old warrior and hastily tries to unfasten and steal the precious belt. But, thank heaven! God would change everything for the best. When the count sees the robber-chief kneeling before the evil man, who had brought him in such dire straits, he raises his fist and with one blow of the fist he beats him to death. [End of the first fragment.]

In the subsequent fight, Willem killes all but one of the highwaymen with the hindleg of his pack-animal. Willem frees his servant and goes back to the monastery. Eventually all is forgiven and forgotten. At night Willem has a vision, in which an angel tells him to leave the monastery and to found his own. The monastery would be named after its founder: Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert.

Only two fragments of the Middle Dutch version of the Old French epic *Montage Guillaume*[2] have been preserved, each about 200 (209+220) lines. The first fragment shows the fight with the fifteen highwaymen. In the second Willem is imprisoned by the Sarassin Emir Synagon in Palerne. It is the so-called "Interpolation of Synagon." After Willem had founded a hermitage in the desert, he is taken prisoner by Synagon. For seven years Willem is in prison. Yet God does not abandon him in his plight, even though He allows it to go on for such a long time. Willem would be delivered by a noble man, a proud

knight named Landri li Timonier. He is of Willem's lineage. After a crusade to Jerusalem pirates take him prisoner. They bring him to Synagon and when Synagon discovers that Landri is of Willem's lineage, he tells Landri that he had kept Willem in prison. [End of the Middle Dutch fragment.] Synagon makes the proposal that Landri would come back with a big army under the command of King Louis to fight for the possession of Palerne. During the big fight Willem manages to escape. Synagon is killed and Willem goes back to his hermitage.

The *Moniage Guillaume* ends with the Siege of Paris and the fight between Guillaume and the giant Ysoire who is killed by Guillaume. Guillaume goes back to his hermitage again, where he builds a bridge and where he has a fight with the devil.

Details

The two fragments of this Middle Dutch epic consist of a double sheet of parchment. It is kept in the Library of the University of Ghent (Belgium). Its shelf mark is UB HS 2749, 10. The fragment is partially damaged; it has been cut off at four sides, and consequently there is some loss of text. The worst loss of text is at pages 3 and 4 (Interpolation of Synagon). It is the fourth innermost sheet of the section. Consequently, one cas conclude that both fragments, the "Fight with the fifteen highwaymen" and the "Interpolation of Synagon", are not directly linked to each other. In the Old French original there are 1700 lines between the two fragments. The loss in the Middle Dutch fragments is about 1620 verses. It is plausible that the whole story of the Old French original has been translated into Middle Dutch. One can only guess about the length of the complete story of *Willem van Oringen*. It is probably about the same length of the *Moniage Guillaume II*, which makes it about 6000 lines long. It is unknown whether or not the Middle Dutch poet has written other stories about Willem van Oringen.

The language of the preserved fragments is the West Middle Dutch language of the Countship of Holland, and it suggests a dialiect of Brabant[3] (the preserved double sheet dates from the thirteenth[4] or fourteenth[5] century). The poet of *Willem van Oringen* is barely known: only from second hand information do we know his name; he is mentioned by Jacob van Maerlant in his *Spiegel historiael* (1283-1288):[6] "van Haerlem Clays, ver Brechten sone" (= [Clays < Nicolaas]

Nicholas van Haerlem, son of Lady Bridget; see below). In imitation of Jacob van Maerlant, Jan van Boendale (ca. 1280-1350) also called him "Clays" in his *Brabantsche Yeesten* (1325-1333).[7]

The narrative of *Guillaume d'Orange* was well-known both in Holland as well as in Germany.[8] The Middle Dutch poet Jacob van Maerlant has written:

> Oec sijn some Walsche boeke,
> Die werdich sijn grotere vloeke,
> Die van Willemme van Oringen
> Grote sterke ystorien singen,
> Ende wilne beter dan Karel maken.
> Willem, dat sijn ware saken,
> Was een Duutsch, een ridder goet,
> Maer niet so vorbare, datmen moet
> Karle iet geliken alleene,
> Maer minder noemen ende noch als clene
> Alse Roelant was of Olivier,
> Of van Denemaerken Ogier.
> (…)
> Si wanen die Arleblanke comen,
> Alsi daer hebben vernomen
> Die grave liggende harenthare,
> Dat van Willems orloghe ware; (ll. 41-52, 59-62)[9]

> (Some French books exist which would deserve great maledictions, which sing hardly credible stories of Willem van Oringen, which try to make him more noble than Charlemagne. The real story is, that Willem was a good Frankish [Dutch?] knight, but he was not so prominent that he was possibly equal to Charlemagne. In fact he was considered as inferior to Charlemagne, and what's more: he was a less important knight than Roland, Oliver or Oger the Dane. (. . .) The people who visit Aries think the graves, which are lying everywhere, are the graves of the knights who had fallen in Willem's battle [= the Battle of Aliscamps].)

In ll. 41-45 Jacob van Maerlant has given his reaction to Clays van Haerlem, who in 11. 233-236 of the extant fragments calls his

translation "a beautiful story of how Willem was doing, from the best of all the Old French books, the best ones of their kind."[10] Clays was quite familiar with the Old French books about Charlemagne and Guillaume d'Orange. In his opinion the *Cycle de Guillaume* was the best, and the best part of it was the *Moniage Guillaume.*

Jonckbloet thought that Clays was a member of the court of Willem I, Count of Holland (1203/1206-1222). Only Clays's mother would have been of noble birth, while his father remains unknown.[11] Clays would have translated the *Moniage Guillaume* on behalf of his lord, Count Willem I, perhaps in order to induce him to participate in the Fifth Crusade (1217-1220). (With his second son Willem, Count Floris III (1157-1190) had taken part in the Third Crusade from 1189 to 1192; in 1190 Floris III died of the plague.)[12] After reading Coenen's thesis about the Court of Holland in the thirteenth century,[13] I am inclined to think that Clays was indeed a member of the Dutch Court; he could be identified as Nicolaas Persijn van Haerlem, who appeared as a witness in the Count's charters between 1224 and 1255. His father was Jan Persijn and his mother an unknown sister of Ijsbrand van Haerlem's. So Ijsbrand's sister could be "Ver Brechten of Haerlem." The Persijn family did not appear on the political stage until the end of the twelfth century. Jan (= John) Persijn, the first of this lineage, appeared as a witness in the Count's charters between 1204 and 1224 conjointly with members of the Van Haerlem lineage. Nicolaas Persijn was the only member of the family who called himself "Van Haerlem." In 1255 he was specified as "Nicolaus, miles de Harlem, dictus Persin;"[14] and in the *Historia dominorum de Teysterband, Arckel, Egmonda, Brederoede, Ysselsteyn etc.* the following is recorded: "Anno Domini MCCLV obiit in Velsen Nicolaus de Haerlem miles dictus Persyn."[15] However, Nicolaas was not a member of the Court of Count Willem I; he really was a member of the Court of Count Willem II, for whose son Floris V Jacob van Maerlant wrote the *Spiegel Historiael* (in which Clays van Haerlem is mentioned). It is hardly possible for Nicolaas to have translated the *Moniage Guillaume* on behalf of Count Willem I: Nicolaas was too young to do it before 1217; yet I am inclined to think that he did it on behalf of his Count, Willem II, who had been elected Roman King by the German Electors to become Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (Woeringen near Cologne, October 3, 1247; his election was upheld in Brunswick, March 25th, 1252).[16] Consequently, Willem II followed in the footsteps of Charlemagne's successors by both election, and descent.[17]

According to another hypothesis Nicolaas translated the *Moniage Guillaume* to please the Dutch Count, because the tradition—both oral and written—suggests that the Dutch Counts descended from Guillaume d'Aquitaine. The *Moniage Guillaume* is then an epic which contains a part of the early family-history of the Counts.[18] In this case, it is probably not without reason that a similarity of names exists: many Dutch Counts are called "Willem" (= Guillaume).

The Tradition

There are two versions of the *Moniage Guillaume* in eight different manuscripts. The oldest and shorter version, the so-called *Moniage Guillaume I* (934 verses; incomplete) dates from about 1160, the younger one, the *Moniage Guillaume II* (6629 verses) dates from about 1180. The episode in which Guillaume is kept in prison in Palerne by Synagon did not occur in the lost original, but has been added to the narrative material. Thus it has been called: the "Interpolation of Synagon."[19] Only the *Moniage Guillaume II* contains this interpolation. The contents of *Willem van Oringen*, lines 1-209, correspond with the *Moniage Guillaume I*, verses 435-596, laisses XVII-XXII and with the *Moniage Guillaume II*, verses 1170-1510, laisses XXIV-XXVIII; the Middle Dutch verses 210-429 correspond with the *Moniage Guillaume II*, lines 3221-3438, laisses LIX-LXI. The Middle Dutch fragment *Willem van Oringen* is related to the *Moniage Guillaume H.* Not only owing to the "Interpolation of Synagon," but also owing to the rather literal translation of some verses.

In order to argue the fact that *Willem van Oringen* is a translation of the *Moniage Guillaume II*, I offer the following examples:

> Li quens monta, ses somiers fait troser,
> Vers l'abëie s'est mis au retorner.
> Ainc ne fina dusqu'au bos de Biaucler,
> Mais des larrons nen ot mie trové.
> *(Moniage Guillaume I*, ll. 434-437)

In these lines the narrative space is the "Bois de Beaucler," but in both the second version and the Middle Dutch fragment the space is the "Val de Sigré" and "Dal ten Sigeren" (see the beginning of this article); originally the narrative space is "Bois de Beaucler", so "Val de Sigré" is an error:

Qu'en la valee entra sans demorance:
Grant sont li caisne et li fau et li tramble,
Li destrois fors, la valee soutaigne.
(...)
Mar commencha li famles a canter,
Car li larron, cui Dieus puist craventer,
Qui repairoient ens el val de Sigré
(Moniage Guillaume II, ll. 1153-1155, 1207-1209)

The following lines concern the aforementioned robbery of the highwaymen: in each of the three texts they hear the servant's singing. They had just come back from a robbery and were eating. In two texts the facts correspond very well: the highwaymen had robbed and killed a noble man and his family. The literal conformity between "maisnie" in *Moniage Guillaume II,* l. 1212 and "maisnide" in *Willem van Oringen,* l. 43 is especially remarkable:

Ende sine *maisnide* ende sijn conroet
(Willem van Oringen, l. 43)

Erent venu d'une maison preer
D'un gentil home qu'il orent desreubé
Et sa *maisnie* et lui enkenbelé.
Dieus de ses fieus lui orent mort jeté,
Et lui mëisme et sa feme au vis cler
Orent laissié loiés en un fossé,
Et de lor filles fisent lor volonté.
Ne sai que die, mout les ont vergondés,
Tout lor avoir en orent amené,
Dras et hermins et cevaus sejornés.
(Montage Guillaume II, ll. 1210-1219)

In the *Moniage Guillaume I,* however, the highwaymen had robbed a monastery:

Un hermitage avoient dérobé,
Et les convers orent tous estranglés,
Deniers et robes en orent aporté.
(Moniage Guillaume I, ll. 468-470)

In his translation the Middle Dutch poet has followed the Old French original very closely, but he had shortened the text: the 242 lines of the *Moniage Guillaume II* have become 209 lines in Middle Dutch. Sometimes the poet has used a literal translation, sometimes the translation is free. In addition, the poet has combined several verses and has used amplifications and asides. He has also given his own interpretation of the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Willem's servant is more obliging and more docile than in the *Moniage Guillaume.*

Although only one double sheet has been preserved with some parts badly damaged, we do have a good impression of the story of Willem van Oringen and his connection with the Old French epics. The Middle Dutch version is, though not very original, after all a pleasant adaptation of the *Moniage Guillaume II.* Was it Clays van Haerlem's intention to please Count Willem II, who would soon be crowned Emperor, by calling his attention to his illustrious namesake Willem, the cousin of the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, whose throne Count Willem II had already ascended as Roman King? It is a pity that only this double sheet has been preserved. What a wealth of information the complete book of *Willem van Oringen* would have given us![20]

Notes

1. G. Kalff, ed., *Middelnederlandsche epische fragmenten* (Arnhem: Gysbers & Van Loon, 1968; unaltered reprint of 1886), 99-119.

2. W. Cloetta, *Les deux redactions en vers du Moniage Guillaume, Chansons de geste du XIIe siècle, publiées d'après tous les manuscrits connus,* t.I (Paris, 1906).

3. Based on an examination of rhyme-words E. van den Berg argues that *Willem van Oringen* was originally written in the Dutch dialect of the countship Holland instead of the dialect of Brabant, in: "De Karelepiek. Van voorgedragen tot individueel gelezen literatuur," A. M. J. van Buuren et al. (eds.), *Tussentijds. Bundel studies aangeboden aan* W.P. *Gerritsen ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftigste verjaardag* (Utrecht: HES, 1985), 23-24.

4. W. J. A. Jonckbloet, *Geschiedenis der Middennederlandsche dichtkunst,* vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1851): 321-325; J. te Winkel, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Letterkunde van Middeleeuwen tot Rederijkerstijd,* vol. I (Haarlem, 1922) 322; J. F. Willems, "Fragment van het oude riddergedicht 'Willem van Oranje,'" *Belgisch Museum 7* (1843), 185-208 [Belgisch Museum voor de Nederduitsche Tael- en Letterkunde en de Geschiedenis des Vaderlands, uitgegeven op last der Maatschappij tot bevordering der Nederduitsche Tael- en Letterkunde, door J.F. Willems. Gent: F. and E. Gyselynck, 1837-1846 (10 volumes)]; F.J. Mone, *Übersicht der Niederländischen Volks-literatur älterer Zeit* (Tubingen, 1838).

5. H. Kienhorst, *De handschriften van de Middelnederlandse ridderepiek. Een codicologische beschrijving,* vol. 1 (Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1989): 220; E. Verwijs and J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek, voltooid door F.A. Stoett,* vol 10: *Tekstcritiek* van J. Verdam and *Bouwstoffen,* Eerste gedeelte (A-F) door Willem de Vreese; Tweede gedeelte (G-Z) door G.I. Lieftinck (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff,

1927-1952); A. Derolez, *Beknopte catalogus van de Middeleeuwse handschriften in de Universiteitsbibliotheek te Gent, verworven sinds 1852* (Gent, 1971), 39.

6. Jacob van Maerlant, *Spiegel historiael*, vol. III, part IV, book I, cap. 29. Edition: M. de Vries & E. Verwijs (Utrecht: HES, 1982; reprint of the edition Leyden, 1861-1879), 204-05.

7. Jan de Klerk [van Boendale], *De Brabantsche Yeesten, of Rymkronyk van Braband*, ed. J.F. Willems, vol. I (Brussels, 1839), Book II, ll. 4162-97.

8. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm* trans. Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney M. Johnson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984).

9. Jacob van Maerlant, 204-05.

10. "Ene aventure scone, / Ende van dien boeke dbeste te voren / Ende van den walsce ende vercoren, / Hoe Willem vor vort an." (ll. 233-236)

11. Jonckbloet, *Geschiedenis der Middennederlandsche dichtkunst*, vol. I: 321-24.

12. Willem I indeed participated in the Fifth Crusade, because he wanted his excommunication to be withdrawn.

13. J. M. A. Coenen, *Graaf en grafelijkheid. Een onderzoek naar de graven van Holland en hun omgeving in de dertiende eeuw*, dissertation Utrecht (n.p., 1986), 69. (I thank W. van Anrooij who drew my attention to this fact.)

14. W. van Anrooij, "Aquitanië en de herkomst van de Hollandse graven, een 14e-eeuwse traditie," D. E. H. de Boer, E. H. P. Cordfunke and F. W. N. Hugenholz, eds., *Holland in wording. De ontstaansgeschiedenis van het graafschap Holland tot het begin van de vijftiende eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1991), *Muiderberg symposia* 5, 140-41.

15. Van Anrooij, 141; W.F. Andriessen: *Historia dominorum de Teysterband, Arckel, Egmonda, Brederoede, Ysselsteyn etc.* (Purmerend, 1933), thesis Amsterdam: 131.

16. Emperor Frederick II (1212-1250) was dethroned by Pope Innocence IV in 1245 (Concile de Lyon). When Frederick's son Conrad IV (1237-1254) died, Count Willem II wanted to be crowned as Emperor in Rome. But first he wanted to subject the West-Frisians. In 1256 they killed him when he had fallen through the ice at Hoogwoud.

17. The Counts of Holland were collaterals of Charlemagne via Judith of West-Francia (born ca. 844), Arnulf I of Flanders (born ca. 865; died ca. 964), Hildegard of Flanders (died after 975), who was married to Dirk II of Holland (died 988). See *Gens Nostra* 45 (1990), 365-79.

18.Van Anrooij, "Aquitanië": 141. See also H. van Dijk, "Maerlant en de fantasten", in F.A.H. Berndsen, H. van Dijk, G.J. de Vries (eds.), *Poëtica-onderzoek in de praktijk* (Groningen: Passage, 1993), 33-38.

19. M. Tyssens, *La geste de Guillaume d'Orange dans les manuscrits cycliques* (Paris: Société d'Édition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1967), 315-17.

20. I wish to express my gratitude to Mrs Drs. Eunice Odeh-Oliemans, who was so kind as to read through and correct the English version of this article.