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Medieval Britain and the Transmission of the *Chansons de Geste*

Britain, particularly England, looms large in the history of the *chansons de geste*. Some of the earliest copies of these works are associated with the insular world. The *Chanson de Roland*, the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne,* the *Chançun de Willame* and *Gormont and Isembart* appear in particularly early manuscripts in the hands of insular scribes.[1] And works in this mode also feature prominently in the history of the Anglo-Norman book. Keith Busby's *Codex and Context* (2002) highlighted the pervasiveness and sophistication of the reception of such works in England. Indeed, *chansons de geste* and saints' lives are, perhaps, the best-represented categories of narrative in Anglo-Norman codices (Busby 2002, II:500). Nonetheless, evidence for "original" *chansons de geste* being composed in England is rather more limited. There has been some debate as to whether texts like the *Chançun de Willame* or even the *Roland* itself might have originated in England, but scholarly consensus still favours an ultimate origin in France.[2] However, reception of these works north of the Channel was by no means passive. Many underwent significant adaptation in Anglo-Norman dialect and other insular vernaculars. Additionally, the corpus of *chansons de geste* in insular circulation had a different shape to that in France and reflects somewhat different priorities. Certain texts seem to have been more popular in the insular world than on the continent while some other texts which had wide circulation in France – for instance, *Berte aus grans piés*, *Girbert de Mez* and *Girart de Roussillon* – appear not to have made any impression in England. It is apparent that the *chansons de geste* which appear in early copies or which circulated widely in England seem to have focused on holy war, on religiously-charged conflicts with an ideological "other", rather than on internecine feuding or tensions between rulers and elites (Busby 2002, II:501; Field 2010; Furrow 2010).

A significant number of *chansons de geste* were copied or read in medieval England and there is substantial further evidence of lost codices in wills, inventories and translations into other languages. Marianne Ailes and Philippa Hardman's recent study (2017, 32–52) of

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[1] This reflects a wider precocity that has long been observed in in Anglo-Norman writing, see Legge (1965). Ian Short (1991, 229) goes so far as to suggest that "French literature begins, to all intents and purposes in twelfth century Anglo-Norman England".

[2] The most convincing case is for an Anglo-Norman redactor composing part of *Willame*, but it is not a particularly large intervention, see Bennett (1987).

the reception of the Charlemagne legend in England has demonstrated beyond doubt the appeal of the *cycle du roi* in the insular world, and also highlighted evidence for the circulation of material from every major grouping of *chansons de geste*. The chronological profile of insular manuscripts is similar to those from France – most of them date from the thirteenth century – but there is ongoing evidence of reading and copying into the age of print.[3] Contemporary allusions and anecdotes also suggest *chansons de geste* were a staple of Francophone literary culture north of the Channel. Furthermore, a number of these works were translated into English or Welsh, ostensibly from copies available locally. Indeed, Britain seems to have acted as a conduit for the wider circulation of these texts: it seems likely that many translations of French epic in Norway and in Ireland were made from copies that originated in England.[4]

The insular reception of the *chansons de geste*

There are several reasons why the *chansons de geste* might have been particularly and enduringly appealing to insular audiences. For all that nineteenth-century scholarship suggested that the stories of Charlemagne and his vassals were distinctively "French", their widespread diffusion in medieval Europe suggests that their appeal was more universal.[5] On one level, this reflects Charlemagne's status as a Christian hero and one of the nine worthies, but the historical Charlemagne's imperial reach also extended far beyond French-speaking lands and many of his vassals came from further afield. Of course, Britain was not part of the Carolingian imperium, but the emperor's connection with the island seems to have been considered particularly close in the later Middle Ages. Some strands of medieval tradition associated Charlemagne with England. The Oxford manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland*, which was copied by an Anglo-Norman scribe, includes England, Scotland and Ireland among Charlemagne's possessions when Roland lists the territories he has conquered for the emperor:

> Jo l'en cunquis e Escoce e Irlande,
>
> E Engletere, que il teneit sa cambre (Short 2005, ll, 2331–2332)

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[3] The apparent taste for the *chansons de geste* in England after the Norman Conquest is noted by Rosalind Field (1999, 155). For an overview of the long-term influence of the *chansons de geste* in England, see Furrow (2010, 67–69).

[4] On translations into Welsh and Irish, see Poppe (2014) and Byrne (2022). On the Norse material, see Leach (1921, 227–264) and Kramarz-Bein (2022).

[5] See further Di Vanna (2011).

> [With it [my sword] I have conquered for him Scotland and Ireland,/ and England, which he calls his chamber][6]

A later hand has added Wales to this list. Other versions of *Roland* copied by continental scribes also list England among Charlemagne's conquests, though they less frequently allude to other territories in the insular world (Ailes and Hardman 2017, 230). While these claims have no basis in historical fact, variations of them seem to have been in relatively wide circulation. *Aspremont* and the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* also number England among Charlemagne's possessions (Suard 2008, 814–817). The point is made, using strikingly similar terminology, in Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (1865–1886, II:4–6).

> Anglia Britannica alter orbis appellatur; quam olim Carolus Magnus prae omnium bonorum copia cameram suam vocavit.
>
> [English Britain is called another world, which once Charlemagne, because of the many good things found there, called his own chamber.]

The wide dissemination of both Higden's Latin work and Trevisa's English translation of it kept this claim in circulation into the early modern period.

The French epic offered particularly potent mythmaking for the newly established Norman rulers. It is evident why William and his successors might have wished to compare themselves with the Christian emperor, *par excellence*, particularly one whose reach was thought to encompass Britain.[7] The outbreak of the Hundred Years' War seems to have sustained interest in the Matter of France, rather than undermined it; the idea that Charlemagne's realm encompassed both France and England may well have appealed to English kings who were pressing their claim to the French throne and asserting the close historical relationship of the two realms. There is a recurrent emphasis in manuscripts and texts of this period that "the story of Charlemagne is part of the history of Britain" (Ailes and Hardman 2015, 34). On the wider European stage, the deeds of Charlemagne against non-

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[6] The Oxford *Roland* also refers to Charlemagne as "nostre impereur" (l. 1) – this is potentially a formulation carried over from a continental exemplar but could also readily have been applied by the Anglo-Norman copyist. The poem also asserts that Charlemagne established the papal donation, "Peter's Pence", in Britain (ll. 372–373). These details are discussed further in Ailes and Hardman (2017, 227–234).

[7] See, for instance: Douglas (1960); Owen (1982); Sayers (1983, 77–88); Short (2007). Wendy Hoofnagle (2016) has recently highlighted the importance of Charlemagne as an "imperial model" to the Anglo-Normans; see also Taylor (2017).

Christians were also interpreted as proto-crusading endeavours – lending particular contemporary resonance to these stories.[8]

The most obvious and well-known evidence for the popularity of the *chansons de geste* in Britain are the manuscripts that survive in Anglo-Norman dialect.[9] Additionally, a good number of manuscripts in continental French appear to have been brought to England at some point in the Middle Ages (Careri 2006). Ownership marks, marginal notes in English language or script, or evidence of insular scribal habits are good indications of a manuscript's having been in Britain, but any estimate of the number of manuscripts in this category must always be conservative, since many codices offer no hints as to their provenance or early movements. A number of fragments of French-language manuscripts have also been found in the binding of books from Britain. Surviving wills and inventories can point to manuscripts that were once read in Britain, but which now no longer survive (Ailes and Hardman 2017, 32–52 and 57–73).[10]

The texts associated with Charlemagne, the *cycle du roi*, are by far the most studied of the *chansons de geste* in insular circulation. This is, in part, because almost all the surviving Middle English translations were made from these works, but also because Charlemagne texts have enjoyed greater attention from scholars of Francophone literature in general. Charlemagne narratives also seem to have been the works which travelled beyond England and Britain most readily. All but one of the surviving translations of *chansons de geste* into Welsh, Norse and Irish are from this cycle.[11] A handful of works from this category were particularly widely circulated in Britain. *Aspremont* seems to have been by far the most well-known work of the group. *Fierabras* was also very well-known, followed by *Otinel* and the *Chanson de Roland.* Other works survive in fewer attested copies. The works in wider circulation have a good deal in common with each other. All focus on the conflict between Charlemagne's Christian forces and Muslim enemies in either or both of Spain and Italy. *Fierabras* and *Otinel* tell similar stories of the conversion of Islamic antagonists. *Aspremont* also features the conversion of the

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[8] For a recent discussion of how medieval accounts of the crusades drew on the *chansons de geste*, see Parsons (2015).

[9] See Dean and Boulton (1999) and Field (2010).

[10] This survey ranges well beyond the Charlemagne material which is the focus of the book and offers the most comprehensive overview of the circulation of *chansons de geste* in England.

[11] The exception is the Norse translation of *Le Moniage Guillaume*, though it also proves the rule: in this adaptation, the story is transported from the reign of Charlemagne's son, Louis, back into the period of the twelve peers.

Muslim Balan and of Agolant's queen. Passion relics play an important part in both *Aspremont* and *Fierabras*. Additionally, all these texts feature Roland in a prominent role.

By any measure, *Aspremont* is the *chanson de geste* with the widest circulation in the insular world. It relates an invasion of the Italian peninsula by Muslims from Africa and Charlemagne's defence of that territory. Roland appears as a youth and the work is, in some respects, an *enfances* narrative. This work is set in parts of southern Italy where the Normans were present into the middle of the thirteenth century and where they paralleled their exploits with those of Charlemagne (Busby 2002, II:495, 501). Indeed, the depiction of holy war in this work may have had particular resonance in the age of the crusades. Ambroise (1897, ll. 516, 4188, 8491–8493) records that *Aspremont* was recited for the armies of Richard and Philip Augustus when they wintered in Sicily in 1190–1191.[12] Nine manuscript copies in insular circulation survive, of which seven are in Anglo-Norman dialect (Dean and Boulton 1999, 52). The other two copies, Nottingham, University Library, MS WLC Lm6 (The Laval Manuscript) and London, British Library, MS Royal 15 E VI (The Talbot Shrewsbury Book), were written in France and brought to England. The Laval Manuscript dates from the first half of the thirteenth century and was probably taken to England after the sacking of the castle at Laval in 1428 (Cowper 1959). The Talbot Shrewsbury Book may have been produced in Rouen in 1444 or 1445, but for an English patron, John Talbot, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury. Talbot presented the manuscript to Margaret of Anjou on her engagement to Henry VI and it likely travelled to England with Margaret when she married in 1445.[13] A further copy is attested as part of Guy de Beauchamp's bequest to the Cistercians at Bordesley Abbey in the first decade of the fourteenth century.[14] Two copies which were at St Augustine's Benedictine Abbey at Canterbury in the late medieval period have survived as Cologny-Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, MS Bodmer 11 and London, British Library, MS Additional 35289 (Busby 2002, I:125). Other attestations of this work are less secure. There is some doubt as to whether "Bella Karoli et Agulandi" listed among the books at Titchfield Abbey is *Aspremont,* since, as Ailes and Hardman (2017, 47) point out, the title could also describe *Pseudo-Turpin*.

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[12] See also Van Emden (1992).

[13] On this book, see A. Taylor (2011); C. Taylor (2011); Ailes (2017).

[14] The editor of the inventory of Dover Priory, William P. Stoneman (1999, item 364), suggests a book described in their records as "le Romonse du roy Charlemagne". It does not seem to me that the catalogue entry offers enough information to make this identification. On the Bordesley donation, see Blaess (1957) and Bell (1992). On French manuscripts in ecclesiastical houses more generally, see Blaess (1973).

Fierabras is also strongly associated with the insular context: of the nine copies of the work which came down to the modern era in French, five are either in Anglo-Norman dialect or have insular provenance. Further copies are attested as part of the Bordesley bequest and in the library of the Benedictines at Dover in 1389 (Stoneman 1999, item 170). A distinctively insular tradition of adaptation is in evidence here. *Fierabras* circulates in Britain in both its continental form and in a heavily reworked and abbreviated Anglo-Norman version. Three Middle English works draw on versions of *Fierabras*: *Sir Ferumbras*, *Firumbras* and *The Sowdone of Babylone*.[15] There is evidence of interest in this text throughout the medieval period. A copy of the continental French version appears in the Talbot Shrewsbury Book compiled in the 1440s. The level of detail offered about *Fierabras* in the *Bruce* suggests John Barbour knew the work very well, though it is unclear whether he was familiar with the text in French or in English (Barbour 1985, II:bk. 3, 435–466).[16]

Events in *Otinel* are largely set in Italy and may reflect similar interests to those which motivated the copying and circulation of *Aspremont*. The text also has a good deal in common with *Fierabras* in terms of the particular conventions of the *chansons de geste* it uses.[17] Like *Aspremont* and *Fierabras*, *Otinel* is not merely attested in a high number of insular copies, but a high proportion of all attestations are from north of the Channel. Two of the three surviving French manuscripts are Anglo-Norman. Indeed, the fragment preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS n. a. fr. 5094 was copied alongside a text of *Aspremont* (Dean and Boulton 1999, 53).[18] The Benedictines at Peterborough Abbey held a copy of this work, bound with a text of *Gui de Bourgogne* (Friis-Jensen and Willoughby 2001, 173–174). A further copy seems to have been in the library of Isabella of France (Cavanaugh 1980, 458).[19] There are three distinct Middle English reworkings of *Otinel*: *Otuel*, *Duke Rowland and Sir Ottuell*, *Otuel and Roland*, though the freedom with which adaptations have been made makes it difficult to trace connections between the English and French texts.[20]

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[15] For a comprehensive overview of *Fierabras* adaptations in Anglo-Norman and Middle English, see Ailes and Hardman (2017, 264–345).

[16] See further Ailes (1989, 95–98).

[17] On the relationship between *Fierabras* and *Otinel*, see Ailes (2012).

[18] See further Camps (2016).

[19] Discussed in Ailes and Hardman (2017, 51–52).

[20] For a discussion of the relationship between these texts and French versions of the story, see Ailes and Hardman (2017, 77–79). On the insular tradition of *Otinel* more broadly, see ibid. (346–401).

Interest in *La Chanson de Roland* spans the medieval period in England. Three medieval manuscripts or fragments with insular provenance survive, accounting for a third of the total copies of the French *Roland* now in existence. Most famous, of course, is the Oxford manuscript, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 23, copied by an Anglo-Norman scribe and representing one of earliest surviving *chansons de geste*. The other two manuscripts are of the rhymed version of the text, rather than a work in the assonanced tradition (Kibler 1979). Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 3. 32 was copied in France early in the fifteenth century and brought to England soon afterwards. The remaining survival, London, British Library, MS Additional 41295 (the "Bogdanow fragment") is a leaf from a thirteenth century continental French copy of the rhymed *Roland* that survives as a pastedown in a theological book owned by John Stokes of All Souls College, Oxford (d. 1503) (Bogdanow 1960). A Middle English *Roland* dating from around 1400 also survives in fragmentary form – it appears to derive from a variant version of the French text and to have been substantially adapted in English translation (Herrtage 1882, 105–136).[21]

The appeal of the *chansons de geste* in England was by no means limited to the stories of Charlemagne. There is also considerable evidence for the wide insular circulation of *Aliscans*, *Foulque de Candie* and *Renaut de Montauban*, in particular. Like the four texts of the *cycle du roi* already discussed, these works focus on holy wars and holy warriors; however, unlike the Charlemagne material they seem to have had limited appeal beyond England and in languages other than French. The insular popularity of *Aspremont*, *Fierabras*, *Otinel* and the *Chanson de Roland* enabled the diffusion and translation of these texts in other parts of north-west Europe and allowed them to penetrate regions where works in French from the continent had very limited circulation.

Onward transmission in Norway, Wales and Ireland

Evidence of *chansons de geste* being transmitted from Britain to other parts of Europe first emerges at the end of the twelfth century when Konrad produces his *Rolandslied* in Middle High German at the behest of Henry II's daughter, Matilda, wife of the Duke of Saxony. The work bears particularly close comparison to versions of *Roland* in Anglo-Norman and to the Welsh adaptation of the poem. It seems likely that an insular copy of *Roland* was available to the author of this German adaptation (Short 2007, 385). Although particularly early, the

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[21] On this text, see Hardman (2008).

Rolandslied also appears to be a unique case and no further translations of the French epic into German seem to have drawn on insular sources.

The largest bodies of translations from Anglo-Norman sources are in Old Norse and Welsh and are predominantly thirteenth-century in date. Charlemagne cycles in these languages compiled in that period seem likely to have relied heavily on insular source texts. A statement at the start of the one of the works in the Old Norse Charlemagne cycle gives some indication of how readily *chansons de geste* travelled through Britain and beyond in this period:

> Fann þessa sögu herra Bjarni Erlingsson or Bjarkey ritaða ok sagða í ensku máli í Skotlandi, þá er hann sat þar um vetrinn eptir fráfall Alexandri konungs. (Unger 1860, 50)

> [Lord Bjarni Erlingsson of Bjarkey found this saga written and told in the English language, in Scotland, when he stayed there during the winter after the death of King Alexander.] (Hieatt 1975, 178)

The king mentioned here is Alexander III of Scotland, who died in 1286. Bjarni Erlingsson visited the English and Scottish courts on diplomatic missions for Norway's kings on a number of occasions in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (Leach 1921, 68–71, 241–245). The English text Bjarni seems to have brought back to Norway was clearly a translation of an Old French *chanson de geste*, *Doon de la Roche*.[22] With a *terminus ante quem* of 1286, this seems to be the earliest secure evidence we have for the translation of Old French epic into English. We have no other witness to the circulation of *Doon de la Roche* in medieval Britain in either French or in English. Indeed, only two manuscripts of the work now survive in French, but they seem to be from a very different version of *Doon* from what which informed the Old Norse text (Meyer and Huot 1921). The layers of translation and textual movements that lie behind this Norse *Doon de la Roche* – from France to Scotland to Norway and from French to English to Norse – reflect the mobility of the *chansons de geste* and the ease with which they were translated into new linguistic and cultural contexts.

The Norse *Doon* survives as part of a larger cycle of Charlemagne works known as *Karlamagnús saga.* This cycle now only survives in Icelandic manuscripts and comes down to us in two versions – one substantially less extensive than the other. Its sources are primarily *chansons de geste* along with texts in other genres, such as Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum*

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[22] See further, Smyser (1941) and, more recently, O'Connor (2005). Constance Hieatt (1978a) suggests that some other parts of the *Karlamagnús Saga* might also be from Middle English based on the presence of certain loan words, but further work is needed to verify this possibility.

Historiale and, of course, the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. Unfortunately, no other work in the compilation is prefaced by such a clear statement of its origins. Nonetheless, it has generally been supposed that a number of these works also came to Norway via Britain, though the evidence for this is less clear-cut than in the case of *Ólif ok Landres*.[23] In practice, unless an individual text shows particularly close similarities to a distinctively insular redaction or carries over peculiarly Anglo-Norman or even English versions of proper nouns, it is difficult to be certain. Certainly, political and cultural conditions were favourable for such transmission. It is clear that close ties between English and Norwegian courts, particularly those of Henry III and Hákon Hákonarson, facilitated the transmission and translation of a range of texts, such as works of Marie de France.[24] In some cases, the Norse translations of *chansons de geste* are particularly close to Anglo-Norman versions (Kramarz-Bein 2022, 21).[25] For instance, *Af Runzival Bardaga* is from a version of the *Chanson de Roland* very similar to that preserved in the Oxford manuscript and to the source of the Welsh translation, *Cân Rolant* (Kramarz-Bein 2022, 21). The personal names in this translation also appear to reflect Anglo-Norman, rather than continental French, forms (Leach 1921, 251). Other sources of the cycle are works closely associated with the Anglo-Norman context. As we have seen, the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, seems to have been the most popular *chanson de geste* in circulation in Britain. It is one of the sources for Branch II of the *Karlamagnús saga*, *Af Agulando konungi* (ibid., 382–383).[26] Other works translated in Norway seem also to be narratives popular north of the English Channel. The *Chanson d'Otinel* is translated as Branch VI – the Norse text's use of the form "Otuel", rather than "Otinel" reflects renderings of the character's name in Anglo-Norman and strongly suggests a source in insular French. *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* (Branch VII) is otherwise known in a unique (now lost) Anglo-Norman manuscript and also in Welsh translation. The work has left no trace in the continental French tradition. The *Karlamagnús saga* also features a translation of an otherwise lost *chanson de geste*: the *Chanson de Basin*. The only plausible attestation of a copy of this poem in French comes from England, a few decades after the

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[23] Leach (1921, 239) assumed that almost all the source material for the *Karlamagnús saga* was insular in origin.

[24] For an overview, see Goeres (2019).

[25] For a discussion of the evidence, see Hieatt (1978b, 284 n. 19).

[26] For an account of this text and the work that remains to be done on its relationship to the various French versions, see Tétrel (2002).

translation of the Norse work: a text described as "liber romanizatus de Duce de Basyns" was in the collection of Edward II's queen, Isabella (Cavanaugh 1980, 458).[27]

The Welsh Charlemagne cycle, *Ystorya Charlymaen,* comprising three or four texts in the surviving manuscripts, is considerably more modest in scope than the Norse compilation, but draws on many of the same sources: the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, *Chanson de Roland, Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* and *Otinel* (Williams 1984). The date of the compilation is similar to that of the Norse cycle: *Roland* and the *Pèlerinage* seem to have been translated in the first half of the thirteenth century, with the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* translation appearing a couple of decades later. The first three texts were then brought together in the late thirteenth century. The translation of *Otinel*, *Af Otúel*, was a later addition to the compilation, probably from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Like the Old Norse work, the Welsh, *Cân Rolant,* also derives from an Anglo-Norman exemplar close to the Oxford *Roland* (Rejhon 1984). Similarly, the text of the *Pèlerinage* is comparable to the unique Anglo-Norman text of the work and *Otinel* has clear similarities with the two Anglo-Norman manuscripts (Poppe 2014, 173–174).

A colophon in manuscripts of the Welsh translation of the *Pèlerinage* credits Reginald, king of the Isle of Man and of the Western Isles (d. 1229) with commissioning an initial translation of the work from French into Latin. The implication is that the Welsh translation is from this Latin text. [28] However, given no Latin text survives, scholars have tended to discount this claim as an appeal to the authority of Latin writing and to assume the work was translated directly from French into Welsh (Rejhon 1984, 74). While appealing to fictitious Latin sources is not unknown in medieval translation, it would be unusual (and undermining) to acknowledge the ultimate source "o Rwmawns" in doing so.[29] Furthermore, and as we shall see, a similar intermediate translation from French into Latin was undertaken in translating *Fierabras* in Ireland later in the medieval period. There too, the text was associated with the Latin *Pseudo-Turpin* and may have been adapted into Latin to expand that work, before both were translated into the local vernacular. In light of the very similar sources underlying the Norse and Welsh texts and their appearance around the same time, Annalee Rejhon (1984, 71–75) has suggested that the Welsh cycle may have been inspired by translation work in Norway. Certainly, Reginald's political connections into the North Sea world would provide a plausible context

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[27] Hardman and Ailes (2017, 51) suggest this is a version of *Daurel and Beton*, a text which otherwise only survives in Occitan. There is also a later Dutch version of the *Chanson de Basin*.

[28] Discussed in Rejhon (1984, 71–75).

[29] On such claims, see Byrne (2020).

for such a line of influence. Reginald also had close ties to the court of King John, facilitating access to narratives in circulation in Anglo-Norman in England.

Evidence of the circulation of *chansons de geste* in Ireland is rather more scant and considerably later in date than in Wales or Norway. *Fierabras* seems to be the only French epic which was translated into Irish in the medieval period. *Stair Fortibrais* was particularly successful and survives in a high number of copies for a translated work (Stokes 1898). *Fierabras* found its way into Irish by an unusual linguistic route – a Latin prose adaptation was made in Ireland from a French verse copy and this Latin text, in turn, furnished the source for the Irish translation. The Latin prose work survives uniquely in Dublin, Trinity College MS 667.[30] Recent work by Conor McDonough (forthcoming) shows that this manuscript is almost certainly from the Dominican friary in Limerick and other material in the codex suggests that the friary was a centre for the copying and translation of a range of homiletic, instructional and narrative works. *Fierabras* seems likely to have travelled to Ireland via the international network of the Dominican friars and to have been translated into Latin and then Irish on account of its religious interest. Both the Latin and Irish versions of *Fierabras* lay particular stress on the didactic and religious, as well as the historical, dimensions of the work (Davies 1995, 243). An interesting feature of the transmission of these works in Ireland is that they tend to appear in manuscripts of largely religious material (Poppe 2014, 183).

Previous discussions of Latin and Irish versions of *Fierabras* have assumed that the ultimate French source was brought to Ireland from the Continent (Davies 1995). However, it seems to me that the source was more likely to have been a version of the work in the French of England. Notably, the text identifies of Roland's father, Milo, as an Englishman. This association only otherwise appears in the fifteenth-century Middle English prose translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*: *Turpines Story* (Shepherd 2004, 10, 12).[31] Circumstantial evidence also enhances the likelihood that this text came from England. As far as we can tell, all other Irish adaptations of vernacular works are from Middle English or from the French of England (Byrne 2015).[32] Trinity 667 also features a Latin text of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*

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[30] Edited, translated and analysed by Michael Howard Davies (1995).

[31] As Ailes and Hardman (2017, 408) note, assertions of Roland's English descent are also made in the early modern period.

[32] On the reception and composition of French works in Ireland in general, see Busby (2017).

that bears a strong resemblance to the C-text tradition of the work – an exclusively insular tradition of the narrative (Shepherd 1996).

The Irish text has a prologue relating the finding of the true cross and passion relics. This material seems to be derived from a short Latin text, *De Inventione Sanctae Crucis*, which appears in Trinity 667, though at several folios remove from the Latin *Fierabras*. In three of the surviving manuscripts, a translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, *Gabháltais Shearluis Mhóir*, follows immediately after *Stair Fortibrais*. The connection between these two texts is structurally looser than that between *Stair Fortibrais* and the translation of *De Inventione Sanctae Crucis*, but it is persistent enough to suggest a conscious attempt to associate the works.[33] So, although no formal "cycle" of Charlemagne material survives in Irish, the surviving manuscripts witness a tendency to combine the narrative with other material relating to Charlemagne and the passion relics. This loose association of *Fierabras* with one or two other works reflects the treatment of the poem in England where Marianne Ailes and Philippa Hardman (2008, 54) have observed an "impulse to aggregate texts" in treatments of Charlemagne narratives. Anglo-Norman copies of *Fierabras* are typically paired with *La Destruction de Rome*. This association is carried over into one Middle English version, *Sowdone of Babylone*. In a similar vein, the Fillingham *Fierabras* is followed in its late fifteenth-century manuscript by a text of *Otuel and Roland*.

Conclusion

Among the many rich insights generated by Keith Busby's work is a particularly broad perspective on the concept of medieval Francophonia. French-language works were composed, transmitted, translated and adapted well beyond the boundaries of *l'Hexagone*. This is strikingly evident in the fortunes of works that are often considered quintessentially "French" – the *chansons de geste*. Rather than merely receiving these French texts, medieval Britain acted as a springboard for further transmission and translation. Several translations into Norse, Welsh and Irish bear close comparison with works from the Anglo-Norman tradition. These translations also reflect a distinctively British set of interests. The composition of the *chanson de geste* corpus as it was known north of the Channel was, as we have seen, rather different from that in France. The text in circulation reflected a distinctively insular set of narrative and thematic interests, focusing on holy war and holy warriors and evincing more limited interest

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[33] Discussed in Byrne (2019, 169–73).

in dynastic feuding and conflict between the aristocracy and rulers. It was this corpus, with its emphasis on the *cycle du roi*, and particular interest in *Aspremont*, *Fierabras, Otinel* and the *Chanson de Roland*, that seems to have shaped the reception of these works in the Welsh-, Irish- and Norse-speaking worlds.

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