Medieval Dutch Charlemagne Romances: An Overview

Bart Besamusca
Utrecht University

In her 1993 annotated bibliography to the medieval Charlemagne tradition, Susan Farrier notes that critics outside of Belgium and the Netherlands have generally neglected the medieval Dutch Charlemagne romances in spite of their importance for the international Charlemagne tradition (Farrier, 1993, p. xvii). Although obviously the language barrier plays a part, Low Countries' scholarship must also be held responsible for the lack of knowledge about Middle Dutch Charlemagne literature among the international academic community. Having acknowledged their negligence, a group of Dutch *chansons de geste* specialists decided some time ago to publish a series of essays on Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances in *Olifant*. These contributions were meant to complement a number of general non-Dutch articles on the tradition which have appeared in recent years, including Evert van den Berg and Bart Besamusca's "Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances and the oral tradition of the *chansons de geste*" (1994), Hans van Dijk's "Das Bild Karls des Groβen in den Niederlanden" (2004), and two subsequent contributions by van Dijk: "Des originaux français perdus à la transmission orale" (2008) and "Die Chanson de geste im Niederländischen zwischen dem Französischen und dem Deutschen" (2010).[1] In previous issues of *Olifant*, the following articles, which were mostly structured according to an identical pattern, have been published:

---

[1] For an overview in Dutch, thematically organized, see van den Berg and Besamusca, 1992.

1. "Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances in *Olifant*" (Bart Besamusca and Hans van Dijk, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 9-11; first published in vol. 19.3-4 [1994-95], pp. 143-44)

2. "*Beerte metten breden voeten*" (Bart Besamusca, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 13-25; first published in vol. 19.3-4 [1994-95], pp. 145-53)

3. "*Renout van Montalbaen*" (Irene Spijker, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 27-43; first published in vol. 19.3-4 [1994-95], pp. 155-66)

4. "*Willem van Oringen*" (T.J.A. Broers, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 45-61; first published in vol. 19.3-4 [1994-95], pp. 167-76)

5. "*Gheraert van Viane*" (Irene Spijker, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 63-78)

6. "*Huge van Bordeeus*" (Mieke Lens, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 79-93)

7. "*Madelgijs*" (Bob Duijvestijn, vol. 23.1 [2004], pp. 95-110)

8. "*Van den bere Wisselau*" (Frank Brandsma, vol. 24.1 [2005], pp. 9-21)

9. "*Ogier van Denemarken*" (Hans van Dijk, vol. 24.1 [2005], pp. 23-38)

10. "Developments in the Versification of Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances" (Evert van den Berg, vol. 26.1 [2007], pp. 11-26)

11. "*Roman der Lorreinen*" (Ben van der Have, vol. 26.1 [2007], pp. 27-44)

12. "The Manuscripts of the Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances" (Ben van der Have, vol. 26.2 [2011], pp. 9-34)

13. "*Roelantslied*" (Hans van Dijk, vol. 26.2, [2011], pp. 35-50)

14. "*Karel ende Elegast*" (edited and introduced by Bart Besamusca and Hans van Dijk, translated by Thea Summerfield, vol. 26.2 [2011], pp. 51-165)

This fifteenth, and final, essay provides a concise overview of all the medieval Dutch Charlemagne romances.[2] Succinctly incorporating the texts which were presented in the preceding articles, I will discuss the

---

[2] In the introduction, "Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances in *Olifant*," eighteen articles were announced (p. 10). Owing to circumstances beyond our control, however, three pieces have never been completed.

whole corpus, which consists of around 27 texts.[3] My point of departure is the relation between a Middle Dutch romance and its French source, if any. Translations of French texts will be studied first, followed by a discussion of the adaptations of French (written and oral) sources, and by an analysis of the texts which may be (the remains of) indigenous romances.[4] Supplementary to this tripartite division, I will pay attention to the date of composition of the texts, to their authors' geographical origins and to the results of recent research.[5]

Middle Dutch translations

As critics have noted, the number of extant Middle Dutch translations of French *chansons de geste* is limited to three.[6] The so-called Limburg *Aiol* is the oldest of these faithful renditions.[7] While the French source dates from c. 1160, the surviving fragments of the Limburg translation were copied around 1200 according to new paleographical observations (Klein, 1995, p. 13, no. 3). Consequently, the Limburg text came into being shortly after the composition of the "primitive" version of the *Chanson d´Aiol* (Finet-van der Schaaf, 2006, p. 507). This early date is in accordance with the current general view among Dutch critics that the cradle of Middle Dutch literature was not situated in Flanders, as was

---

[3] The precise number cannot be determined, due to some manuscript fragments which may or may not preserve lines of a Charlemagne romance. See Besamusca, 1983, pp. 138-44, and Kienhorst, 1988, pp. 228-41.

[4] To be perfectly clear, I should note that the boundaries between a translation and an adaptation and between an adaptation and an indigenous text are often quite vague.

[5] When the occasion arises, I will update bibliographical references concerning the romances which were discussed earlier in the series.

[6] See for example van der Have, 2005, p. 89.

[7] For the Flemish *Aiol*, see below (**Middle Dutch adaptations**).

assumed for a very long time, but more to the east, in the area between the rivers Rhine and Meuse.[8]

Around 930 lines of the Limburg *Aiol* survive (Gysseling, 1980, pp. 311-32). Although almost half of these are incomplete because the manuscript fragments are severely damaged, enough of the text remains to facilitate an analysis of the translation technique of the Limburg author (Finet-van der Schaaf, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 26-113). His rendition of the French text, which relates the story of the knight Aiol and his beloved Mirabel, who become the parents of twins and are threatened with death by the traitor Makaire, follows the French model quite closely. The position of the initials, for example, corresponds with the beginnings of the French *laisses*, indicating that the structure of the original was preserved in the translation. In addition, it may be noted that the Limburg author often used two Dutch lines to translate a single line in French, omitting along the way small details and repetitions that were present in his source.

As is well known, Middle Dutch verses usually consist of lines with three to five (but generally four) stressed syllables separated by one to three unstressed syllables. The Limburg *Aiol*, however, deviates remarkably from this tradition, because it is written in four iambic feet (Goossens, 2002). The use of this meter is quite unique. One of the very few other examples of a Middle Dutch iambic text is the so-called Copenhagen *Leven van Lutgart* (c. 1270), a Middle Dutch saint's life based on Thomas of Cantimpré's *Vita Lutgardis* (Zonneveld, 2000). It has been suggested that the author of the Limburg *Aiol*'s use of iambic feet was due to the influence of his knowledge of medieval Latin poetry (Goossens, 2002; van Oostrom, 2006, p. 181).

The second extant Middle Dutch translation of a *chanson de geste* is the first part of the *Roman der Lorreinen*, often referred to as *Lorreinen*

---

[8] See for example van Oostrom, 2006, pp. 117-213.

I.[9] Two Old French texts which are always found together in the manu-
scripts, *Garin le Lorrain* and *Gerbert de Metz*, were the source for *Lor-
reinen I*, which probably dates from the middle of the thirteenth century
(van der Have, 2007). A number of dialectical features of the couplets
point to Brabant as the author's origin (van den Berg, 1985, p. 23). The c.
1000 surviving Middle Dutch lines of his text show that the translator
aimed at a faithful rendition of his French source, which relates the feud
between the Loherains and the Bordelais in the reign of King Pepin. His
work resulted in a translation that is slightly longer than his model (van
der Have, 2007; van der Have, 2005, pp. 82-83).

The third Middle Dutch translation of a French original is a fairly re-
cent discovery. In 1993, two Dutch critics demonstrated that the unidenti-
fied text of a fragment that had been known since 1925 could be
connected to the tradition of the *Chanson d'Aspremont* (Kienhorst &
Mulder, 1993, pp. 69-70). Unfortunately, only 97 lines of the Middle
Dutch *Aspremont* have come down to us (Kienhorst & Mulder, 1998).
From these poor remnants of the tale, which relates, among other things,
how the young Roland wins his sword Durendal, his horse Viellantif, and
the horn Olifant, it can be deduced that the translator followed his
twelfth-century original closely. However, when and where he worked
cannot be determined. All we know is that the fragment dates from
around 1300 and that the surviving lines were copied by a Flemish scribe
(Klein, 1995, p. 14, no. 17; Kienhorst & Mulder, 1998, pp. 301-02).

Middle Dutch adaptations

The great majority of the Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances are
adaptations of Old French *chansons de geste*. Where this is the case, the
Middle Dutch authors aimed at their own version of their French source
by omitting passages, adding story elements, and changing the story line.
I will present these adaptations by first discussing the Middle Dutch texts

---

[9] For *Lorreinen II*, see below (**Indigenous romances**).

that, in spite of their deviations, clearly resemble their French models, and will continue by describing the Middle Dutch texts that radically differ from their French written and oral sources. I will conclude this section of the overview by discussing two texts that are probably based on a French source that is lost.

The oldest Middle Dutch adaptation of a *chanson de geste* is a rendition of the most famous of all medieval French texts, the *Chanson de Roland*. The versification of the *Roelantslied* points to a date in the twelfth century, and the dialectical features of its couplets show that its author was a Fleming (van Dijk, 2011; van den Berg, 1985, p. 23). The surviving c. 2000 lines have come down to us in manuscript fragments and as part of a printed edition, entitled *Den droefliken strijt van Roncevale* (*The Grievous Battle of Roncevaux*), published by the Antwerp printers Willem Vorsterman (around 1520) and Jan van Ghelen (in 1576). Remarkably enough, the extant verses belong to a single episode of the story, relating the defeat of the French rearguard, including Roland and the other peers, at Roncevaux. It may well be that this surprising feature of the textual tradition implies that only the second of the *Chanson de Roland*'s four episodes was rendered into Middle Dutch. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the Flemish author aimed at a small-scale adaptation of his source. While following the story line closely, he shortened the text by omitting details, and he accentuated the theme of the Christian battle against the infidels (van Dijk, 2011).

Like the *Roelantslied*, the second extant Middle Dutch rendition of the *Chanson d'Aiol* was written by a Flemish author (van den Berg, 1985, p. 21). It has been argued that this poet was active around 1240 (Finet-van der Schaaf, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 311-17). This date is mainly based on the passage in the so-called Flemish *Aiol* that states that Aiol's beloved Mirabel was called "Johane" when she was christened (Verdam, 1882, l. 509). The name is taken as a reference to the text's supposed patroness: Jeanne of Constantinople, countess of Flanders between 1205 and 1244.

While it cannot be determined, unfortunately, whether the Flemish author made use of the Limburg *Aiol* or the French text as his model, it is certain that he presented an abridged version of the story (Finet-van der Schaaf, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 114-283). The extant 1200 lines of the Flemish text correspond, after all, to around 2300 French lines. These Middle Dutch lines include, moreover, a passage of 240 lines missing in the *Chanson d'Aiol*, relating an attempt of the treacherous Herijn to poison his brother-in-law, King Gratien (ll. 960-1200). Whereas the Flemish adapter shortened the numerous accounts of battles and duels, he incidentally added lines to accentuate religious story elements. For instance, he incorporated almost thirty lines to explain how God prevented Makaire from drowning Aiol's twins by sending an angel to the fisherman Tierijn, ordering him to go fishing at night (ll. 651-80).

Another example of an abridged Middle Dutch Charlemagne romance is provided by *Willem van Oringen*. This text is based on the long version of the *Moniage Guillaume*, in which Guillaume d'Orange becomes a monk after Guibourc's death, retires to a hermitage by order of an angel, and is imprisoned by the Saracen Synagon. Its author may have been a certain Clays of Haerlem who is mentioned by Jacob van Maerlant in his *Spiegel historiael* as the translator of French stories about Guillaume. It has been argued that he was a member of the court of Willem II, count of Holland between 1234 and 1256 (Broers, 2004). Although it is difficult to study the author's translation technique, as only 429 lines of *Willem van Oringen* survive, one gets the impression that the author aimed at a somewhat shortened account of Willem's adventures (Broers, 2004).

In the French manuscript tradition, the *Moniage Guillaume* is always part of a cycle of Guillaume texts. That this was also true for *Willem van Oringen* is suggested by the parchment bifolium containing the text's remaining lines, since the verses were copied in three columns per page. This *mise-en-page* strongly indicates that a number of texts other than *Willem van Oringen* were also present in the codex (van der Have, 2005, p. 84). In this context, it is important to note the recent discovery of a

very small, fourteenth-century fragment containing just 58 badly damaged lines. Although not one of them is complete, a number of names, like "willem" (Guillaume), "oringhen" (Orange), and "harleblanc" (Arle le blanc), prove that at least one other Middle Dutch Guillaume romance once existed (Kienhorst, 1998). Unfortunately, the incomplete lines do not allow us to identify the text, referred to with the provisional title *Willem van Oringen II*, or his French model.

Among the Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances that present an abridged version of their source text, there is one adaptation that is exceptional in a number of aspects. Whereas the *Roelantslied*, the Flemish *Aiol*, and *Willem van Oringen* are based on French models, *Sibilla* is an adaptation of a Spanish text, the *Hystoria de la reyna Sevilla* (c. 1500). The Dutch text is, moreover, a prose adaptation, written hundreds of years after the composition of the verse renditions just mentioned. The printed edition was published in Antwerp by Willem Vorsterman around 1538. The most remarkable aspect of this adaption concerns the way in which the author abridged his Spanish model (Besamusca, Kuiper, and Resoort, 1988, pp. 34-37). The further the story progresses, the more the Dutch adapter omits. At the beginning of the tale about the repudiated wife of Charlemagne, who overcomes her enormous problems with the aid of the peasant Baroquel and her son Loys, *Sibilla* deviates only little from the *Hystoria*. But while the abridgements begin to increase considerably as the story progresses, for example by the removal of characters from the tale, the second half of the Spanish narrative is reduced to a bare minimum. Curiously enough, this remarkable increase in the number of excisions as the adaptation progresses runs parallel to the unbalanced distribution of the edition's woodcuts. Unevenly spread over the text, they occur especially in the first part of the story. This makes it conceivable that the Dutch author abridged his source in order to meet the publisher's condition that his text should not encompass more than a fixed number of leaves. Vorsterman may well have feared that his *Sibilla* edition would become too voluminous and, therefore, too expensive (Besamusca, 1992).

Like the *Roelantslied*, the *Flovent* is both one of the oldest Middle Dutch texts, dating from around 1200, and written by a Flemish poet (van den Berg, 1983, pp. 148, 152, 179-80; van den Berg, 2007). However, whereas the author of the *Roelantslied* abridged his source, the *Flovent* poet expanded the story. Circa 640 lines of his tale about the eldest son of the Merovingian king Clovis and his companion Richier survive (Pfeijffer & Wielaard, 1994). A comparison between the Middle Dutch text and the corresponding episodes of the French *Floovant*, presumably written at the end of the twelfth century, reveals that the Flemish author amplified the story spectacularly. He multiplied the number of lines by at least a factor of four (Pfeijffer & Wielaard, 1994, pp. 86-90; van der Have, 2005, p. 82).

Among the plot elements which are not present in the French text is the intriguing story of Rigant. This rich burgher comes to the aid of the besieged king Clovis, offering him assistance in exchange for the knighting of himself and his sixteen sons. Armed with a gigantic club, Rigant confronts the Saracens and is eventually killed by a French traitor. In recent research it has been suggested that the story of Rigant in the *Flovent* may serve as a clue to the text's primary audience (van Oostrom, 2005). If the portrayal of Rigant was not meant as comedy—which could well be the case, so it seems—it may have been intended to appeal to prosperous Flemish patricians living in cities like Ghent and Bruges. Such a conclusion would be in accordance with the current critical opinion that Middle Dutch narrative literature, including Charlemagne romances, Arthurian tales, and the masterly beast epic *Van den vos Reynaerde*, was not aimed in the first instance at the court aristocracy but at the Flemish-speaking urban elite.[10]

The poet of the *Flovent* is not the only author of a Middle Dutch Charlemagne romance to amplify his model. The same holds true for the

---

[10] See for example van Oostrom, 2006, pp. 227-33. See also Bouwman and Besamusca, 2009, pp. 28-33.

poet of *Gheraert van Viane*. Originating in Holland or Flanders, this thirteenth-century author adapted a French version of *Girart de Vienne*, possibly at the request of one of the lords of Viane (a village in East Flanders) who was called Gerard (Spijker, 2004a, pp. 68-69). The French story features a hero who rebels against Charlemagne. The hero, Girart, is assisted by his nephew Olivier, who acts as his champion against the king's champion Roland. The Middle Dutch text is based on a *Girart* version in which the cause of Girart's rebellion is his humiliation by the king's wife, who has made him unknowingly kiss her foot. We find this motif in the tale composed around 1200 by Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, who seems to have introduced it in the tradition, and in a late medieval version. A comparison of the 192 extant lines of *Gheraert van Viane* with the French versions shows that the Middle Dutch author composed a very free rendition of his model, for instance by adding narrative elements to the story. An example concerns Gheraert's nephew Aymerijn, who during a meeting delivers a speech of seventy lines which is not found in the French versions (Spijker, 2004a, pp. 69-76).

Another amplified Middle Dutch Charlemagne romance is *Beerte metten breden voeten*, which is based on *Berte aus grans piés*, written by Adenet le Roi at the Flemish court of Gui de Dampierre around 1275. The tale is about Berte, who is supplanted as King Pepin's bride by an imposter, is received by the forester Simon as his daughter, and is rehabilitated when the king, who has lost his way in the woods, finds her. Due to the poor remnants of the Middle Dutch story—around 400 often-damaged lines survive—we do not know where the thirteenth or fourteenth-century adapter originated (van den Berg, 1985, pp. 21-22). The extant lines show that the poet needed about twice as many lines as Adenet to tell the same story, albeit with small changes meant to improve the logic of the narrative (Besamusca, 2004).

Both *Beerte metten breden voeten* and *Aubri de Borgengoen* situate their narrative in the time of King Pepin. According to the mid-thirteenth-century *chanson de geste Auberi le Bourgoing*, the young titular hero and his nephew Gaselin are the great-uncle and father, re-

spectively, of Charlemagne's adviser Naimon de Bavière (Farrier, 1993, pp. 493-94). The voluminous French text, numbering c. 30,000 lines, begins by telling how Auberi and Gaselin save Bavaria from the Saracens. In the second part it relates how Auberi incorrectly suspects his wife Guiborc of infidelity and is rescued from his attacking enemies by Gaselin. It concludes in the final part with the story of how Auberi is accidentally killed by Gaselin. The extant 350 lines of the Middle Dutch adaptation correspond to the end of the French first part (Kalff, 1885-86, pp. 138-52). While the author´s geographical origin is unclear (van den Berg, 1985, p. 21), it is certain that he worked before the middle of the fourteenth century since the remaining fragments date from that period (Klein, 1995, p. 15, no. 76; Kienhorst, 1998, p. 17). A comparison between the Middle Dutch verses and the corresponding French lines reveals that the adapter slightly amplified his model (Kalff, pp. 140-45, 147-52, notes).

The author of *Huge van Bordeeus* was doubtlessly a Fleming (van den Berg, 1985, p. 22). Writing at the beginning of the fourteenth century, he adapted *Huon de Bordeaux*, including a number of episodes which were part of the French text's sequels (Lens, 2004a, pp. 82-83; Lens, 2004b, pp. 100-01). The French story recounts the adventures of Huon, who unknowingly kills Charlemagne's son Charlot. A reconciliation with the king will be possible only if Huon performs seemingly impossible tasks in the Orient. However, assisted by the fairy king Auberon and his messenger Malabron, Huon successfully accomplishes all he needs to do. Around 1500 lines of the Middle Dutch rendition, which originally seems to have numbered around 15,000 lines (Lens, 2004b, pp. 269-70), are extant. This verse text and the printed prose edition of the story, published by the Antwerp printers Willem Vorsterman (around 1540) and Jan van Ghelen (in 1584), both derive from a common, now lost, Middle Dutch verse text (Lens, 2004b, pp. 103-92, 240-46). The extant lines show that the adapter adhered to the main events of the story yet changed their order and their contents (the sultan Gaudisse, for example, is not killed as in the French *Huon*, but taken prisoner). Further-

26.2

more, he elaborates on narrative elements which had received a concise treatment in his source and amplified his model by adding characters and episodes (Lens, 2004a; Lens, 2004b, pp. 46-102).

Whether they are abridged or amplified versions of their models, the Middle Dutch adaptations so far discussed in this section of the overview all are based on written sources. However, there are indications that this is not the case for the four texts which I am about to present. The poets of these texts did not seem to work on the basis of a written (or printed) copy but on the basis of their recollection of performances of French tales. The chief witness for this use of oral sources is *Renout van Montalbaen*. This is the story of the four sons of Aymijn, the four "Heemskinderen," who rebel against Charlemagne for many years, assisted by their cousin Malagijs, who has magical powers, and Renout's tremendously strong horse Beyaert, who can carry all four brothers together on his back. The Middle Dutch version was written by a Flemish author who was active presumably before 1225 (Spijker, 2004b, p. 31). Although his text has come down to us incompletely—around 2650 lines have survived—we can get a reliable impression of the whole work by studying the faithful, late-fifteenth-century Rhine-Franconian rendition of the Middle Dutch text as well as the printed prose edition published by the printer Jan Seversoen in 1508 (*De historie vanden vier Heemskinderen*). The Flemish adapter seldom followed his French source closely. A number of the numerous Middle Dutch deviations from the French are clearly intentional, but the frequent changes in the order of narrative elements and, in particular, the attribution of actions to characters that differ from the French model cannot be explained in this way. They can be understood only if we assume that the Flemish poet had heard the *Renaut de Montauban* being recited (as a whole or, more probably, in episodes) and composed his text on the basis of his (partly transformed) recollections of the recitation(s) of the French story. As a result of the deviations, the Middle Dutch adaptation is less serious and more focused on action than *Renaut de Montauban* (Spijker, 2004b, pp. 34-41).

Critics have assumed that like *Renout van Montalbaen*, *Madelgijs* was based on an oral delivery of its French model. That source was *Maugis d'Aigremont*, which deals with the youth of Renaut's cousin, the magician Maugis, who is raised by the fairy Oriande, and his twin brother, Vivien, whom he meets long after they were separated at birth. The Middle Dutch adaptation, which was made by a Flemish author around 1300, has survived in fragments and in a complete, late-fifteenth-century Rhine-Franconian rendition of the text. Another fourteenth-century Flemish author copied this text and added new episodes. This long version of the *Madelgijs* is extant in fragments and in a printed prose edition published by the Antwerp printer Jan van Ghelen in 1556 (Duijvestijn, 2004, pp. 99-100). The short version of the Middle Dutch *Madelgijs* differs profoundly from its French model. The c. 3280 surviving lines and the faithful Rhine-Franconian rendition show that the Flemish adapter wrote a tale that does not follow the narrative structure of the *Maugis* and is, moreover, twice as long as its model. It contains many episodes that are not found in the French text. Taking into account, too, that the verbatim resemblances between *Madelgijs* and *Maugis* are extremely rare, it is conceivable that the Flemish author did not have a manuscript of the French tale at his disposal but knew its broad outline from oral recitation or at second hand from someone who had heard the *chanson the geste* and retold the story for him (Duijvestijn, 2004, pp. 101-07; Duijvestijn, 2002).

The third Middle Dutch Charlemagne romance that has been associated with the oral transmission of a French tale is *Ogier van Denemarken*. Its French source, the *Chevalerie Ogier*, relates first the story of the heroic deeds of the young Ogier the Dane, who is staying as a hostage at Charlemagne's court, and secondly the feud between the adult Ogier and the king, whose son Charlot has killed Ogier's son Baudouin. Around the middle of the thirteenth century, two Flemish authors independently wrote tales about Ogier's youth and about his adult life, including the story of his journey to the Orient, which shows resemblances to the Orient continuation in the *Roman d'Ogier*. Their texts have sur-

vived in Middle Dutch fragments—around 630 lines are extant—and were combined in a late-fifteenth-century Rhine-Franconian text that gives a faithful rendition of the Middle Dutch romances, albeit that the German translator abridged the final part of the story (van Dijk, 2005, pp. 27-32). Although the general outline of *Ogier van Denemarken* corresponds to the most important French Ogier tales, there are no verbal correspondences between the texts. Moreover, the Middle Dutch story presents the episodes in a different order and introduces characters, like Willem van Oringen, who seem to be absent in the French tradition. This state of affairs makes it likely, according to Dutch scholarship, that the two Flemish poets composed their texts on the basis of their knowledge of narrative material that was transmitted orally (van Dijk, 2005, pp. 32-34).

Another Flemish author composed *Jourdein van Blaves*, which has come down to us in fragments that preserve around 440 lines (Kuiper & Biemans, 2004). The poet, who probably worked in the first half of the fourteenth century, adapted *Jourdain de Blaye*, which relates the feud between Jourdain, assisted by his foster father Renier, and Fromont, who has treacherously killed the hero's father. The Middle Dutch text diverges markedly from the French text, most strikingly in its use of proper names. Except for the names of the main protagonists, all other characters have names which do not occur in the French model but were borrowed from other French *chansons de geste*. This feature can be explained most convincingly by assuming that the Flemish author adapted his source from memory (Kuiper & Biemans, 2004, pp. 213-19).

All the Middle Dutch adaptations discussed so far can be compared to an extant French model. However, there are also cases in which we assume that a Middle Dutch author based himself on a (written or oral) source even though that French text is lost. This concerns, for example, *Loyhier ende Malaert*. Around 800 lines, half of them damaged, of this fourteenth-century Middle Dutch text have come down to us (Iwema, 1986). Its author, who worked before the middle of the fourteenth century (Klein, 1995, p. 15, nos. 64, 81), originated from Flanders (van den

Berg, 1985, p. 22). Since *Lohier et Maller* is not extant (with the exception of a fifteenth-century fragment), we have to rely on a German intermediary when comparing the Middle Dutch tale and its French source. This German prose translation, *Loher und Maller*, of the French story was supposedly made by Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken around 1430-40 (Bastert, 2010, pp. 108-12). It presents the story of Charlemagne's son Loher, who, banished from court because of his amorous exploits, fights against the Saracens, assisted by his companion Maller, whom he unknowingly kills later on in the story. The remnants of the Middle Dutch text show that *Loyhier ende Malaert*'s narrative style was more elaborate than that of *Loher und Maller* (Iwema, 1986, pp. 438-39). However, this observation does not apply to the relation between the Middle Dutch text and *Lohier et Maller*, because we know that the German author freely adapted his/her French source (von Bloh et al., 2002).

Besides *Loyhier ende Malaert*, there is one other Middle Dutch Charlemagne romance which seems to be based on a lost French model. Some critics have assumed that this text, *Karel ende Elegast*, was an indigenous composition about Charlemagne, who goes out stealing in the company of the magician-thief Elegast and, as a result, learns of a plot on his life. However, other scholars have argued, more convincingly, that the lost *Chanson de Basin* was the source of the Middle Dutch author (Besamusca & van Dijk, 2011, pp. 53-54). References to this *chanson* in other French texts and the existence of an analogous episode about Charlemagne and the thief Basin at the beginning of the mid-thirteenth-century *Karlamagnús saga*, which contains a number of Norse adaptations of French texts, allow us to reconstruct the tale about Basin. If this story was indeed the source for *Karel ende Elegast*, its Flemish author, who presumably worked in the first half of the thirteenth century, aimed at a very free adaptation of his French model (Besamusca & van Dijk, 2011, p. 54). In his version of c. 1400 lines, the portrayal of Elegast, for example, is strikingly different from that of Basin. Other deviations include the portrayal of Charlemagne (the Middle Dutch king is not young, as in the Norse version, but at the height of his powers) and the discovery of the plot (whereas the Norse king is present when the traitor Renfrei

26.2

tells his wife about the plan to kill his lord, the Middle Dutch king is informed about this by Elegast, who enters the castle of the treacherous Eggeric alone).

For the sake of completeness, I should finally mention *Garijn van Montglavie*. Just around 150 lines of this text, still unedited, have come down to us, preserved in fragments which date from c. 1325 (Klein, 1995, p. 14, no. 35). Both the scribe and the author appear to be Flemings (Kienhorst, 1988, p. 59). The names of the main characters, like Garijn van Montglavie and his wife Mabilette, point to two French texts, *Garin de Monglane* and *Gaufrey*, but critics have been unable to find a corresponding episode in these *chansons* (van der Have, 2005, p. 86).

Indigenous romances

In addition to the translations and adaptations, the corpus of Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances features original tales, viz. texts which are not based on a (French) model. *Lorreinen II* takes pride of place among these indigenous romances. This text is the work of a Brabantine poet who was active in the second half of the thirteenth century and may have been commissioned by the duke of Brabant (van der Have, 2007, p. 40). The surviving 10,300 lines of his impressive continuation, which originally added probably around 110,000 lines to *Lorreinen I*, show that he went his own way, independent of the French Loherain tradition. The main theme is still the feud between the Loherains and the Bordelais, but at the beginning of his continuation King Pepin has been succeeded by his son Charlemagne. Surprisingly enough, the arch-traitor Ganelon (here called Gelloen) is introduced as the new leader of the Bordelais. Freely borrowing from texts like Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* and the *Pseudo-Turpin* chronicle, the author of *Lorreinen II* devoted large parts of his continuation to Gelloen's low deeds. By introducing an interlace structure, the poet was able to alternate the traitor's narrative thread with the stories of other characters like the Saracen king Agulant, Gelloen's sons Beligant and Marcilijs, and the leader of the Loherains, King Yoen, who falls in love with Helene, the wife of his cousin Otte, and has

to defend himself against Gelloen's daughter Yrene, empress of Greece (van der Have, 2007, pp. 37-40). As a result of this enormous expansion, *Lorreinen II* occupies a unique position in the tradition of the Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances.

Unique, too, albeit in a different way, is *Van den bere Wisselau*. This indigenous story about a bear, Wisselau, is an unusual Charlemagne tale. According to the extant fragment, Wisselau fights Eeric, the champion of Espriaen, king of the giants, as the champion of Charlemagne and his companions. Dressed up in human clothes, the bear then throws Espriaen's favorite cook in a cauldron with boiling water. It is true that Charlemagne is mentioned as one of the characters who arrive in the hostile land of the giants, but the story about the bear and his clever tamer, Geernout, shares, above all, characteristics with Germanic texts like the *Thidrekssaga* and *König Rother* (Brandsma, 2005, pp. 16-18). However, a German model cannot be traced. It has been argued that the twelfth-century poet, who originated from the border area between Flanders and Brabant, wrote his tale for the court of the duke of Brabant (Brandsma, 2005, pp. 15, 17). Whatever the case may be, the surviving 720 lines show that *Van den bere Wisselau* was an entertaining story, full of comedy and exciting adventures.

In a number of cases, critics have been unable to connect the text of an extant Middle Dutch fragment to a *chanson de geste*. It is conceivable that these episodes were part of adaptations of French texts, but that their fragmentary nature prevents us from identifying these models. It could also be that these fragments preserve the remnants of Middle Dutch renditions of lost French texts. However, it is at least as convincing to assume that these episodes were part of indigenous Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances (Besamusca, 2008). A case in point is *Pepijn die naen*. The extant 384 lines of this text feature a dwarf, Charlemagne's bastard son Pepin the Hunchback. He is a traitor who rebels against his father and has captured the town of Charlemagne's loyal vasal, Florant, allowing his men to rape all the women (Verdam, 1897). Since the scholarly quest for a French source has failed, one may assume that the author

26.2

did not base his tale on a French model (Verdam, 1897, p. 295; van Oostrom, 1987). As the extant fragments date from the middle of the fourteenth century (Kienhorst, 1988, p. 232; Klein, 1995, p. 15, no. 88), the story was composed before that period.

Another mid-fourteenth-century Middle Dutch fragment probably originates from the same codex as the *Pepijn* fragments (Kienhorst, 1988, pp. 68-69; Klein, 1995, p. 15, no. 80). It contains 198 lines of a text critics have given the title *Gwidekijn van Sassen*, since this name appears in the last lines (Kalff, 1885-86, pp. 159-67). A king called Gwidekijn obviously points to Jean Bodel's *Chanson des Saisnes*, which relates Charlemagne's war against the Saxon king Guitaclin after the battle of Roncevaux. However, in the Middle Dutch text Roland and Olivier are still alive. They have, in the company of the sons of Girart de Vienne and many others, fought against the Saxons under the leadership of the giant Fledric and have slain them with the help of a magician in a black suit of armour (possibly called Elegast: the scribe's abbreviation is unclear). These events do not have a parallel in the French tradition (Besamusca, 2008, pp. 26, 28-29). This state of affairs makes it likely that *Gwidekijn van Sassen*, probably composed by a Flemish poet (van den Berg, 1985, p. 22), was an indigenous romance.

The last Middle Dutch romance to be discussed here is known under the title *Fierabras*. It is significant, however, that in the past other titles (*Doon de Mayence* and *Jan van Lecviden*) were proposed as well. After all, the incomplete Middle Dutch text, copied on a mid-fourteenth-century fragment (Klein, 1995, p. 15, no. 77) and numbering 372 lines, relates events that are unparalleled in the French tradition (Besamusca, 2008, pp. 27-28, 29-30). The main protagonists are the young Fierabras, who rides a dromedary, and Elegast and Roland's future father, Mile. They meet three Saracen kings who recall that the three heroes played pranks on them earlier by using magic and a clever trick (they pretended to bring a message from Mohammed). Later, Fierabras, Elegast, and Mile fight against superior Saracen forces (Kalff, 1885-86, pp. 168-79). The current state of Dutch scholarship certainly does not exclude the possibil-

ity that *Fierabras*, written by a Flemish or Brabantine author (van den Berg, 1985, p. 22), like *Pepijn die naen* and *Gwidekijn van Sassen*, was an indigenous romance.

This concise overview of all the extant Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances has made it clear that we are dealing with a considerable corpus of texts. It should be added, however, that almost all of these romances have come down to us in fragments. While *Karel ende Elegast*, thanks to the printed verse editions of this text, and *Sibilla* are the exceptions to the rule, other romances are completely extant in an adapted form only. This concerns, for example, the three faithful Rhine-Franconian renditions of *Renout van Montalbaen*, *Madelgijs*, and *Ogier van Denemarken*. These texts came into being around 1460 in a literary milieu connected with the Heidelberg court and the countess palatine Mechtild of Rottenburg (Beckers, 1987; Duijvestijn, 1987). The printed prose editions of *Huge van Bordeeus*, *Madelgijs*, and *Renout van Montalbaen* are adapted versions, too. Most of them were published by the Antwerp printers Willem Vorsterman and Jan van Ghelen.

The Middle Dutch Charlemagne romances were written over a long period of time. Texts like *Van den bere Wisselau*, the Limburg *Aiol*, *Flovent*, and the *Roelantslied* were composed before or around 1200. While the majority of the works date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, *Sibilla* came into being in the sixteenth century. The vast majority of the authors made use of written models. Some of them, however, seem to have worked on the basis of their recollection of performances of French tales.

Middle Dutch literature first came into being in the area between the rivers Rhine and Meuse. The Limburg *Aiol* testifies to this. Most of the Charlemagne romances, however, were written by Flemish poets.[11] According to recent research, they did not compose their works for the (bi-

---

[11] See also van den Berg, 1987.

lingual?) court aristocracy but for the Flemish-speaking urban elite con-
sisting of both patricians and noblemen.[12]

Works Cited

[Note to the reader: Because the author/date system has been used for citations in the present article, multiple works by the same author(s) are listed chronologically in ascending order.]

Bastert, Bernd. (2010). *Helden als Heilige. Chanson de geste-Rezeption im deutschsprachigen Raum*. Tübingen: Francke.

Beckers, Hartmut. (1987). "Frühneuhochdeutsche Fassungen nieder-ländischer Erzählliteratur im Umkreis des pfalzgräflichen Hofes zu Heidelberg um 1450/80." *Miscellanea Neerlandica. Opstellen voor dr. Jan Deschamps ter gelegenheid van zijn zeventigste verjaardag*. Ed. Elly Cockx-Indestege and Frans Hendrickx. Vol. 2. Leuven: Peeters. 237-49.

Berg, Evert van den. (1983). *Middelnederlandse versbouw en syntaxis. Ontwikkelingen in de versificatie van verhalende poëzie ca. 1200-ca. 1400*. Utrecht: HES.

—. (1985). "De Karelepiek. Van voorgedragen naar individueel gelezen literatuur." *Tussentijds. Bundel studies aangeboden aan W.P. Gerritsen ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftigste verjaardag*. Ed. A.M.J. van Buuren et al. Utrecht: HES. 9-24.

—. (1987). "Genre en gewest. De geografische spreiding van de ridderepiek." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 103: 1-36.

—. (2007). "Developments in the Versification of Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances." *Olifant* 26.1: 11-26.

Berg, Evert van den and Bart Besamusca, eds. (1992). *De epische wereld. Middelnederlandse Karelromans in wisselend perspectief*. Muiderberg: Coutinho.

—. (1994). "Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances and the Oral Tradition of the *Chansons de Geste*." *Medieval Dutch Literature in Its European Context*. Ed. Erik Kooper. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 81-95.

Besamusca, Bart. (1983). *Repertorium van de Middelnederlandse Karelepiek. Een beknopte beschrijving van de handschriftelijke en gedrukte overlevering*. Utrecht: HES.

—. (1992). "Willem Vorsterman's *Sibilla*: The Dutch Story of Charlemagne's Repudiated Wife." *L'imaginaire courtois et son double*. Ed. Giovanna Angeli and Luciano Formisano. Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane. 245-54.

—. (2004). "*Beerte metten breden voeten*." *Olifant* 23.1: 13-25.

—. (2008). "Unidentifizierte mittelniederländische Karlsepen. Die Idée fixe der mittelniederländischen Literatur als Übersetzungsliteratur." *Chansons de geste im europäischen Kontext. Ergebnisse der Tagung der Deutschen Sektion der ICLS am 23. und 24.4.2004 in Köln*. Ed. Hans-Joachim Ziegeler. Göttingen: V&R UP. 26-35.

Besamusca, Bart and Hans van Dijk. (2004). "Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances in *Olifant*." *Olifant* 23.1: 9-11.

—, eds. (2011). "*Karel ende Elegast*." Trans. Thea Summerfield. *Olifant* 26.2: 51-165.

Besamusca, Bart, Willem Kuiper, and Rob Resoort, eds. (1998). *Sibilla. Een zestiende-eeuwse Karelroman in proza*. Muiderberg: Coutinho.

Bloh, Ute von, Kurt Gärtner, and Michael Heintze. (2002). "*Lohier et Malart-Loher und Maller*: Vorschläge zu einer Edition des Epos." *Zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich. Elisabeth von Lothringen, Gräfin zu Nassau-Saarbrücken*. Ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs and Hans-Walter Herrmann, in collaboration with Gerhard Sauder. St. Ingbert: Röhrig. 427-57.

Bouwman, André, and Bart Besamusca, eds. (2009). Of Reynaert the Fox. *Text and Facing Translation of the Middle Dutch Beast Epic* Van den vos Reynaerde. Trans. Thea Summerfield. Incl. chapter on Middle Dutch by Matthias Hüning and Ulrike Vogl. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP.

Brandsma, Frank. (2005). "*Van den bere Wisselau*." *Olifant* 24.1: 9-21.

Broers, Theo J.A. (2004). "*Willem van Oringen*." *Olifant* 23.1: 45-61.

Dijk, Hans van. (2004). "'Ende hi was de aldercloecste ende besochste ridder': Das Bild Karls des Großen in den Niederlanden." *Karl der Große in den europaïschen Literaturen des Mittelalters. Konstruktion eines Mythos*. Ed. Bernd Bastert. Tübingen: Niemeyer. 107-26.

—. (2005). "*Ogier van Denemarken*." *Olifant* 24.1: 23-38.

—. (2008). "Des originaux français perdus à la transmission orale. Aperçu des recherches dans le domaine de l´épopée française aux Pays-Bas." *Cinquante ans d´études épiques. Actes du Colloque anniversaire de la Société Rencesvals (Liège, 19-20 août 2005)*. Ed. Nadine Henrard. Geneve: Droz. 215-27.

—. (2011). "*Roelantslied*." *Olifant* 26.2: 35-49.

—. (In press). "Die Chanson de geste im Niederländischen zwischen dem Französischen und dem Deutschen."

Duijvestijn, Bob. (1987). "Niederländische Dichtung in der Privat-bücherei der Pfalzgräfin Mechthild (1418/19-1482)." *Miscellanea Neerlandica. Opstellen voor dr. Jan Deschamps ter gelegenheid van zijn zeventigste verjaardag*. Ed. Elly Cockx-Indestege and Frans Hendrickx. Vol. 2. Leuven: Peeters. 253-61.

—. (2002). "Madelgijs, zwerftocht van een epische stof." *Van Madelgijs tot Malagis. Een bundel opstellen n.a.v. de tachtigste verjaardag van Gilbert de Smet*. Ed. Georges de Schutter and Jan Goossens. Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde. 23-34.

—. (2004). "*Madelgijs*." *Olifant* 23.1: 95-110.

Farrier, Susan E. (1993). *The Medieval Charlemagne Legend: An Annotated Bibliography*. Dutch materials treated by Geert H.M. Claassens. New York: Garland.

Finet-van der Schaaf, Baukje. (1987). "Étude comparée d'*Aiol*, chanson de geste du XIIe siècle, et des fragments d'*Aiol* en moyen-néerlandais." 2 vols. Thèse de IIIe cycle. Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV.

—. (2006). "La tradition écrite de la chanson d'*Aiol*: une mise au point." *Romania* 124: 503-08.

Goossens, Jan. (2002). "De jambische viervoeters van de Limburgse *Aiol*." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 118: 317-34.

Gysseling, Maurits, ed. (1980). *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)*. Series 2 (Literaire handschriften). Vol. 1. The Hague: Nijhoff. 311-32.

Have, J.B. van der. (2005). "De Middelnederlandse Karelepiek: de fragmenten en het geheel." *Karolus Rex. Studies over de middeleeuwse verhaaltraditie rond Karel de Grote*. Ed. Bart Besamusca and Jaap Tigelaar. Hilversum: Verloren. 77-92.

—. (2007). "*Roman der Lorreinen.*" *Olifant* 26.1: 27-44.

—. (2011). "Medieval Dutch Charlemagne Manuscripts." *Olifant* 26.2: 9-34.

Iwema, Klaas. (1986). "De Middelnederlandse fragmenten van *Loyhier en Malaert*. Een bronnenuitgave." *Leuvense Bijdragen* 75: 433-94.

Kalff, Gerrit, ed. (1885-86; 1968). *Middelnederlandsche epische fragmenten*. Groningen: Wolters. Arnhem: Gysbers.

Kienhorst, Hans. (1988). *De handschriften van de Middelnederlandse ridderepiek. Een codicologische beschrijving*. 2 vols. Deventer: Sub Rosa.

—. (1998). "Fragment van een onbekende Middelnederlandse ridderroman over Willem van Oringen. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Dutch b. 2, fol. 6." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 114: 125-37.

Kienhorst, Hans, and Herman Mulder. (1993). "Middelnederlandse fragmenten van D.A. Stracke in de bibliotheek van het Ruusbroecgenootschap te Antwerpen." *Spiegel der Letteren* 35: 67-74.

—. (1998). "Fragment van een Middelnederlandse vertaling van het *Chanson d'Aspremont*." *Spiegel der Letteren* 40: 299-307.

Klein, Jan Willem. (1995). "'Het getal zijner jaren is onnaspeurlijk'. Een herijking van de dateringen van de handschriften en fragmenten met Middelnederlandse ridderepiek." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 111: 1-23.

Kuiper, Willem, and Jos Biemans. (2004). "*Jourdein van Blaves*. Editie van de bewaard gebleven fragmenten." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 120: 211-46.

Lens, Mieke. (2004a). "*Huge van Bordeeus*." *Olifant* 23.1: 79-93.

—. (2004b). *Huge van Bordeeus. Een ridder van Karel de Grote op avontuur in het oosten. Onderzoek naar de Middelnederlandse versfragmenten en prozaroman*. Groningen: Groningen UP.

Oostrom, Frits van. (1987). "Het verraad van Pepijn (Leiden, U.B., Ltk. 1199)." *Rapiarijs. Een afscheidsbundel voor Hans van Dijk*. Ed. Saskia Buitink et al. Utrecht: Instituut de Vooys. 83-84.

—. (2005). "Grote oorzaken, kleine gevolgen? Over een bijfiguur in de *Flovent*, en het primaire publiek van de Middelnederlandse ridderroman." *Karolus Rex. Studies over de middeleeuwse verhaaltraditie rond Karel de Grote*. Ed. Bart Besamusca and Jaap Tigelaar. Hilversum: Verloren. 105-15.

—. (2006). *Stemmen op schrift. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300*. Amsterdam: Bakker.

Pfeijffer, Leo, and Rob Wielaard. (1994). "De Middelnederlandse fragmenten van de *Flovent*. Diplomatische editie." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 110: 81-114.

Spijker, Irene. (2004a). "*Gheraert van Viane*." *Olifant* 23.1: 63-78.

——. (2004b). "*Renout van Montalbaen*." *Olifant* 23.1: 27-43.

——, ed. (2005). *De historie vanden vier Heemskinderen*. Amsterdam: Bakker.

Verdam, Jacob. (1882). "Nieuwe *Aiol*-fragmenten." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 2: 209-55.

——. (1897). "Fragment van een onbekenden ridderroman." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 16: 294-305.

Zonneveld, Wim. (2000). *Van Afflighem en Chaucer. Het* Leven van Sinte Lutgart *als jambisch gedicht*. Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek; Münster: Nodus.

26.2