

Published in 1978
Commemoration of the
twelfth centenary
Battle of Roncevaux

THE
SONG
OF
ROLAND

AN ANALYTICAL EDITION

II. Oxford Text and English Translation

Gerard J. Brault

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

UNIVERSITY PARK AND LONDON



- You are hailed by all as a noble knight.
 The one who proposed that you should go
 Will not be protected or saved by Charlemagne.
 355 Count Roland ought not to have thought of that,
 For you were born of very high parentage."
 Afterward they say to him: "Take us along, my lord!"
 Ganelon replies: "God forbid!
 Far better that I should die alone than so many good knights.
 360 You will return to fair France, my lords:
 Greet my wife for me
 And Pinabel, my friend and my peer,
 And Baldwin, my son whom you all know:
 Help him and be his vassals."
 365 He started on his way, setting forth along the road. AOI.

28

- Ganelon is riding under a tall olive tree.
 He has joined up with the Saracen messengers,
 But now Blancandrin lags behind to be alone with him;
 They speak to each other with great cunning.
 370 Blancandrin said: "Charles is an extraordinary man
 Who conquered Apulia and all Calabria.
 He crossed the salt sea to reach England
 And imposed an annual tax to be paid to Saint Peter.
 What does he seek from us here in our land?"
 375 Ganelon replies: "Whatever he wills.
 There will never be anyone to measure up to him." AOI.

29

- Blancandrin said: "The Franks are most worthy men.
 Those dukes and counts do very great harm
 To their lord when they counsel him thus:
 380 They torment and ruin him, and others too."
 Ganelon replies: "In truth, I know this to be so of no man
 Except Roland, who will suffer for it some day.
 Yesterday morning the Emperor was sitting in the shade.
 His nephew came to him wearing his byrnie,
 385 For he had been plundering near Carcasoine.

He held a red apple in his hand:
 'Here, dear lord,' said Roland to his uncle.
 'I present you with the crowns of all the kings.'
 His madness will surely bring him to ruin,
 390 For he risks his life each day.
 If someone were to kill him, then we would have real peace." AOI.

30

Blancandrin said: "Roland is a maniac
 To want to subdue all peoples
 And assert a claim to all lands!
 395 What people does he count on to accomplish such exploits?"
 Ganelon replies: "French people.
 They love him so much they will never fail him.
 He gives them so many gifts of gold and silver,
 Mules and war-horses, silk cloth and battle gear.
 400 He holds sway over the Emperor himself.
 He will conquer for him all the lands from here to the Orient."
 AOI.

31

Ganelon and Blancandrin rode on,
 Eventually they gave each other their word
 That they would find a way to have Roland killed.
 405 They rode along through highways and byways,
 Eventually they dismount in Saragossa under a yew.
 There was a throne in the shade of a pine tree,
 Covered with a silk cloth made in Alexandria.
 The King who ruled all of Spain was there,
 410 Twenty thousand Saracens came all around him.
 Not a single one of them utters a word or makes a sound,
 Because all would like to hear the news.
 Here now are Ganelon and Blancandrin.

32

Blancandrin came before Marsile,
 415 Holding Count Ganelon by the hand,
 And he said to the King: "May Mohammed save you

And Apollo, whose holy faith we profess!
 We delivered your message to Charles.
 He raised both his hands upward,
 420 Praised his God, but made no other reply.
 He sends you one of his noble barons here,
 Who comes from France and is a very powerful man:
 From him you will hear whether or not you will have peace."
 Marsile replies: "Let him speak, we'll listen!" AOI.

33

425 Now Count Ganelon had thought everything out carefully.
 With great guile he begins to speak
 As one well accustomed to such dealings,
 And he said to the King: "May God save you,
 And glory be to Him we should all adore!
 430 Here is what noble Charlemagne wishes you to know:
 Become a convert to holy Christianity,
 And he will consent to give you half of Spain as a fief.
 If you do not submit to this pact,
 You will be seized and bound by force;
 435 You will be brought to the judgment seat at Aix,
 There you will be tried and executed,
 There you will die shamefully and in vile fashion."
 King Marsile was panic-stricken by this.
 He was holding a spear feathered with gold.
 440 He tried to strike him with it but was prevented from doing so.
 AOI.

34

King Marsile's color rose and faded,
 He brandished his spear, holding it by the shaft.
 When Ganelon saw him do this, he put his hand to his sword,
 Pulled it out of the sheath about the width of two fingers,
 445 And said to it: "How beautiful and bright you are!
 I served the King at court for a long time with you!
 The Emperor of France will never say
 That I died alone in a foreign land
 Before the best of them paid dearly for you."
 450 The pagans say: "Let's break it up!"

35

The shrewdest Saracens all pleaded with Marsile,
 With the result that he returned to his seat on the throne.
 The Caliph said: "You served us badly
 When you tried to strike the Frenchman;
 455 You ought to have listened to what he has to say."
 "My lord," said Ganelon, "I'll consent to suffer that affront.
 I would not fail, for all the gold that God has made,
 Nor for all the wealth in this land,
 To tell him, if I have an opportunity to do so,
 460 What mighty King Charles wishes him to know,
 What he wishes his mortal enemy to know through me."
 He is wearing a sable cloak
 Covered with silk cloth made in Alexandria.
 He throws it to the ground, Blancandrin picks it up,
 465 But he does not wish to part with his sword,
 He kept his right hand on its golden hilt.
 The pagans say: "There's a worthy knight for you!" A.O.I.

36

Ganelon moved close to the King,
 And he said to him: "It is wrong of you to be angry,
 470 For here is what Charles, who rules France, wishes you to know:
 Become a convert to the Christian faith;
 He will give you half of Spain as a fief.
 His nephew Roland will have the other half:
 What a madman you'll have for a partner!
 475 If you do not submit to this pact,
 He will come to besiege you in Saragossa,
 You will be seized and bound by force,
 You will be led directly to the capital at Aix.
 You will have neither a palfrey nor a war-horse,
 480 Neither a mule nor a jenny as a mount;
 You will be thrown on a lowly packhorse.
 There you will be tried and will lose your head.
 Our Emperor sends you this letter."
 He gave it to the pagan, who took it in his right hand.

37

- 485 Marsile was in a white rage,
 He breaks the seal, he threw away the wax.
 He looks at the letter, sees the written offer:
 "Charles, who rules over France, wishes me to know
 That I should bear in mind the chagrin and the anger
 490 Occasioned by Basan and his brother Basile,
 Whose heads I took in the mountains of Haltille.
 If I wish to escape with life and limb,
 I must send him my uncle, the Caliph,
 Otherwise he will not care what happens to me."
 495 Then Marsile's son spoke up
 And said to the King: "Ganelon talked nonsense,
 He went so far he doesn't deserve to live any longer.
 Let me have him and I'll dispense justice to him."
 When Ganelon heard him, he brandished his sword,
 500 He goes under the pine tree and backs up against the trunk.

38

- The King went into the garden,
 He takes his best advisers along with him:
 White-haired Blancandrin came,
 And Jurfare, who is his son and heir,
 505 And the Caliph, his uncle and his loyal companion.
 Blancandrin said: "Call the Frenchman,
 He has given me his word he'll act in our interest."
 The King said: "Go and fetch him personally."
 But Ganelon took him by the fingers of his right hand,
 510 He leads him into the garden up to the King.
 There they negotiate the wrongful act of treachery. AOT.

39

- "Dear Sir Ganelon," said Marsile to him,
 "I did something a bit ill-advised to you
 When I gave vent to my great anger and made as if to strike you.
 515 I pledge to make things straight between us with these sable furs
 Worth more than five hundred pounds in gold.
 Before tomorrow night I shall make a handsome reparation to you."

Ganelon replies: "I shall not turn it down.
May it please God to make it up to you!" AOI.

40

- 520 Marsile said: "Ganelon, believe me when I say
That I intend to take care of you handsomely.
I want you to tell me about Charlemagne.
He is very old and his time is running out,
I understand he is over two hundred years old.
- 525 He has knocked about so many lands,
He has taken so many blows on his shield,
He has reduced so many powerful kings to beggary:
When will he ever forsake waging war?"
Ganelon replies: "Charles is not like that.
- 530 There is not a man who sees him and knows him well
Who won't agree that the Emperor is a man's man.
No matter how much I praise and extoll him to you,
He has more honor and nobility in him still.
Who can relate his great worth?
- 535 God has cast such rays of manly virtue on him
That he would rather die than abandon his barons."

41

- The pagan said: "I marvel greatly
At Charlemagne who is old and gray.
I understand he is better than two hundred years old.
- 540 He has punished his body in so many lands,
He has taken so many blows from lances and spears,
He has reduced so many powerful kings to beggary:
When will he ever forsake waging war?
"Not," said Ganelon, "so long as his nephew lives.
- 545 There's no knight like him under the canopy of heaven.
His companion Oliver also has great worth.
The Twelve Peers, whom Charles cherishes so,
Are in the van with twenty thousand knights.
Charles is secure and fears no man." AOI.

42

- 550 The Saracen said: "I marvel greatly
 At Charlemagne, who is hoary and white-haired.
 I understand he is more than two hundred years old.
 He has conquered his way across so many lands,
 He has taken so many blows from good sharp spears,
 555 He has slain and vanquished in battle so many powerful kings:
 When will he ever forsake waging war?"
 "Not," said Ganelon, "so long as Roland lives.
 There's no knight like him from here to the Orient.
 His companion Oliver also has great worth.
 560 The Twelve Peers, whom Charles loves so well,
 Are in the van with twenty thousand Franks.
 Charles is secure and fears no man alive." AOI.

43

- "Dear Sir Ganelon," said King Marsile,
 "You'll never see a finer army than mine,
 565 I may have as many as four hundred thousand knights.
 With them can I give battle to Charles and to the French?"
 Ganelon replies: "Don't do it right away!
 You will suffer a great loss of your pagans if you do.
 Don't act foolishly, keep your wits about you.
 570 Give the Emperor such riches
 That every Frenchman's head will turn.
 Send him twenty hostages,
 And the King will return home to fair France.
 He will position his rearguard behind him:
 575 His nephew Count Roland will be there, I know,
 And worthy and reliable Oliver.
 The counts are already dead, believe me!
 Charles will see his great pride fall,
 He won't have the will to war against you ever again." AOI.

44

- 580 "Dear Sir Ganelon, . . .
 How can I kill Roland?"
 Ganelon replies: "I can tell you exactly how.

- The King will be at the main pass of Cize,
 He will have positioned his rearguard behind him;
 585 His nephew, mighty Count Roland, will be there,
 And Oliver, on whom he relies so much;
 They are accompanied by twenty thousand Franks.
 Send a hundred thousand of your pagans against them,
 Let these men join battle with them first.
- 590 The men from France will be battered and bruised;
 Not that your men won't be massacred too.
 Offer them battle a second time in similar fashion:
 Roland will not escape from both engagements.
 Then you will have achieved a noble feat of arms,
 595 You will never have war for the rest of your life." AOI.

45

- "If one could cause Roland to die,
 Then Charles would lose his right arm from his body,
 His formidable armies would cease to exist.
 Charles would never again muster such great forces,
 600 The Fatherland would remain in peace."
 Hearing this, Marsile kissed him on the neck,
 Then he begins to bring out his treasures. AOI.

46

- Marsile said: "Why discuss it . . . ?
 Advice is worthless when one . . .
 605 You must swear to me to betray Roland."
 Ganelon replies: "Just as you please!"
 On the relics of his sword Murgleis
 He swore the oath of treason, thus he committed a felony. AOI.

47

- There was a throne there made of ivory.
 610 Marsile has a book brought forward,
 It contained the scriptures of Mohammed and Tervagant.
 The Spanish Saracen swore this:
 If he finds Roland in the rearguard,

He will give battle with all his army
 615 And, if it be in his power, Roland will surely die there.
 Ganelon replies: "May your wish come true!" AOI. X

48

At that moment, a pagan, Valdabron, came forward,
 He went before King Marsile.
 With peals of laughter he said to Ganelon:
 620 "Take my sword, no man has a better one,
 There are more than a thousand mangons in its hilt.
 I give it to you, dear sir, as a token of friendship,
 So that you may help us in the matter of the knight Roland,
 So that we may find him in the rearguard."
 625 "That will be taken care of," Count Ganelon replies.
 Then they kissed each other on the face and chin.

49

Then a pagan, Climborin, came forward.
 With peals of laughter he said to Ganelon:
 "Take my helmet, I've never seen a better one.
 630 Help us concerning the marquis Roland,
 Show us how we may shame him."
 "That will be taken care of," Ganelon replied.
 Then they kissed each other on the mouth and face. AOI.

50

At that moment, Queen Bramimonde came forward:
 635 "I care very much for you, sir," she said to the Count,
 "Because my lord and all his men hold you in high esteem.
 I will send two brooches to your wife;
 They are wrought with much gold, amethysts, and jacinths,
 They are worth more than all the riches of Rome.
 640 Your Emperor never had such fine ones."
 He took them, he sticks them in his boot. AOI.

51

The King summons his treasurer, Malduit:
 "Is Charles's tribute ready?"
 And he replies: "Yes indeed, sire, in full:
 645 Seven hundred camels laden with gold and silver
 And twenty of the noblest hostages on the face of the earth." AOI.

52

Marsile placed a hand on Ganelon's shoulder,
 And he said to him: "You are extremely worthy and wise.
 By that faith which you hold most holy,
 650 See to it you don't have a change of heart concerning us.
 I wish to give you a huge portion of my wealth:
 Ten mules laden with the finest gold of Arabia;
 I shall make you an identical gift every year.
 Take the keys of this vast city,
 655 Present its great riches to King Charles,
 Then volunteer Roland to the rearguard for me.
 If I manage to find him in a mountain pass or defile,
 I'll engage him in mortal combat."
 Ganelon replies: "I think I'm wasting time!"
 660 Then he mounted up, he begins his return voyage. AOI.

53

The Emperor is approaching his homeland,
 He came to the city of Galne.
 Count Roland captured and destroyed it.
 From that day forward, it remained deserted for a hundred years.
 665 The King is awaiting news of Ganelon
 And the tribute of the great land of Spain.
 In the morning, at dawn, as the day is breaking,
 Count Ganelon arrived at the camp. AOI.

54

The Emperor rose early in the morning.
 670 The King hears mass and matins,
 He stood before his tent on the green grass.

- Roland was there and worthy Oliver,
 Duke Naimes and many other knights.
 Ganelon, the felon, the perjurer, arrived,
 675 He begins to speak with great deceit
 And he said to the King: "May God save you!
 I bring you the keys of Saragossa;
 I bring very great riches for you from there
 And twenty hostages, have them carefully guarded!
 680 But worthy King Marsile wishes you to know
 That you shouldn't blame him on account of the Caliph,
 For with my own eyes I saw four hundred thousand armed men,
 Wearing hauberks, some with helmets laced,
 Swords with gold enameled hilts at their sides,
 685 Who accompanied him to the sea.
 They flee from Marsile because of Christianity,
 Which they neither wish to accept nor uphold.
 Before they had sailed four leagues,
 A tempest and a storm overtook them.
 690 They drowned there, you will never see them again;
 Had he survived, I would have brought him.
 As for the pagan king, believe me, sire,
 Before the end of next month,
 He will follow you to the kingdom of France
 695 And become a convert to your religion;
 His hands placed between yours, he will become your vassal,
 He will hold the kingdom of Spain as a fief from you."
 The King said: "Thank God!
 You rendered good service, you shall have a very great reward."
 700 A thousand bugles are sounded throughout the army.
 The Franks break camp, they have their beasts of burden packed up,
 All have taken the road for fair France. AOI.

55

- Charlemagne has laid waste to Spain,
 Captured its fortresses, penetrated its citadels.
 705 The King says that his war is over,
 The Emperor is riding toward fair France.
 Count Roland has mounted the standard,
 Raised it against the sky at the top of a hill.

- The Franks bivouac throughout the countryside.
 710 The pagans are riding through deep valleys,
 Wearing hauberks and . . .
 Helmets laced and swords at their sides,
 Shields slung from their necks and lances with gonfanons attached.
 They remain in a woods on top of the mountains.
 715 Four hundred thousand await daybreak.
 God! what a pity the Franks do not know it! AOI.

56

- The day passes, the night is still,
 Charles, the mighty emperor, sleeps.
 He dreamed he was at the main pass of Cize,
 720 He was holding his ashen lance in his hands.
 Count Ganelon seized it from him,
 He twisted and brandished it so violently
 That its splinters fly toward heaven.
 Charles sleeps, he does not wake up. *dream*

57

- 725 After this vision he dreamed anew,
 This time that he was in France, in his chapel, at Aix.
 A fierce bear bit him on the right arm.
 He saw a leopard coming from the direction of the Ardennes,
 It attacks his body with great ferocity.
 730 A hunting dog came down the steps from inside the hall,
 Running toward Charles by leaps and bounds.
 It slices off the bear's right ear,
 It fights madly against the leopard.
 The French say that there is a great battle,
 735 They do not know which one of them will win it.
 Charles sleeps, he did not wake up. AOI.

58

The night passes and the bright dawn appears.
 Throughout the army . . .
 The Emperor rides very fiercely.

- 740 "My lord barons," said Emperor Charles,
 "See the passes and the narrow defiles:
 "Help me decide who will be in the rearguard."
 Ganelon replies: "Roland, this stepson of mine,
 You have no other knight with such great courage."
 745 When the King hears this, he looks at him fiercely,
 He said to him: "You're a living devil,
 A deadly frenzy has entered your body!
 And who will be before me in the vanguard?"
 Ganelon replies: "Ogier of Denmark,
 750 You have no knight who can lead it better than he."

59

- When Count Roland heard himself nominated, AOI.
 He spoke as a true knight:
 "Sir stepfather, I am much indebted to you,
 You have nominated me for the rearguard.
 755 Charles, the king who rules France, shall not lose,
 So long as I'm aware of it, a single palfrey or war-horse,
 A single mule or jenny that must be ridden,
 Nor shall he lose a single packhorse or sumpter
 That shall not first have been disputed with swords."
 760 Ganelon replies: "You speak the truth, I'm sure." AOI.

60

- Hearing that he will be in the rearguard,
 Roland spoke angrily to his stepfather:
 "Oh! you dirty son of a bitch,
 Did you expect me to drop the gauntlet to the ground
 765 The way you let the staff fall before Charles?" AOI.

61

- "Rightful Emperor," said the knight Roland,
 "Give me the bow you hold in your hand.
 So help me, they'll never have cause to reproach me
 That I dropped it the way Ganelon did,
 770 From his right hand, when he received the staff."

The Emperor kept his head bowed down,
 He stroked his beard and twisted his moustache.
 He cannot prevent the tears welling from his eyes.

62

After that Naimés came forward.
 775 There was not a better knight at court than he,
 And he said to the King: "You heard everything he said,
 Count Roland is very angry.
 He has been nominated for the rearguard,
 No knight in your service can ever change that.
 780 Give him the bow that you have strung,
 But arrange for him to have very reliable companions!"
 The King gives him the bow, Roland has received it.

63

The Emperor calls his nephew Roland:
 "Dear nephew, sir, believe me when I say
 785 That I will give half of my army over to you.
 Keep these men, it will be your salvation."
 The Count said: "I'll do no such thing,
 I'll be damned if I'll act unworthily of my family!
 I shall keep twenty thousand very brave Franks.
 790 Cross the mountain passes with complete peace of mind:
 You need fear no man while I'm alive!"

64

Count Roland has mounted his war-horse. AOI.
 His companion Oliver comes toward him,
 Gerin and worthy Count Gerier came,
 795 Oton came and Berengier also came,
 Astor and old Anseïs came,
 Fierce Gerard of Roussillon came,
 Mighty Duke Gaifier came.
 The Archbishop said: "I'll go, by my head!"
 800 "I'm with you too," said Count Gautier,

"I'm Roland's vassal, I must not fail him."
 Between them they select twenty thousand knights. AOI.

65

Count Roland calls Gautier de l'Hum:
 "Take a thousand Franks from France, our land,
 805 Patrol the deserts and the heights
 So the Emperor will not lose a single one of his men." AOI.
 Gautier replies: "I'll do my utmost for you."
 With a thousand Frenchmen from France, their land,
 Gautier leads a detachment through the mountain passes and
 elevations.
 810 He will not descend when the news is bad
 Before seven hundred swords have been drawn.
 King Almaris of the kingdom of Belferne
 Gave them a fierce battle that day.

66

The mountains are high and the valleys are shadowy,
 815 The rocks dark, the defiles frightening.
 That day, the French passed through, enduring great pain,
 The groaning can be heard for fifteen leagues around.
 Reaching the Fatherland,
 They saw Gascony, their sovereign's land.
 820 Then they are reminded of their fiefs and of their domains,
 And of maidens and of noble spouses:
 All eyes are brimming with tears of yearning.
 Charles suffers anguish more than anyone else,
 He has left his nephew in the Spanish pass.
 825 He is suddenly distressed, he cannot help weeping. AOI.

67

The Twelve Peers have remained in Spain.
 Twenty thousand Franks accompany them,
 They have no fear and are not afraid to die.
 The Emperor is returning home to France.
 830 Beneath his cloak, his face betrays his anguish.
 Duke Naimés is riding beside him,