Gormond and Isembard

Gormond and Isembard (Old French: Gormont e Isembart) is a 661 line fragment of an Old French epic preserved in a single manuscript which has been kept at the Royal Library of Belgium since 1875. The pages on which the story were written had been used as part of a binding of another book, and were not discovered until 1837. Because of the fragmentary nature of the poem, dating the text poses many problems. The handwriting in the manuscript suggests it was copied in the 13th century, but it is generally agreed that the poem is much older. Specifically, it must predate the Chronicle of Haruiulf, a monk in the Abbey of Saint-Riquier in Ponthieu, who refers to the poem, taking the events it describes as if they had been actual historical occurrences. The Chronicle was written in 1088 and revised in 1104.

Thus, Gormont is most likely from around the mid 11th century, making it approximately contemporary with the Song of Roland, and consequently one of the oldest chansons de geste that have been preserved. Unlike Roland, however, Gormont is much simpler in style. Whereas Roland has a conventional French epic decasyllabic meter, the meter of Gormont is octosyllabic, meaning that the lines contain 8 syllables plus an optional extrametrical syllable at the end of the line. Like Roland, however, Gormont is composed in laisses with no fixed length and with final assonance in each laisse. There is no obligatory caesura in the line, but most lines do have a structural break in the middle, after the first four syllables. I've marked the caesura, where it is clear, with the sign / in the text. The translation is also divided, so you can match it with the original language; in a few cases the order of the two halves of the line is reversed to make the English translation more readable.

Instructions:

Below you will find the first 359 lines of the fragment, along with a fairly literal line-by-line English translation I have prepared that aims to preserve as many of the important syntactic and lexical (but not metrical) properties of the original to the extent possible. Following the excerpt there is a summary of the plot of the remainder of the poem. Because the Old French of the manuscript is exceptionally faulty, the form you will see below is based on an attempted reconstruction of the original form of the poem, published by Alphonse Bayot in 1921. If you are curious to see how the edited version compares with the manuscript, you can look at the transcription of the manuscript, as well as images of the manuscript itself, by following the link on the course web page (near the bottom of the page under ‘Useful Resources’).

Gormont is in many ways an exceptionally striking example of formulaic composition, giving insight into how the earliest troubadours composed their work orally. Read the poem, in English, and take note of properties which suggest oral composition, as introduced in class and in the readings. Epithets, empty material, and formulaic language are all good things to look for. By examining repeated lines and phrases in the translation and comparing them with the Old French text, you may also be able to verify whether the formulas you observe in the translation were present in the original language. In addition you may consider the fact that oral poets had on hand not only convenient ready-made phrases that fit together metrically, but also whole structured episodes which could be recycled with minor variations as needed. Thus your discussion should include observations about formulaic organization of individual words and phrases, as well as of thematic units, episodes — indeed, whatever else appears to you to reflect a tradition in which the singer was forced to generate the poem while performing it.

Your discussion should be about 4 (typed) pages in length.
Summary of plot elements:

Although the fragment gives only part of what must have been a much longer story, now lost, enough variants of and references to the story have survived to allow a tentative reconstruction of the plot, as follows:

Isembard, son of a French noble, suffers a certain (unknown) injustice at the hands of King Louis of France. Angered and humiliated, he crosses the Channel to live in exile in England, which is depicted as a pagan country, inhabited by ‘Saracens’ — a generic term in Old French epic for non-Christian peoples, whether to the north or to the south. Isembard attaches himself to the pagan British king Gormond, and in so doing, renounces Christianity. This earns him the epithet Le Magari, or, the Apostate.

Gormond wants to conquer France, so with his army (including Isembard), he invades Ponthieu, a duchy in Normandy, and burns the Abbey of Saint-Riquier located there. King Louis of France marches north with his army to repel the invader.

The night before the battle, Louis sends his messenger Hugo and Hugo’s squire Gontier to communicate with Gormond. In a scene whose exact details remain obscure, Hugo and Gontier play tricks on Gormond and the Saracens. These tricks include something having to do with serving Gormond an inedible peacock, stealing one of the Saracen nobles’ horses, and stealing a golden vase in the shape of a ship. Hugo and Gontier return safely to the French camp, evidently having humiliated Gormond.

The fragment begins in the middle of the battle which takes place the following day, during which one after one, French knights advance to engage Gormond in one-to-one combat and are each defeated or humiliated.

Historical basis:

The legend of Gormond and Isembard seems to have been based on an historical event, the battle of Saucourt-en-Vimeu, which took place in the year 881. In that year, Vikings from England invaded Normandy and ravaged Ponthieu and nearby Vimeu, burning the monastery of Saint-Riquier. On August 3rd, the army of King Louis III of France, who ruled from 879 to 882, roundly defeated the Viking army, whose commander was named Gudrum. Isembart, a French noble who had recently been exiled, had joined the Viking forces in opposing Louis, hoping that he could regain his lands and take revenge.

The legend is usually classed with several other chansons de geste in the so-called Cycle of the Rebel Barons. In each of these legends, a noble revolts against his lord, and the stories deal extensively with the issue of the feudal obligations a vassal owed to his liege lord. These questions were of intense interest to audiences, especially nobles, of the 11th and early 12th centuries, as this was a time when the power of the king of France was at its lowest, and the king had become nearly a mere equal to the stronger of his vassals.
in a loud voice / he (Gormont) cried out :

You are all / finished now:
you won’t get any help / from your God.’

When he had killed / the good vassal,
he chased his horse away;
Then he raised / his standard:
he was given there / a new shield.

The combat was / savage and massive,
and the battle / was very great.
Here spurring forth is / Gautier de Mans,
the son of Erneis, / and a French duke,
and he saw Gormond / posted on the hill,
then he would look / like a coward.
With his spurs / he hits his steed
so hard he makes it / spray out blood;
to King Gormond / he spurs his horse :
and he hits him on / the shield, high up,
so that he shatters it now,
rips the mail off his hauberk, knocked out of place;
he passed / along his side,
but there doesn’t fall / one bit of blood,
nor does his body / suffer any wound.
Gormond throws at him / a cutting javelin:
through his body / it goes rushing;
and beyond, it even touches / a German,
so it knocks both of them / dead on the spot.
The best of kings, / and the noblest
who ever did / live in this world
had only he believed / in Almighty God,
cried out / loud and howling:
These Christians / are unwise
who into battle / come so hastily at me!
I refuse to let / anyone boast of it;
they will all be killed / or overwhelmed.’

When he had killed / the good vassals,
he chased their horses away;
Then he raised / his standard:
he was given there / a new shield.

Above Cayeux, / near the chapel,
the battle was / harsh and terrible ...

... he kills, and strikes, / and disembowels.
Anyone he reaches, / he doesn’t let him stay in saddle:
he’s struck / yet another one dead.
Here spurring forth is / Tierry de Termes,
mounted on a horse, / a Castilian bay ;
He doesn’t stop till he gets to King Gormond
and strikes him on the new shield
so that he breaks / and shatters it;
52 his lance shaft is smashed to smithereens,
53 And Gormond has / drawn his sword,
54 and he struck him / on top on the helmet:
55 he makes his head / fly to the right,
56 across in front of him, / onto the beautiful grass;
57 then he made / some remarks
58 which to the Frenchmen / were quite ugly:
59 ‘Your God / is not powerful enough
60 to manage to protect you.’

61 When he had killed / the good vassal,
62 he chased his horse away;
63 Then he raised / his standard:
64 he was given there / a new shield.

65 Above Cayeux, / in the countryside,
66 the battle was / strong and great.
67 See spurring forth / the Count of Flanders,
68 in all haste / across the moor;
69 and he saw Gormond, / the man of the East,
70 on the shield / he gave him a hard blow;
71 he breaks it from one side to the other;
72 he tears off his white hauberk,
73 but he cannot at all / reach his flesh.
74 Gormond throws at him a javelin;
75 through his body / it goes rushing,
76 on the other side / it hits the moor;
77 his body falls down, / and his soul flies away;
78 and Gormond says, / the man of the East:
79 ‘The mad / people of France,
80 they really have / a vain hope,
81 when against me they / raise a lance!
82 I refuse to let / anyone boast of it!’

83 When he had killed / the good vassal,
84 he chased his horse away.
85 [missing line]
86 he was given there / a new shield.

87 The combat was / now very savage.
88 Here’s Odo / of Champagne,
89 the lord of / Chartres and Blois,
90 and of Château-Landon, / in Gâtinais,
91 and he was sitting on an / Arabian horse;
92 and he goes to fight / Gormond the king;
93 he slices the black enamel / of his shield
94 and, of his hauberk, the chain-mail;
95 but he cannot at all / reach his flesh.
96 He drew his sword / of Cologne,
97 on his helmet / he gives him three blows,
98 he bent him right down / toward him;
99 he would have killed him, / this one, really,
100 had not an Irishman rushed at him;
101 and under him killed / his fine Arabian.
102 ‘Oh!’ said Gormond. / ‘Things are getting worse!

Quant il ot mort / le bon vassal
ariere enchalce le cheval ;
puis mist avant / sun estandart :
hom la li baille / un tuënart.

Desus Caiou, / en la champagne,
fut la bataille / fort e grande.
Eis vus puignant / li quens de Flandres,
et estaissséys / par mi la lande ;
e vit Gormont, / cel d’Orïente,
sur sun escu / li dona grande ;
d’un or a l’alte li fist fendre,
blanche broigne desconcendre,
mais ne pot mie / en la charn prendre.
Gormonz li lancet une tambre ;
par mi le cors / li vait bruiant,
de l’alte part / fiert en la lande ;
li cors chiet jus, / si s’en vait l’anme ;
e dist Gormonz, / cist d’Oriente :
Iceste fol / gent de France,
mult par unt il / fol esperance,
quant il vers mei / drecent la lance.
Ne vueil que ja / uns suls s’en vante !

Quant il ot mort / le bon vassal
ariere enchalce le cheval ;
hom la li baille / un tuënart.

Li esturs fut / mult fiers maneis.
Eis lur Eodon / le Champaneis,
ceuli qui tint / Chartres e Bleis,
Chastel Landon / en Gastineis,
e sist sur un / destrier moreis ;
e vaist ferir / Gormont le rei ;
de sun escu / trencha le neir
e, de sun blanc halberc, les pleis ;
mais n’en pot mie / en charn aver ;
il traist le brant / de Coleneis,
sur sun helme / l’en dona tres,
tut l’enclinet / encontre sei ;
ja l’oüst mort / icist, por veir,
quant a lui lancet uns Ireis ;
suz lui ocist / sun bon moreis.
« A! » dist Gormonz, / « or est surdeis!
103 You’d have been better off / in Estampes!
104 You’ve lost / your Arabian:
105 you’ll never get it back again.
106 Here you’ll remain / together with me;
107 you’ll make a home / in this briar.
108 He shot him / a lance, right at him,
109 God saved him, / this time,
110 so there he cannot at all / reach his flesh,
111 and Odo retreats right away.
112 The combat was / most deadly savage,
113 and the battle becomes widespread.
114 Here’s the count of Poitou,
115 on a steed / spotted with white,
116 and he saw Gormond / standing on the hill:
117 if he doesn’t go / to joust with him,
118 then he would look / like a fool.
119 He spurs his horse / on the ribs
120 so hard he makes / the blood fly out.
121 Against Gormond he’s / gone to joust.
122 He strikes him on his / banded shield,
123 that it’s / broken and decrepit,
124 his hauberk is broken / and tattered;
125 but he couldn’t manage / to wound his body.
126 And Gormond draws / his sword of graven designs;
127 [missing words]
128 all the way to the belt / he sliced him in two.
129 The best of kings, / and the most noble
130 who ever was / born among pagans,
131 in a loud voice / he cried out:
132 ‘You are all / finished now:
133 You won’t get any help / from your God.’
134 When he had killed / the good vassal,
135 he chased his horse away.
136 Then he raised / his standard:
137 he was given there / a new shield.
138 The battle / was full of activity
139 and the fighting / burning hot.
140 Here’s the count / of Normandy,
141 the one who was lord of Rouen
142 and at Fécamp / built the Abbey.
143 He’s sent no equerry / to King Gormond;
144 to joust with him he goes / all by himself;
145 he knocked his lance right over
146 (so says the story / at the Abbey of Saint-Denis).
147 And if it hadn’t been for his lance shaft that broke,
148 he would have / stolen his life.
149 Gormond throws a javelin at him;
150 through his body / it went like a shot,
151 out the other side / it came forth;
152 it hit a young man / from Lombardy,
153 so that from both of them it has / stolen their life.
154 King Gormond / cries aloud:
155 ‘These people, / reckless mad,
156 really did a very foolhardy thing,
157 when against me they / undertook to do battle.
158 I refuse to let / anyone laugh about it,
159 they will all die / in horrendous pain!
160 When he had killed / the good vassals,
161 he chased their horses away;
162 Then he raised / his standard;
163 he was given there / a new shield.
164 Savage was the combat, / and full of action.
165 Here’s Ernaut, / the lord of Ponthieu,
166 and the holdings / of Saint-Valery,
167 he’s coming to fight king Gormond;
168 he roughs up his shield and breaks it;
169 rips the mail off his hauberk and smashes it;
170 in Gormond’s side / he plants his spear;
171 and catching the banner he’s holding,
172 on the other side / he drives it through;
173 he makes it spew / crimson blood;
174 and Ernaut says: / ‘I’ve got you!'
175 mine are this land / and this country,
176 but only God, / who never fails,
177 and the Emperor Louis.
178 This is the challenge / I put to you.’
179 ‘Oh!’ said Gormond, / ‘I heard you well enough!'
180 But you’ll soon have to cope with me!'
181 He drew his sword / with its golden hilt,
182 and strikes him on top / on his helmet, bent down;
183 all the way to the belt / he cleft him in two,
184 so, with this blow, / he struck him dead.
185 ‘Oh!’ says Gormond, / the Arab,
186 ‘You are all / finished now.
187 You won’t get any help / from that one
188 who was violently / hung on the cross,
189 and killed by the reckless Jews.
190 So do you believe / he was resurrected,
191 now when he cannot save you?
192 He is poorly saved, / by Appolin,
193 who even his own body / cannot save,
194 and thus has lived / only to die!
196 So Hugo was watching this,
197 the one who delivered the message.
198 When at the Lord / he heard such insults directed,
199 indeed he had / a broken heart.
200 He spurs the horse on which he sat,
201 he went looking / for Louis.
202 He called to him, / and said to him:
203 ‘Oh! Noble king / of worthy lineage!
204 Have you seen / this Antichrist
205 who is killing all our men
206 and at the Lord / directs such terrible insults?
207 About this I really have / a broken heart.
208 So help me God, / who never fails,
209 I won’t let him go until he’s dead,
210 really did a very foolhardy thing,
211 when against me they / undertook to do battle.
212 I refuse to let / anyone laugh about it,
213 they will all die / in horrendous pain!
214 When he had killed / the good vassals,
215 he chased their horses away;
216 Then he raised / his standard;
217 he was given there / a new shield.
218 Savage was the combat, / and full of action.
219 Here’s Ernaut, / the lord of Ponthieu,
220 and the holdings / of Saint-Valery,
221 he’s coming to fight king Gormond;
222 he roughs up his shield and breaks it;
223 rips the mail off his hauberk and smashes it;
224 in Gormond’s side / he plants his spear;
225 and catching the banner he’s holding,
226 on the other side / he drives it through;
227 he makes it spew / crimson blood;
228 and Ernaut says: / ‘I’ve got you!'
229 mine are this land / and this country,
230 but only God, / who never fails,
231 and the Emperor Louis.
232 This is the challenge / I put to you.’
233 ‘Oh!’ said Gormond, / ‘I heard you well enough!'
234 But you’ll soon have to cope with me!'
235 He drew his sword / with its golden hilt,
236 and strikes him on top / on his helmet, bent down;
237 all the way to the belt / he cleft him in two,
238 so, with this blow, / he struck him dead.
239 ‘Oh!’ says Gormond, / the Arab,
240 ‘You are all / finished now.
241 You won’t get any help / from that one
242 who was violently / hung on the cross,
243 and killed by the reckless Jews.
244 So do you believe / he was resurrected,
245 now when he cannot save you?
246 He is poorly saved, / by Appolin,
247 who even his own body / cannot save,
248 and thus has lived / only to die!
249 So Hugo was watching this,
250 the one who delivered the message.
251 When at the Lord / he heard such insults directed,
252 indeed he had / a broken heart.
253 He spurs the horse on which he sat,
254 he went looking / for Louis.
255 He called to him, / and said to him:
256 ‘Oh! Noble king / of worthy lineage!
257 Have you seen / this Antichrist
258 who is killing all our men
259 and at the Lord / directs such terrible insults?
260 About this I really have / a broken heart.
261 So help me God, / who never fails,
262 I won’t let him go until he’s dead,
so let me go and fight him,
no matter what happens to me!
‘What, dear brother Hugo,
like this you want / to go and leave me?
If ever you should be killed,
then never again would I have / a friend in this world!'
The emperor answered him:
'That cannot be!
My father was valiant, / and my ancestors too,
and I really come / from a good family,
and, accordingly, / I too must be valiant.
So help me God, / Our Great Father,
I won’t let him go for all the world,
so let me go and seek him out.
The king wanted / to grab onto his reins
but when Hugo / leaned a bit to the right,
he let go of reins / on the excellent horse,
and with his spear / Hugo leaves the crowd;
he goes not at all / as if touching the ground:
he goes rushing swiftly / like a storm
until he’s in front of King Gormond;
and he strikes the new shield,
so that he ruins it / and it shatters;
his lance shaft is smashed to smithereens;
and Hugo / drew his sword
and struck him / on top on the helmet,
he bends him right down / toward the ground:
he would have killed him, / this one, really,
had not the enemy’s men rescued him then.
Hugo made / some remarks,
which to Gormond / were quite ugly:
‘It’s Hugo / who torments you,
who the other day, was / at your lodging
to bring King Louis’ / message.
And I served you / like a serving girl;
I put the peacock / on your plate:
but you couldn’t make a meal of it.’
‘Oh!’ said Gormond, / ‘that’s how war is:
Before you touch / the ground again at all,
in my opinion, / you’ll get something terrible!’
With his solid sword, / he slices him hard,
so the caparison is stained with blood;
he throws him down to the ground.

‘You boasted too much, you rogue!
I know you well enough, Hugo,
who the other day / was in my tent;
and you served me / my peacock,
that I couldn’t eat in the least,
and in recklessness you said no;
and the horse / of one of my barons,
you made off with / most treacherously.

Que jeo ne l’alte ja ferir,
que que m’en deiet averir. »
E l’emperere respondi :
« Avoi, bels frere Hugelins,
vuelz me tu dunc / issi guerpir ?
Se tu esteiros ore ocis,
dunc n’ai jeo mais / suz cie i ami. »
Dist Huëlins : / « Ne puet pas estre !
Prus fut mes pere / e mes ancestre,
e, par meïsmes, / dei prus estre.
Si m’aït Deus, / la grant paterne,
jeo nel lerreie por terrestre,
que jeo ne l’alte ja requerre. »
Li reis le volt / saisir as resnes,
quant Huëlins / se pet sur destre,
e ot l’espïé / depart la presse ;
il ne vait giens / cume terrestre,
pruef vait bruianz / come tempeste :
gesques al rei Gormont n’areste ;
il fiert sur la targe novele
qu’il la li fraint / e eshantele ;
sa hanste brise par asteles ;
e Huon at l’espée traite,
si l’at feru / a mun el helme,
tut l’enclinet / rencontre terre :
la loïst mort / icist, a certes,
quant li tolirent gent averse.
Huëlins dist / une novele
qui a Gormont / ne fut pas bele :
« C’est Huëlins / qui vos maisele,
qui, l’aut’ier, fut / a voz herberges
le message / Loowis faire.
Si vos servi / come pulcele ;
le poûn mis / en l’escuële :
unc n’en meüstes la maissele. »
«A!» dist Gormonz, / «si vait de guerre :
le guerredon / vus en dei faire.
Aîncés qu’algiez / guaires de terre,
mien esciïent, / l’avez mult pesme. »
Del fort espïé / grant colp li serre ;
mult l’at navré / al flanc senestre,
que tute en nueille la suzsele ;
jus le tresbuchet a la terre.
Puis s’escria / li reis Gormonz :
« Trop estes vos vantés, bricun !
Jeo te conois assez, Hugon,
qui l’aut’ier, fus / as pavelluns ;
si me servis / de mun poûn
que n’en mui unques le gernun,
si por folie dire nun ;
e le cheval / a mun barun,
en enmenas / par traïsun.
For that you'll now have / your reward!
You'll be stretched out dead, / in the dirt,
You'll never again say / yes or no,
and not from any healer in this world
will you ever get / a cure,
or, from your God, / any respite!
You'll never again say / yes or no,
and not from any healer in this world
will you ever get / a cure,
nor, from your God, / any respite!
You lie!' / is what Hugo said.
'I've gotten torn / only my clothes,
and a little bit / of my skin.
You'll have me again / as an adversary,
and you'll see me / on this battlefield,
crying the name / of the noble king,
of Louis, / the son of Charles.
Happy are those / on our side,
the cruel pagans / will suffer!
He got up / on his feet again
and grasped with two fists / his banner.
He would have killed / King Gormond,
but not an Irishman / jumped between them.
Hugo struck him / with all his might,
so that he fell dead / at Gormond's feet.
Then he's back mounted / on his Gascon horse.
Hugo crosses the battlefield,
his banner / all unfurled,
crying the name / of the noble king,
of Louis, / the son of Charles.
Happy are those / on their side;
the cruel pagans / suffer for it!
He rode around / on the battlefield,
and came back again / to King Gormond,
throwing him to the meadow / on his knees.
Taking his turn, / Gormond strikes him back,
the sword plunges into his body,
and this throws him down / in the dirt.
Now Hugo got / on his feet in the meadow,
though wounded twice / by the great sword.
Then his horse runs away from him.
When Isembard / the Renegade
saw the horse / running, wandering around,
by one thing only / he stood transfixed:
if only he might / get hold of it
before the animal got cut down
and was never of use to any one.
He rushes that way / in all haste;
with the handle / of his spear,
he hopes to pull in / the excellent steed;
the horse holds its head high
so Isembard can't / get hold of it at all.
Hugo has / come up so close
that he approaches / opposite, just walking;
as soon as the steed passes by him,
he seized it by its / golden reins,
between the pommel and cantle he takes his seat.
The crossbowmen / are shooting nearby,
and their sergeants. / and their archers.

Hugo strikes his spurs, / and spurs and whips,

His wounds begin to bleed,

so he gets a bit away from them.

for he really was / a good knight

He rushes that way / in all haste;

between the pommel and cantle he takes his seat;

it was all bloody / and notched,

with Saracen blood / stained red.

Striking the spurs, he comes / to King Gormond,

and he hits him on / his striped helmet

so it's leather straps / get ripped off;

in the meadow he forces him / to kneel,

then says to him / reproachfully:

Lord Gormond, / most right king,

With Hugo, / the messenger?

I'm the one who stole / the golden ship-vase;

I've put it / at the Abbey of Saint-Riquier.

Because you burned the chapel there,

may great misfortune / befall you!

King Gormond / answered him,

in haughtiness / and in pride,

'Get away from me, / you despicable boy!

I come from a lineage / of knights,

all very rich / and glorious,

I would never deign to touch / a squire ever.'

The story continues ... King Louis sees all his men being killed and is full of grief and astonishment. He decides to take on Gormond himself, king to king. Praying to God and Saint Denis and Saint Riquier for help, he rides furiously into battle. Gormond shoots three javelins at him but God protects Louis and he suffers no wounds. Louis then is burning in anger. He doesn't even stop to challenge Gormond verbally, but strikes Gormond on the head with his spear, smashing the helmet and knocking the top of his hauberk off. Then he chops Gormond's body in two, leaving the two halves slumped on the ground.

But the old King Louis has overexerted himself. He is so tired he nearly falls off his horse and has to hold on tight to its neck. He bends over, letting his heavy sword drag to the side as he tries to sit up again on the saddle. But for a Frenchman it would be the height of shame to fall off the mount. So he sits up, pushing down hard against the stirrups. But in doing so he rips all the muscles under his rib cage. He lives only thirty more days. The poet laments Louis' impending death, because he was a good king, and a true champion of Christianity. The poet adds that according to the story, there has never since been such a great king in France.
Thus ends the first part of *Gormond and Isembard*. In the second part the pagans begin to flee towards the port when they notice that their king Gormond is dead. Isembard the Apostate discovers Gormond’s body and laments that a prophecy given to him by an Englishman — that he would end up dead if he raised an army to invade France — is evidently coming true.

It is now the fourth day of the battle, and the pagans are fleeing. Isembard tries to rally his troops, calling on them to avenge Gormond’s death and (ironically?) pointing to their responsibilities as his vassals. But the pagans don’t listen to him and Isembard goes mad with rage at his powerlessness. He is so angry that he rides up to Seguin, a cousin of King Louis, and drives a spear all the way through Seguin’s body and into a horse behind him. Thus Isembard has killed the most noble of all the French nobles.

Isembard then goes to view Gormond’s body. He laments that Gormond did not listen to him when he told Gormond how fierce, yet honorable, the French fighters were. He again tries to rally his troops.

Meanwhile, Louis has rallied his army, the battle resumes in earnest, and many Saracens die. The pagans then assemble around the body of Gormond. They ask Isembard if he will now abandon them to return to his Christian people. Isembard says (ironically, as we will see) that he will never leave the pagans: as long as he can stand, they have nothing to fear.

The battle goes on for four more days after Gormond’s death. Isembard succeeds in mustering 40,000 men, while Louis has only 10,000. The poet explains that too many Saracens are killed for him to relate in any detail. Louis goes up to the top of the hill where he killed Gormond four days prior. He laments the death of so valiant a noble, and wishes again that Gormond had been a Christian. In order to give Gormond the respect which is his due, Louis has Gormond’s remains brought to his tent in camp and placed upon a round shield. Then he returns to the field, and finds Hugo’s wounded body, with the squire Gontier next to him. Louis wraps Hugo’s body in a coat, and loads it on a Gascon horse. The king wistfully holds onto the horse’s stirrup for a long moment, then allows the body to be transported back to his tent, where it is placed near Gormond’s body. [The treatment of the bodies of the enemy hero is of course a major theme at the end of the *Iliad* when Hector’s father must beg Achilles to return his son’s mutilated corpse.]

Eventually Miles of Gaillard, a French noble, takes on Isembard in combat. Isembard nearly kills Miles, but the old warrior Bernard steps in front of Miles. Bernard is in fact Isembard’s father, although Isembard cannot recognize him in his closed helmet. Bernard strikes Isembard so hard that his shield is destroyed, and Isembard strikes back even harder, breaking the mail on his father’s hauberk. He tries to impale his father with his sword, but the old man escapes injury. Isembard knocks his father off his horse and grabs the horse’s reins. But then he recognizes his father’s eyes. He rides off saying nothing. He has committed an unpardonable sin by unhorsing his father, but, on the other hand, the poet explains, he had not recognized him. He wouldn’t have dared to touch him if he had: he would have tried to do something else. Isembard then makes a massacre of the French: only those whom God brings to life again are saved.

But eventually the pagans are defeated and begin to flee: indeed, the Irish flee like deer running across the moor. The pagans are weakened by hunger and take to their boats. Isembard now has only 10,000 men and will surely be defeated; his white hauberk is torn to pieces down to his chest, his helmet is of no use. (Here there is a gap in the manuscript, but then ...) a group of four French nobles attacks Isembard, piercing three holes [symbolic of the Trinity?] in his body and knocking him from his horse.

The final scene is full of Christian symbolism and shows some resemblance to Roland’s death scene. Isembard falls down at the crossing of three roads [three, again ...] near a thick bush. He is dying, [and no longer able to stand ...] he returns to the Christian faith, calling upon God for the salvation of his soul. Praying to the Virgin, he admits that the prophecy is true and he will die now after returning to France. He asks God to forgive those who have killed him [as Jesus did on the cross ...], and begs the Virgin to intercede on his behalf, that Jesus may take pity on such a pitiful man as he. He looks down and sees an olive tree full of leaves [a symbol of peace, or of the cross?]. Making an extreme effort [as if carrying the cross?], he drags himself to the tree, and, sitting there in the cool grass, turns towards the East. Bent towards the ground, he does penance. He sits up a bit ... (Here the manuscript breaks off.)