

[Chanson de Roland. English.]

THE SONG OF ROLAND

Translated by
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And he can bear a greater load in sport
Than four pack mules when they are burdened
down.

The land he comes from, so the people say,
Has never seen the sun, and no grain grows;
No rain falls there, nor dew upon the earth,
And every single stone is black as pitch.
Some folk declare it is the haunt of fiends.
Chernuble said: 'I have my good sword girt,
Which I shall turn crimson at Roncevaux.
If I find gallant Roland on my way
And don't attack him, then my word is false.
My sword will win the match with Durendal,
The French will die, and France will be bereft!'
At this the pagan peers gather all twelve,
With them a hundred thousand Saracens,
Who hasten eagerly to join the fray,
And in a pine-wood go to don their arms.

79

The pagans put Saracen hauberks on,
Most of them reinforced with triple mail;
They lace the splendid Saragossan helms,
Gird on their swords wrought of Viana steel,
Take their fine shields and their spears from Valence
With gonfalons of crimson, blue and white.
Then they forsake their palfreys and their mules,
Mount on their steeds, and ride in close array.
Bright was the day and radiant the sun;
All their equipment glitters in its rays.
A thousand bugles sound a flourish forth:
Great is the clamour, and the Frenchmen hear.
Said Oliver: 'Sir comrade, I believe
We may do battle with the Saracens.'
Roland replies: 'And may God grant it so!
Our duty bids us stand firm for our king:
A man should suffer hardship for his lord,
Endure great heat and bear with bitter cold,
And be prepared to lose both hair and skin.
Now let each man take care to deal great blows,
So that no song of shame be sung of us!

Pagans are wrong and Christians in the right;
No bad example shall be set by me.' AOI.

80

Oliver stands upon a lofty hill
And to the right looks down a grassy vale,
Spies there the infidels as they approach.
To Roland his companion he then calls:
'Coming from Spain such gleam of arms I see,
So many shining hauberks, blazing helms,
That for our French they hold great grief in store.
This Ganelon the wicked traitor knew,
When he named us before the emperor.'
'Be silent, Oliver,' Count Roland says.
'He is my stepfather; I'll hear no more!'

81

Oliver has climbed up onto a hill,
And now he clearly sees the Spanish realm
And the assembled horde of Saracens.
Bright shine the golden helms studded with gems,
Bright too the shields and saffroned¹² coats of mail,
And bright the spears with flying gonfalons.
The simple tally of the squadrons there
He cannot count, so vast their numbers are;
And even he is seized with great alarm.
He lost no time, but hastened from the hill,
Came to the French, and gave them full report.

82

Said Oliver: 'The pagans I have seen:
Never has any man on earth seen more.
The vanguard is a hundred thousand strong,
With shields and gleaming hauberks, helmets laced;
On shafts erect the polished spear-heads shine.
You'll have such battle as has never been.
French lords, may God now send His strength to you.
Stand stalwart in the field, or taste defeat!'
The Frenchmen say: 'A curse on him who flees!
For you we'll do our duty to the death.' AOI.

83

Said Oliver: 'The pagans have vast strength,
And our Frenchmen beside them seem so few.

Friend Roland, I beseech you, sound your horn!
 Then Charles will hear; the army will turn back.'
 Roland replies: 'Should I act like a fool
 And lose my fame and honour in fair France?
 No! I shall strike great blows with Durendal,
 Stain it with gore up to its golden hilt.
 The pagan knaves shall rue their coming here,
 For this I pledge: each one is doomed to die.' AOI.

84

'Companion Roland, sound your oliphant!
 The king will hear and turn the army back;
 Charles and his barons will come to our aid.'
 Roland replies: 'May it never please God
 That blame should fall on my kinsfolk through me,
 Or fair France ever lapse in infamy!
 Rather I'll strike amain with Durendal
 My trusty sword that hangs here at my side;
 And you will see its blade all stained with gore.
 Those pagan knaves shall rue their gathering.
 I pledge you this: they are all marked for
 death.' AOI.

85

'Companion Roland, sound your oliphant,
 And Charles will hear as he goes through the pass;
 And then, I pledge, the Franks will turn about.'
 'May God not please', Roland replies to him,
 'That any man alive should urge me so
 Or have me sound my horn for infidels!
 Never shall my kinsmen bear that reproach.
 When I am fighting in the great affray,
 I'll strike seven hundred and a thousand blows.
 Durendal's steel you shall see stained with gore.
 Stout are the French, valiantly they will strike:
 Never shall those from Spain escape their death!'

86

Said Oliver: 'I see no blame in it;
 For I have seen the Saracens from Spain:
 They cover both the mountains and the vales,
 Swarming on hillsides and throughout the plains.
 Huge are the armies of the foreign folk,

While we have but a puny company.'
 Roland replies: 'I like it better so.
 May God Himself and His angels forbid
 That through me France's worth should ever wane!
 I'd rather die than suffer such a shame.
 Stout blows endear us to the emperor.'

87

Roland is valiant, Oliver is wise,
 And both are matchless in their chivalry.
 When they are armed and mounted on their steeds,
 For fear of death neither will shun the fray.
 Excellent are the counts, lofty their speech.
 The wicked pagans wrathfully ride on.
 Oliver said: 'Roland, just see them all!
 How close they are, with Charles so far away!
 You did not deign to sound your oliphant,
 Yet if the king were here, we'd have no harm.
 Look up towards the passes into Spain!
 Now you can see what plight the rearguard's in:
 Its men will never form another one.'
 Roland replies: 'Tell no such tale to me!
 Cursed be the heart that quakes within the breast!
 We shall stand fast and firm to hold our ground,
 Hewing and hacking there as best we may.' AOI.

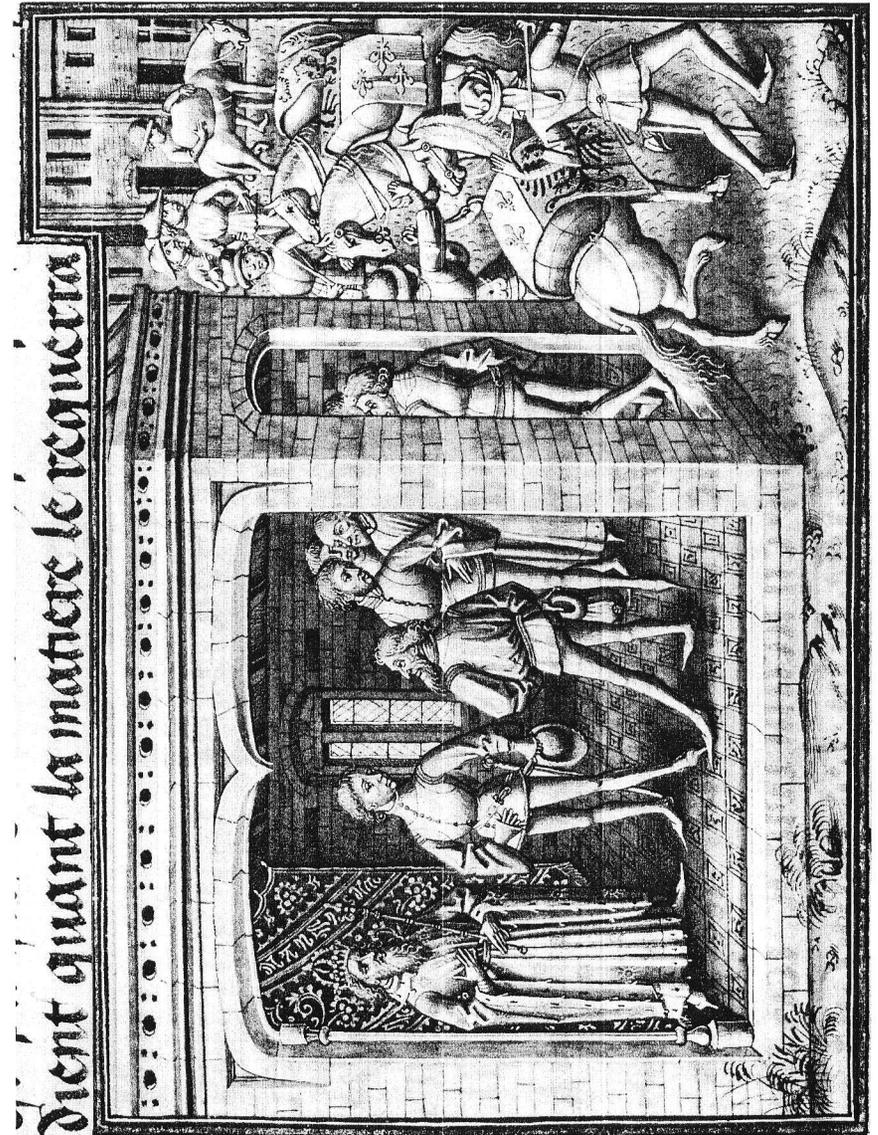
88

When Roland sees the battle will be joined,
 Lions and leopards show less pride than he.
 He calls the Frenchmen, summons Oliver:
 'Companion, friend, I pray you say not so!
 The emperor who left his French with us,
 Allotting to us twenty thousand men,
 Thought not to find a single coward here.
 A man should suffer great ills for his lord,
 Endure the bitter cold and bear great heat,
 And be prepared to lose both flesh and blood.
 Strike with your lance, and I with Durendal
 My trusty sword, given me by the king!
 If I die here, the man who takes it up
 Can say: "A noble vassal wielded this!"'

89 Archbishop Turpin is not far away.
Spurring his horse, he gallops up a hill,
Summons the French, and speaks these solemn
words:
'My lords and barons, Charles has left us here,
And for our king we should in duty die.
Lend aid now to maintain the Christian faith!
You'll join in battle, as you know full well:
Before your eyes you see the Saracens.
Say your confessions, for God's mercy pray!
I will absolve you to secure your souls.
If you die, blessed martyrs you will be
And have your place on high in Paradise.'
The French dismount and to the ground they fall
For the archbishop's blessing in God's name.
As penance he commands that they strike hard.

90 The French rose up again upon their feet,
Truly absolved and pardoned for their sins
And signed by the archbishop with God's cross.
At this, they mounted on their speedy steeds
In arms and armour fitting for true knights,
And with their battle-gear all well equipped.
Count Roland then called upon Oliver:
'Companion, sir, as you are well aware,
We have all been betrayed by Ganelon,
Who has been paid in money, wealth and gold:
The emperor should take vengeance for us.
Marsile the king has bartered with our lives;
But with our sword-strokes he shall have his
price!' AOI.

91 Roland has ridden to the Spanish pass
On Veillantif, his good swift battle-steed,
And bearing arms as fine as was his due.
His spear the noble knight goes brandishing,
Turning the tip upwards towards the sky;
And there a pure white gonfalon is tied,
With golden streamers hanging to his hand.
Handsome he is, with laughter in his eyes.



5. Charlemagne, with Roland at his side, receives Ganelon on his return with Marsile's gifts. (f.238v)

He rides with his companion at his heels,
 Hailed as protector by the men of France.
 Proudly he gazes at the Saracens,
 But on the French with mild humility;
 Them he addresses with true courtesy:
 'My noble lords, go gently, do not haste!
 On savage slaughter these pagans are bent.
 Today our booty will be rich and rare,
 More precious than French king has ever won.'
 He spoke these words, and then the armies
 clash. AOI.

92

Said Oliver: 'I have no time for words.
 You did not deign to sound your oliphant,
 And so of noble Charles there is no trace,
 For he knows nothing, and no guilt is his;
 And those men with him are not to be blamed.
 Ride forward then yourself with all your might!
 My lords and barons, strive to hold the field!
 And in God's name, I beg you well attend
 To dealing blows: you'll give, and you'll receive!
 Let's not forget the battle-cry of Charles.'
 When the French hear these words, their shouts ring
 out.

If you had heard them cry aloud 'Monjoie!',
 Well you would call to mind true vassalage.
 Then they ride on, oh God! in such great pride,
 Drive in their spurs to go more quickly still,
 And so press on to strike their blows—what else?
 The Saracens were not in dread of them:
 Pagans and Franks, see them now come to grips!

93

King Marsile had a nephew, Aelroth,
 Who on his own rode at the army's head.
 He hurls his insults in our Frenchmen's teeth:
 'You felon French, you'll joust with us today.
 By your protector you have been betrayed;
 Mad is the king to leave you in the pass.
 Today fair France shall forfeit its repute,

And Charlemagne will lose his own right arm!
 When Roland heard him, God! what grief was his.
 He spurs his steed on to a frantic pace;
 On the count drives, to strike with all his might.
 His shield he shatters and his hauberk rends,
 Cleaves through the breast and shivers all his bones,
 Sunders in twain the spine within his back:
 So with his spear he puts his soul to flight;
 He thrusts well home and topples down his foe,
 Hurls him at lance's length dead from his horse
 With his neck broken in two equal parts.
 Still he will not forbear to rail him:
 'Charles is not mad, you blackest-hearted rogue,
 And never was a friend of treachery.
 Gallant he was to leave us in the pass:
 Fair France shall not today lose its repute.
 Have at them, Franks, for this first blow is ours!
 We're in the right, these villains in the
 wrong.' AOI.

94

A duke was there whose name was Falsaron,
 And he was brother to Marsile the king,
 Ruler of Dathan and Abiron's land,
 As foul a felon as is found on earth.
 So broad his brow was spread between the eyes
 That one could measure there a full half-foot.
 Much grieved was he to see his nephew slain.
 He leaves the safety of the serried throng
 To shout the war-cry of the Saracens
 And at the Frenchmen hurl his mocking words:
 'Fair France shall lose its honour on this day!'
 Oliver hears him and is filled with wrath.
 He pricks his charger with his gilded spurs
 And goes to strike him as a baron should.
 His shield he shatters and his hauberk rives,
 Plunges his pennant's streamers in his breast,
 Slays and unsaddles him at lance's length.
 Down on the ground he sees the scoundrel lie,
 And he addresses him with these proud words:

'Your menaces, you rogue, mean naught to me.
 Have at them, Franks, for well we'll vanquish them!'
 He shouts 'Monjoie!', the battle-cry of Charles. AOI.

95

A king is there whose name is Corsablix:
 He is a Berber from a foreign land;
 And he calls to the other Saracens:
 'This battle can be won by us with ease,
 For of the Frenchmen there are very few.
 Those who are here we should hold in contempt.
 Not one of them is to be spared for Charles:
 This is the day when they all needs must die.'
 Archbishop Turpin clearly hears these words:
 No man on earth has roused his hatred so.
 He pricks his horse with his spurs of pure gold
 And with great vigour goes to strike at him.
 His shield he shatters and his hauberk splits,
 And through his body drives his mighty spear;
 He thrusts well home and topples his foe dead,
 At lance's length hurls his corpse to the ground.
 He looks behind and sees the villain sprawl,
 And he will not forbear to call to him:
 'Ignoble pagan, you have told a lie,
 For Charles my lord will always ward us well;
 And since our Frenchmen have no mind to flee,
 All your companions we shall force to stay!
 I've news for you: you all must suffer death.
 Have at them, Franks, let none of you relent!
 For this first blow is ours, thanks be to God.'
 'Monjoie!' he shouts, and so he holds the field.

96

Then Gerin strikes Malprimis of Brigal,
 Whose good shield is not worth a penny piece:
 The crystal boss in many fragments flies;
 Full half of it he knocks down to the earth
 And bursts his hauberk open to the skin,
 Then plunges his good spear into his breast.
 To the ground falls the pagan in a heap,
 And Satan comes to carry off his soul. AOI.

Ride onward then! Why do you hesitate?
Our fatherland lies very far ahead.' AOI.

Count Roland's mouth runs red with his own blood,
And at the temple he has burst his skull.
He sounds the oliphant with toil and pain.
Charles hears it, and his Frenchmen listen too.
Then said the king: 'How long this horn-blast holds!
Duke Naimes replies: 'A baron's effort, this!
I do not doubt in battle he's engaged,
Betrayed by him who bids you stay your hand.
Arm then, and shout aloud your battle-cry
And go to aid your noble company!
You hear full well: Roland is desperate.'

The emperor has had his own horns sound.
The Frenchmen all dismount and arm themselves
With helms and hauberks and their gilded swords.
Fine are their shields, and long and stout their
spears,
With gonfalons of crimson, white and blue.
Then all the army's barons mount their steeds
And through the pass's length spur on with zest.
Not one of them but to his neighbour said:
'Should we see Roland while he's still alive,
We would deal mighty blows there at his side.'
To what avail? Too long they have delayed.

The day draws on, bright is the evening sky.
The arms they carry gleam against the sun,
The hauberks and the helms seem all ablaze,
The shields too with their richly painted flowers,
And all the spears and gilded gonfalons.
The emperor rides onward full of wrath,
The Frenchmen full of grief and bitterness.
Not one of them but weeps in great distress,
And all for Roland's sake are much afraid.
The king commands Count Ganelon's arrest
And has him handed to the royal cooks;
And to the chief of them, Besgon, he cries:

'This wicked criminal guard well for me!
He has wrought treason on my company.'
He takes and guards him with a hundred knaves
Amongst his scullions, both the best and worst.
They pluck the hair from his moustache and beard,
And each one strikes him four times with his fist;
And then they drub him well with staves and sticks,
And, with an iron collar round his neck,
Bind him in fetters just like any bear.
Shamefully set on a pack-horse's back,
He's kept to be delivered up to Charles.

High are the hills and shadowy and vast, AOI.
The valleys deep, the torrents rushing swift.
The bugles sound ahead and in the rear
And all make echo to the oliphant.
The emperor rides onward in his wrath,
The Frenchmen full of bitterness and grief;
Not one of them but weeps and loud laments
Praying to God that He keep Roland safe
Until together they have reached the field;
Then they will all strike truly at his side.
To what avail? Nothing can help them now.
Too long they've tarried to arrive in time. AOI.

Onward with mighty rage rides Charles the king,
His white beard lying on his byrnie's breast.
Each one of the French barons spurs with zest;
No single man but gives vent to his ire
Not to be there at captain Roland's side
As he fights with the Saracens of Spain.
With such a wound, I think, his soul scarce stays.
But God, what sixty men are in his band!
No king or captain ever had their like. AOI.

140
Roland looks to the mountains and the steeps,
Sees there so many men of France lie dead.
He mourns them like the true-born knight he is:
'My noble lords, may God His mercy show
And grant His Paradise to all your souls

And give them rest amid celestial flowers!
 I never saw better vassals than you.
 So long you have served me with constancy,
 And conquered such great lands in Charles's name!
 The emperor retained you for your woe!
 Oh realm of France, how fair a land you are,
 Laid waste today by such calamity!
 French lords, on my behalf I see you slain:
 I cannot shield you or protect you now,
 So may God help you, who was ever true!
 Oliver, brother, you I must not fail.
 From grief I'll die, if from no other blow.
 Companion, sir, let us set to again!

141.

Count Roland has gone back onto the field,
 And wielding Durendal strikes valiant blows.
 Faldrun of Pui he has there split in twain,
 With him two dozen of the very best:
 Never will man thirst for his vengeance more.
 Just as the stag takes flight before the hounds,
 So before Roland all the pagans flee.
 Said the archbishop: 'You do splendid deeds!
 This is such valour as a knight should show
 Who bears his arms astride a sterling steed:
 In battle he should be both strong and fierce,
 Or else four penny pieces are worth more,
 And he should be a cloistered monk instead
 And ever after pray for all our sins.'
 Roland replies: 'Strike on, no quarter yield!'
 Hearing these words, the Franks set to once more,
 But still the Christian losses mount apace.

When a man knows no captive will be made,
 Then stout is his defence in such a fray;
 And so like lions the Franks fiercely fight.
 See now Marsile make his lordly approach!
 He sits astride the horse he calls Gaignon,
 Digs in his spurs and goes to strike Bevon,
 Who was the lord of Beaune and of Dijon.

His shield he shatters and his hauberk rends,
 And with this single blow he drops him dead.
 And then he slew both Yvoire and Yvon,
 Along with them Gerard of Roussillon.
 Count Roland is not very far away.
 To the pagan he said: 'God bring you woe!
 To slay my comrades was a wicked wrong:
 For that you'll feel my blow before we part,
 And know today the name of my good sword.'
 He goes to strike him like a valiant lord.
 First his right fist the count has smitten off,
 And then the head of Jurfaleu the Fair,
 None other than the son of King Marsile.
 The pagans cry: 'Mahomet, help us now!
 Our own true gods, give us revenge on Charles!
 For he has sent such villains to this land
 That they will die rather than quit the field.'
 One to the other said: 'Now let us flee!'
 At this a hundred thousand men make off:
 They'll not return, whoever calls them back. AOI.

Yet what does this avail? Marsile is fled,
 But Marganice his uncle is still there;
 Carthage he holds, Alfrere and Garmalie,
 And Ethiopia, a land accursed,
 Peopled by black men, whom he holds in fee:
 Wide are their ears, and broad their noses are;
 They number more than fifty thousand strong.
 Ferociously and full of wrath they ride,
 Then call aloud the pagan battle-cry.
 'Our martyrdom', said Roland, 'is at hand.
 I know our lives have now not long to run,
 But only scoundrels will not sell theirs dear.
 Strike on, my lords, with your fine furbished swords!
 Not without challenge you must live and die,
 And never let fair France be shamed by us!
 When Charles my lord has come upon this field,
 He'll see such slaughter of the Saracens
 That he'll find fifteen dead for one of us
 And will not fail to bless us for our deeds.' AOI.

He has lost so much blood his strength is gone.
 Before a man could go an acre's breadth
 His heart fails, and he topples on his face;
 His own death-pangs now have him in their grip.

Roland the count recovers from his swoon,
 Climbs to his feet despite his great distress,
 And then he turns his gaze both up and down.
 Beyond his comrades, there on the green grass
 He sees the noble baron lying still,
 The good archbishop, God's servant on earth,
 Who, eyes upturned, confesses all his sins;
 With both his hands joined and to Heaven raised,
 He prays to God to grant him Paradise.
 Turpin is dead, Charles's great warrior
 And ever, in fierce fray and sermon fine,
 True champion against the infidel.
 May God grant him His holy benison! AOI.

Count Roland sees the archbishop lie there
 With all his entrails spilt upon the ground
 And his brains gushing forth below his brow;
 Beneath the collar-bone, upon his breast
 His hands are crossed, so delicate and white.
 Roland laments him in the Frankish way:
 'Ah, noble man, knight of high lineage,
 To God above I commend you this day.
 No man will ever serve Him with more zeal;
 Since the apostles no prophet has lived
 Who won more men for the faith he maintained.
 May your soul never lack for anything,
 But find the gates of Paradise stand wide!'

↓ 168

Now Roland feels that his own death is near,
 For from his ears his brains are running forth.
 He prays to God to summon all his peers,
 Himself invokes the angel Gabriel.
 To keep from blame, he took the oliphant,
 And he seized hold of Durendal his sword
 And further than a crossbow's shaft can fly

Went toward Spain, into a fallow field,
 And climbed a hillock. Under a fine tree
 There stand four blocks, each one of marble made.
 Down on his back he falls on the green grass,
 And there he swoons, for now his death is nigh.

169

High are the hills and towering the trees.
 Four gleaming marble blocks are standing there.
 Count Roland, swooning, lies on the green grass.
 Watching him closely is a Saracen
 Who lies among the others, feigning death:
 His body and his face he's smeared with blood.
 He jumps up quickly and runs forward now.
 Handsome he is, and strong and full of fight;
 His arrogance to fatal folly leads:
 He seizes Roland's body and his arms
 And says: 'Charles's nephew is overcome.
 Back to Arabia I'll bear this sword!'
 But as he tugged at it, the count came to.

170

When Roland feels him take away his sword,
 His eyes he opens, and he says to him:
 'You're not, it seems to me, one of our men!'
 Grasping the oliphant he would not lose,
 He strikes him on his gilded jewelled helm,
 Shatters the steel, the skull, and all the head,
 And from their sockets thrusts out both the eyes;
 Down at his feet he fells his foeman dead.
 And then he said: 'Foul pagan, how so bold
 Rightly or wrongly to lay hands on me?
 All those who hear of this will think you mad.
 My oliphant is split now at its mouth,
 The crystal and the gold fallen away.'

171

Now Roland finds that all his sight is gone.
 He struggles to his feet as best he may;
 And all the colour from his face is fled.
 Before him stands a dark and swarthy stone:
 On it he strikes ten blows in bitter grief.
 Loud grates the steel, but does not break or breach.

'Ah,' said the count, 'sweet Mary, help me now!
 Ah, my good Durendal, alas for you!
 With life, I'll leave my mastery of you.
 With you I've won such battles in the field,
 And so many vast lands I've brought to heel
 That are now held by hoary-bearded Charles!
 May no man own you who would flee in fight!
 So fine a vassal held you for so long!
 In blessed France your like will not be found.'

172

Roland strikes hard on the sardonyx stone;
 Loud grates the steel, but does not break or notch.
 Then, when he saw he could not shiver it,
 Soft to himself he started this lament:
 'Ah, Durendal, how fair and bright you shine,
 And with what fire you glitter in the sun!
 Charles once was in the vales of Maurienne
 When, through an angel He sent from above,
 God bade him give you to a captain count:
 The great and noble king girt you on me.
 With you I conquered Anjou, Brittany,
 With you I won for him Poitou and Maine
 And for him conquered Normandy the free
 And overcame Provence and Aquitaine.
 The whole of the Romagna, Lombardy,
 And won all Flanders and Bavaria,
 Burgundy and Apulia entire,
 Constantinople that he held in fee,
 And Saxony, where he does what he will;
 With you I won Scotland and Ireland too,
 And England, which he held as his domain;
 With you so many lands and realms I've won
 That now white-bearded Charles holds in his sway.
 Sorely I grieve and sorrow for this sword:
 I'd die to save it from the infidel.
 Our Father, God above, spare France this shame!'

173

Roland strikes hard upon a swarthy stone,
 Cuts more of it away than I could tell.
 Loud grates the sword, but does not break or snap:

Instead it flies rebounding to the sky.
When the count sees he cannot shatter it,
In soft tones to himself he makes lament:
'Ah, Durendal, holy and fair you are!
Relics in plenty fill your gilded hilt:
Saint Peter's tooth, some of Saint Basil's blood,
Hairs from the head of my lord Saint Denis,
Part of a garment blessed Mary wore.
For infidels to wield you would be wrong:
Your service is for Christian men alone;
And may no craven coward take you up!
So many vast lands I have won with you
That now are held by grizzle-bearded Charles
And bring the emperor riches and might.'

174

Now Roland feels that death closes its grip,
Descending from his head down to his heart.
Running, he makes his way beneath a pine,
And on the green grass he prostrates himself,
Placing beneath him sword and oliphant.
His head he turns towards the infidel,
Because he wishes from his very soul
That Charles and all his company shall say:
'This noble count has died a conqueror!'
Then beating many times upon his breast,
He offers for his sins his glove to God. AOI.

175

Now Roland feels his life is at an end.
Upon a steep hilltop he faces Spain,
And with his hand he beats against his breast:
'God, I confess my sins before your might.
Forgive me for the faults both great and small
That I've committed since I first drew breath
Until this day, when I am stricken down!'
Then his right glove he held aloft to God.
Angels descend from Heaven to his side. AOI.

176

Roland the count lies there beneath a pine;
His face he's set toward the realm of Spain.

His mind began to turn on divers things:
 The many lands he had with valour won,
 Fair France, the men of his own lineage,
 And Charlemagne, his patron and his lord.
 He could but weep and sigh with heavy heart;
 But he was not forgetful of himself
 And begged God to have mercy for his sins:
 'Our rightful Father, fountain of all truth,
 Who from the dead raised holy Lazarus
 And guarded Daniel in the lions' den,
 Protect my soul from every peril now
 And from the sins committed while I lived!
 Then his right glove he offered up to God:
 Saint Gabriel received it from his hand.
 He held his head bowed down upon his arm,
 Folded his hands, and went to meet his end.
 To him God sent His angel Cherubim
 Together with Saint Michael du Peril;
 And with them both there came Saint Gabriel
 To bear the count's soul up to Paradise.

177

Roland is dead, his soul with God in Heaven.
 The emperor is come to Roncevaux.
 There is no way there and no single track,
 No open ground, no yard or even foot
 Where neither infidel nor Frenchman lies.
 Charles calls aloud: 'Fair nephew, where are you?
 Where the archbishop, where Count Oliver?
 Where are Gerin and his comrade Gerier?
 Where is Oton, and where Count Berengier?
 Where Yvon and Yvoire so dear to me?
 And where are Engelier of Gascony,
 Duke Samson and the noble Anseis?
 And where is old Gerard of Roussillon?
 Where then are these twelve peers I left behind?'
 What use to ask, when none can make reply?
 'God,' said the king, 'how dire is my dismay
 Not to have been here to begin the fray!
 He plucks his beard like a man racked with grief;
 Tears fill the eyes of all his baron knights.

Together twenty thousand swooning fall.
 Duke Naimes is filled with pity for their sake.

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There is no knight or baron on the field
 But, pricked by pity, weeps abundantly.
 They mourn their nephews, brothers, and their sons,
 And all their friends and their liege lords besides;
 And most of them fall swooning to the ground.
 But then Duke Naimes showed his true gallantry
 And spoke the first words to the emperor:
 'Look over there, two leagues ahead of us!
 See on the highways how the dust-clouds rise:
 Great numbers of the pagan folk are there.
 Ride on, and take revenge for our distress!
 'Oh God,' said Charles, 'They are so far away!
 But grant that honour and justice be done!
 They plucked from me the flower of fair France!
 The king commands Geboin and Oton,
 Tedbald of Rheims, and with him Count Milon:
 'Guard well the field, the mountains and the vales,
 And let the slain lie there just as they are,
 Untouched by lion or by any beast,
 And undisturbed by any squire or knave!
 I bid you see that no man touches them
 Until, please God, I come back to the field.'
 'Just emperor, dear lord, this we will do.'
 With them they keep a thousand of their
 knights. AOI.

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The emperor then has his bugles sound
 And forward with his great host nobly rides.
 Now they have made the Spaniards turn their backs,
 And all together join in the pursuit.
 But when the king sees that the evening falls,
 Dismounting on a verdant meadow's grass
 He lies down on the ground and prays to God
 That for him He may make the sun stand still,
 Make the day linger and the night delay.
 An angel then, with whom he often spoke,
 Appeared to him and gave this prompt command:

↑
 'Ride on, then, Charles: the daylight shall not fail!
 God knows you've lost the finest flower of France:
 You may avenge them on the felon folk.'

For Charlemagne a mighty miracle
 God wrought, and stayed the sun there where it
 stood.

The pagans flee; the Franks hotly pursue,
 Catch up with them in the Val Tenebros,
 Chasing them hard toward Saragossa's walls,
 Slaying them as they go with mighty blows.
 They block their roads and cut off their main routes.
 The Ebro's waters flow before them now,
 Rushing and terrible and wondrous deep;
 There is no ferry, barge or galley there.
 The pagans call to their god Tervagant,
 Then they leap in; but there is no escape.
 Those who are fully armed weigh heaviest,
 And many of them sink down in the depths;
 The rest, who float, are swept down with the stream,
 And the more fortunate have drunk so much
 That all are drowned with dreadful suffering.
 The Frenchmen shout: 'Alas, Roland, for you!' AOI.

When Charles sees all the infidels are dead,
 Many slain by the sword, but still more drowned,
 Leaving behind great booty for his knights,
 The noble king, dismounting from his steed,
 Lies on the ground and gives his thanks to God.
 When he rose to his feet, the sun had set.
 The emperor said: 'It is time to camp:
 Too late now to return to Roncevaux,
 For all our steeds are flagging with fatigue.
 Unsaddle them! Loose the reins from their heads,
 And let them rest and graze among these fields!'
 The Franks reply: 'What you have said is
 right.' AOI.

The emperor has now set up his camp.
 In open country all the Franks dismount,

Remove the saddles from their horses' backs,
 Unfasten from their heads the golden reins,
 And turn them to the fresh grass in the fields:
 No other, better care is theirs to give.
 A weary man will sleep well on the earth;
 No single sentinel that night was set.

Down in a meadow lay the emperor,
 The noble man, his great spear at his head,
 That night he would not take his armour off,
 Kept his bright burnished hauberk on his back;
 And still his gilded, jewelled helm was laced,
 And at his side was girt peerless Joyeuse,
 Which changes colour thirty times a day.
 There is much we could tell about the lance
 With which our Lord was wounded on the cross:
 Charles had its tip, for which praise be to God,
 And in the gilded pommel had it set.
 In token of this honour and this grace
 The name Joyeuse was given to the sword.
 This the French noblemen should not forget:
 From it they took their battle-cry 'Monjoie!'
 So over them no people can prevail.

Clear is the night, and shining is the moon.
 Charles lies at rest, but grieves for Roland's sake;
 And he is much distressed for Oliver,
 For the twelve peers and all the men of France.
 In Roncevaux they're left, bloody and dead,
 And he cannot but grieve and mourn for them
 And pray for God's protection for their souls.
 The king's great anguish has so wearied him,
 He falls asleep, for he can do no more.
 Now all the Franks throughout the meadow sleep.
 There is no horse that can stay on its feet;
 Those that will graze must do so lying down.
 He has learned much who has known suffering.

¹⁶Charles lies asleep like a tormented man.
 Saint Gabriel is sent to him by God