

Turolde

La Chanson de Roland (the Song of Roland)



Grandes Chroniques de France, St. Petersburg, Ms. Hermitage. fr. 88: (Niederl. Burgund, Mitte 15. Jh., Exemplar Philipps des Guten), folio. 154v
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Part I: Ganelon's Treachery



Charlemagne from the Grandes Chroniques de France, Paris, BNF, Fr. 2813
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Translator's Introduction

'La Chanson de Roland', or 'The Song of Roland', an 11th-century chanson de geste (a literary form that flourished between the 11th and 16th centuries in Europe, celebrating legendary deeds) relates the tale of the Frankish warrior Roland at the Battle of Roncevaux (or Roncesvalles) Pass, in AD778, during the reign of the Emperor Charlemagne, King of France. The poem, the oldest major work of French literature extant, composed in Old French, is thought to have been drafted around 1040AD and subsequently enhanced during the period up to 1115AD. The historical battle was an ambush laid by the Basques against Charlemagne's forces, in retaliation for the destruction of their capital Pamplona, however the poem, fictitiously, presents the encounter as a battle against the Muslim conquerors of Spain who, as the poem begins, have been defeated everywhere apart from Zaragoza. Roland was adopted in the 19th century as a French national hero, and this chanson de geste, in which he appears, as the French national epic. The major extant manuscript of the Song of Roland in Old French, dating between 1129AD and 1165AD and written in Anglo-Norman, is held at the Bodleian Library (MS Digby 23), Oxford, England.

Verses 1-4: King Marsilius seeks counsel

Our mighty emperor, King Charlemagne,
Had lingered for full seven years in Spain,

Conquering that land to the western main,
Till not one hostile stronghold did remain,
Nor city wall to raze, nor tower to gain,
Save Zaragoza, high on its inland plain,
Marsilius' realm, he that did God disdain,
Served Mahomet, called on Apollo's name,
Nor escaped the ills to which all such attain.

King Marsilius was ensconced in Zaragoza.
He walked in an orchard there, in the shade,
On a terrace, richly paved in bluish marble,
Around him more than twenty thousand knights.
He called to his dukes and counts, and said:
'Hear, my lords, of the trouble which impends.
Emperor Charlemagne, who rules fair France,
Has entered this, our land, to confound us.
I've no force strong enough to defeat him,
Lacking sufficient men to break his ranks.
Counsel me then, all you men of wisdom,
How I may guard myself from death or shame.'
None of those pagans spoke a word in answer.
Save Blancandrins of the castle of Valfunde.

Now, Blancandrins was of the wisest pagans,
A vassal, and brave knight in all respects.
Prudent counsel he gave to aid his master:
To the king he said: 'Sire, be not dismayed!
Send messengers, bearing words of friendship,
To Charlemagne, a monarch fierce and proud.
Offer him gifts of bears and hounds and lions,
Seven hundred camels, a thousand moulted hawks,
Four hundred mules, sacks of gold and silver,
With fifty strong carts to convey the burden,
With which he may readily pay his soldiers.
He has campaigned too long within our land;
Let him return at last to France, and Aix,
Where you may go to him at Michaelmas,
And there may accept the Christian creed,
And swear to be his man, upon your honour.
If he seeks hostages, then yield them to him;
Some ten or twenty should gain his alliance.

Send him the sons born of our own wives;
I will send him mine, though he be slain.
Far better that our own sons be beheaded
Than that we lose our dignity and honour,
Or we, through this, be reduced to poverty.'

Said Blancandrins: 'By this, my right hand,
And this, my beard stirred by the breeze,
You shall see this host of Franks disperse.
The Franks will return to France, their land.
Once all have returned to their dwellings,
Charlemagne will be at Aix, in his chapel,
To celebrate the feast-day of Saint Michael.
Come the day, the treaty terms will expire,
Yet he shall hear no word, no plea from us.
The king is proud, and his heart hardened,
So, the heads of our dear hostages will fall.
And yet far better that they lose their heads,
Than we should lose, Spain the fair, forever,
And endure the many ills that would bring.'
'It may well be best,' the rest cried, 'to do so!'

Verses 5-7: He follows Blancandrin's advice

King Marsilius brought the council to an end,
Then summoned to him Clarin de Balaguet,
With Estamarin, and Eudropin his peer,
And Priamun, and Guarlan of the beard,
Besides Machiner, with his uncle, Maheu,
Joüner, and Malbien from o'er the sea,
To hear, with Blancandrins, his decision.
'My lord barons, go now to Charlemagne,
He is laying siege to the city of Cordrès.
Go, bearing olive-branches in your hands,
Tokens, as ever, of humility and peace.
If you, by wise words, can gain his favour,
I will give you each much gold and silver,
And all the lands and fiefdoms you'd wish.'
They answered: 'Of such we have enough!'

King Marsilius concluded then, by saying:

‘My lords, go forth then, as I’ve commanded,
Bearing those olive-branches in your hands,
And, in my name, ask King Charlemagne,
For love of his God, to show me mercy.
A month shall not have passed ere he sees
Me follow, with a thousand loyal knights.
There I shall accept the Christian creed,
And will be his man, in faith and affection.
If it’s hostages he wants, he shall have them.’
Said Blancandrins: ‘His favour you will win.’

Marsilius ordered ten white mules be brought,
Which once the King of Sicily had sent him,
Their bridles gold, their saddles set with silver.
These, his chosen messengers now mounted,
Each holding an olive-branch in his hands.
They sought Charlemagne, who ruled all France,
Yet could not guard himself from treachery.

Verses 8-11: Marsilius’ messengers address Charlemagne

Emperor Charlemagne was happy and blithe,
Cordrès he’d taken; he had pierced the walls,
And with his catapults had felled the towers.
Many a rich spoil his knights had garnered,
Much gold and silver, and finest ornaments.
Not one pagan in that city did now remain
That was alive yet had not turned Christian.
The emperor was in a spreading orchard,
Beside him there, stood Oliver and Roland,
Duke Sansun, and brave Anseis the Proud,
Gefreid d’Anjou who bore the royal banner,
And there, also, were Gerin and Gerers.
And where they were, went many another.
Full fifteen thousand knights of fair France.
On white couches these knights were seated,
Playing board-games to amuse themselves,
With the older and wiser duelling at chess,
The lighter youths in their fencing-matches.
Beneath a pine-tree, near to a sweet-briar,
Was placed a folding-stool of pure gold,

Where sat the king, the ruler of fair France.
White of beard, his head of hair all white,
Graceful in form, proud of countenance,
He needed no pointing out to newcomers.
The messengers, on seeing him, dismounted,
And greeted him, offering love and loyalty.

Blancandrins was the first of them to speak,
Addressing the king: 'God save your Grace,
The glorious God, whom you owe worship to!
We bear a message from Marsilius the Brave,
Who has studied the creed of true salvation,
And wishes to grant you gifts, of his wealth.
Here are hounds, bears, and lions enchained,
Seven hundred camels, a thousand moulted hawks,
Four hundred mules, sacks of gold and silver,
With fifty strong carts to convey the burden.
Great is his gift of bezants of pure gold,
With which you may readily pay your soldiers.
Full long you have campaigned in this land;
You may, at last, return to France, and Aix,
And he will follow you; thus, says my lord.'
The emperor raised his hands to the heavens,
Bowed his head, and was seen deep in thought.

The emperor remained there, with head bowed,
For he was ne'er a man hasty in replying,
And his custom it was to respond at leisure.
When he raised his head, his gaze was proud;
He said to the messengers: 'A fine speech.
King Marsilius is, many times, my enemy.
To what degree then, can I place my faith
In the fair words that you have spoken here?'
'Do you seek hostages?' said the Saracen,
'You shall have ten, fifteen, or even twenty.
Though he be slain, my son shall make one,
And you shall have nobler, of those that be.
When you've returned to your royal palace,
He has said he will follow you, and be there
At the great feast of Saint Michael del Peril.
In the spring your God brought forth for you,

He would bathe, and so become a Christian.’
Charlemagne replied: ‘He may yet be saved.’

The evening sky was clear, the sunset bright;
Their mules were stabled at the king’s command,
While a tent was raised in the spreading orchard,
In which the ten messengers might then lodge;
Twelve sergeants were assigned to serve them.
They rested there all night, till daylight came,
The emperor rising from his bed at dawn,
To hear both Matins chanted, and the Mass.
Beneath a pine-tree, now, the emperor sat,
And asked his nobles to grant him counsel,
Wishing to be guided by the lords of France.

Verses 12-13: Charlemagne’s Council at Cordrès

Beneath that pine-tree, then, the emperor sat;
These the barons summoned to the council:
Duke Oger answered, and Archbishop Turpin,
Richard the Old, and his nephew Henry,
Count Acolin the Brave of Gascony,
Tedbald of Reims, with Milun, his cousin,
And Gerers was there, alongside Gerin.
Count Roland was present with the rest,
And Oliver, that brave and noble knight;
In all, a thousand Franks of France, and more.
And Ganelon was there that wrought treason.
The council then began, that brought but ill.

‘My Lord Barons,’ said Emperor Charlemagne,
‘King Marsilius has sent me messengers,
And offers me rich gifts from his treasury,
Bears and lions, greyhounds on the leash,
Seven hundred camels, a thousand moulted hawks,
Four hundred mules, sacks of Arabian gold,
And fifty carts, as well, to bear the burden.
But he demands that I withdraw to France;
He’ll follow me, to Aix, to my seat there,
And there accept our creed that spells salvation.
A Christian he’d be, hold his lands from me,

And yet what is in his heart I cannot know.'
Cried the Franks: 'Of him we should beware!'

Verses 14-16: Roland objects to Marsilius' terms

With this the emperor now ended his address.
But Count Roland, who disliked the terms,
Rose to his feet, set to speak against them.
To the king he said: 'Ne'er trust Marsilius.
Full seven years ago we first entered Spain.
I've won Noplés and Commiblés for you,
And took Valterne, and all the land of Pine,
And Balasgued, and Tuele, and Sezilie.
Marsilius there displayed his treachery.
He sent fifty pagans, envoys, from his host,
And each came bearing an olive branch,
And spoke to you in those self-same words.
You took counsel of the lords of France,
That would offer you but endless flattery.
Two of your counts you sent to the pagans.
Basan was one, and Basilies the other;
The king beheaded them before Haltilie.
Complete this war that you've undertaken.
Lead forth your mighty host to Zaragoza.
Lay siege to the place, in all your strength,
And avenge those men that the villain slew!'

The emperor then mused, with bowed head,
He clasped his chin, and tugged at his beard,
Saying naught to his nephew, of good or ill.
The Franks were silent, all except Ganelon,
Who rose, and stood before King Charlemagne,
And then began to speak to him most boldly.
He said to the king: 'Put not your faith in fools!
Nor in myself, nor others; yourself, decide.
Since King Marsilius sends you this offer,
That with clasped hands he will be your man,
And hold all Spain a fiefdom ruled by you,
While adhering to the creed we all accept,
Then those that advise you to reject his plea
Care not a jot what manner of death we die.

Advice born of pride is wrong, to seek more.
Ignoring the fools, let's hold to what is wise.'

After him, up stood the Duke of Neimes,
No better vassal had the emperor at court,
And addressed his king: 'You have listened
To all that Ganelon has said in answer.
Wisdom, he spoke, and it should be heard.
Marsilius has met defeat in this fierce war;
Every one of his strongholds you've taken,
Your siege-engine shattering their walls;
His cities set ablaze; his army vanquished.
His plea but asks that you show him mercy.
It would be a sin to press him harder, now,
When he offers hostages as confirmation.
This campaign should be waged no longer.'
The Franks cried: 'The duke has spoken well.'

Verses 17-19: He proposes himself as envoy; Oliver objects

'My lords,' said the king, 'whom shall we send
To Zaragoza, to speak with Marsilius there?'
'By your leave, I'll go!' said the Duke of Neimes,
'Grant me the glove, and the wand of office.'
The king replied: 'You are a man of wisdom,
By this very beard that grows upon my chin,
You shall not journey this far from my side;
Go and be seated, to this none summon you.'

My Lord Barons, which of you may we send
To the Saracen king who rules in Zaragoza?'
Roland replied: 'It were best for me to go!'
'Indeed, you should not!' cried Oliver.
'Your heart is too proud, and full of fire;
I fear that you will meet with misadventure.
If the king wills it, better that I should go.'
The king exclaimed: 'Be silent, both of you!
Neither you nor he shall stir a foot, in this.
By this white beard of mine, that you see,
I swear my Twelve peers shall be so ordered.'
The Franks were silent; for all acquiesced.

Turpin of Reims then stepped from the ranks,
And cried: 'Let all your Franks here remain.
Seven years you've campaigned in this land,
And they've experienced much toil and pain,
Grant me the glove, and the wand of office,
And I will meet, Sire, this Saracen of Spain.
For I think that I may seek out his intention.'
The emperor replied, with a show of anger:
'Go sit on that white couch of yours, again,
Nor speak a word, except at my command!

Verses 20-22: Roland proposes Ganelon as envoy, angering him

Knights of France,' said the emperor, Charlemagne,
'Come choose a baron of the realm for me,
Who might bear my message to Marsilius.'
Said Roland: 'Send Ganelon, my step-father.'
The Franks cried: 'He could well perform the task,
For compared to him, no wiser could be found.'
At this Count Ganelon was filled with anguish,
Flung the mantle of marten-fur from his neck,
And rose to his feet, in but his silken garments.
Bright were his eyes, proud was his glance,
Noble his body, his chest broad and arched,
So handsome he seemed that all gazed at him.
Said he to Roland: 'Fool, why such malice?
All here know that for being your stepfather
You've proposed that I go meet Marsilius!
Well, if God grant I yet return from there,
I shall oppose you with so great a passion
That it will endure as long as your life may!'
Roland replied: 'Folly I hear, and madness.
All men know I pay scant regard to threats.
Yet some wise fellow should bear the message;
If you wished it so, then I'd go in your place.'

Ganelon replied: 'No, that you shall not do!
You are no man of mine, nor I your master.
King Charlemagne orders that I serve him,
And go meet with Marsilius, in Saragoza.

Once there I may work a little trick or two,
And so bring home my anger against you.'
When Roland heard this, he began to smile.

When Ganelon saw that Roland was smiling,
He felt such pain he was consumed with rage;
But a little more, and he'd have lost his mind.
To the count he said: 'I bear no love for you.
You have done me an injustice in this matter.
My emperor, you behold me here before you.
I will complete the task that you've decreed.

Verses 23-26: Ganelon commits, angrily, to acting as such

It is clear that I must go to Zaragoza;
He who goes there is likely to remain.
I've taken your sister's hand in marriage,
And have a son, none is more handsome;
Baldwin, that is, a paragon of knighthood.
To him, then, I leave my titles and estates.
Care well for him; I'll not see him again.'
The monarch replied: 'You are over-fearful.
If I command that it be so, then you must go.'

Then said the king: 'Ganelon, stand before me,
To receive the glove, and the wand of office.
As you have heard, the Franks choose you.'
'This is Roland's doing, Sire,' cried Ganelon.
'As long as I live, I'll hold no love for him,
Nor for Oliver, who's ever his companion;
As for the dozen peers whom he so loves,
I here defy them all, Sire, in your presence.'
Then said the king: 'You are but too perverse,
While, indeed, you must go, if I command it.'
'Then go I will, with no guarantee of safety,
As Basilies had none, nor Basan his brother.'

The emperor took the glove from his right hand,
Though Ganelon had rather have been elsewhere;
Moving to grasp it, the glove fell to the ground.
The Franks cried: 'Lord, what might this portend?

Great may be the trouble this message will bring.'
'Well, my Lords,' said Ganelon, 'we'll soon know.'

Then: 'Give me your orders, Sire,' he demanded,
'Since I must go, I'll brook no more delay.'
Then the King, with: 'In Jesus' name and mine!'
Made the sign of the cross with his right hand,
And gave him the wand of office, and his brief.

Verses 27-28: He sets out, meeting Blancandrins and the Saracen envoys

Count Ganelon now went to his lodgings,
And donned the garments for his journey,
The very best clothing that he could find.
He fastened spurs of pure gold to his feet,
And hung Murglies his sword at his side.
On Tachebrun, his charger, he mounted,
As his uncle, Guinemer, held the stirrup.
There you had seen many a knight weep,
Crying as one: 'What misfortune, my lord!
You have been full many a year at court,
Acclaimed by all as a most noble vassal.
King Charlemagne will ne'er protect him,
The man that proposed you for this mission.
Count Roland should never have done so,
Knowing you born of such a noble line.'
Then they said: 'Sire, now lead us forth!'
Ganelon replied: 'Not so, God damn me!'
Better another dies, than a friend of mine.
To fair France, my lords, you shall go,
And greet my noble wife on my behalf,
And Pinabel, who is my friend and peer,
And Baldwin, my son, of whom you know,
And aid him, and hold him as your lord.'
Then, entering on his road, he went his way.

Ganelon rode on, halting neath an olive-tree,
Where he found the Saracen envoys gathered.
Blancandrins, it was, who came towards him,
And most courteously they then spoke together.
Said Blancandrins: 'Wondrous is Charlemagne,

Who has conquered Puille, and all Calabre;
Into England he crossed, o'er the salt sea,
And by war, restored tribute to Saint Peter.
What does he seek from us, and our country?'
Ganelon replied: 'So great is his courage,
None there is that can best him in encounter.'

Verses 29-31: He and Blancandrins plot against Roland

Said Blancandrins: 'Noble knights are the Franks,
Yet these dukes and counts act very wrongly
Towards their master, in thus advising him;
For he, and others, they trouble and confound.'
Ganelon said: 'In truth it rises from but one,
Roland alone, whom shame will yet seek out.
One morn, my king was seated in the shade,
His nephew came to him, all clad in brown.
Spoils he had gained, about Carcassonne;
And in his hand he held a crimson apple.
"Take this, fair Sire," said Roland to his uncle,
"Of every prince, I bring you here the crown."
His cursed pride will in the end confound him,
For every day he exposes himself to death.
Only when he is dead shall we have peace.'

Said Blancandrins: 'Roland is most troubling,
Who'd make all men bow beneath the yoke,
And so challenges the peace of every land!
With what help does he pursue this same?'
Ganelon replied: 'The Frankish noblemen.
They love him so, he'll ne'er want for men.
Such gold and silver he showers upon them,
Mules and chargers, clothes, and silk carpets.
The king himself holds all due to his powers;
He'll gain all realms, from here to the Orient.'

Ganelon and Blancandrins rode on together,
And, pledging friendship to one another,
Hatched a plan to do away with Roland.
The pair rode on so far, by road and path,
Near a cliff by Saragoza they descended,

Where a folding-stool stood beneath a pine.
And there, enveloped in Alexandrian silks,
Sat the king who ruled the whole of Spain,
With twenty thousand Saracens about him,
Though not a one of them uttered a word,
Wishing to hear what news there might be,
As Blancandrins and Ganelon came in sight.

Verses 32-36: Ganelon presents Charlemagne's terms to Marsilius

Blancandrins took his stand before the monarch,
And, taking Count Ganelon by the hand,
Said to the king: 'Mahound preserve you,
And Apollo, whose sacred laws hold here!
King Charlemagne received your message,
He raised his hands high towards the heavens,
In praise of his god, and said naught else.
I present to you one of his noble barons,
A wealthy man, who came here from France;
From him, hear if you'll have peace or no.'
'Speak,' said Marsilius: 'all shall hear you!'

But Count Ganelon reflected carefully,
And only then, most cautiously, he spoke,
Like a man that knows the path to take,
Saying to the King: 'God preserve you,
The Glorious God, to whom we must pray.
Brave Charlemagne sends you this message:
You must receive the holy Christian faith,
And yield, in fee, half the lands of Spain.
If you choose not to accept these terms,
Seized by force, and then bound in chains,
You will be led before his throne at Aix,
To be judged, and so condemned to death,
There to die in wretchedness and shame.'
King Marsilius, gripped by momentary fear,
Seized a dart, fledged with golden feathers,
As if to hurl it, and then withdrew his arm.

He changed colour nonetheless, in anger,
Still gripping the dart tightly by its shaft.

Ganelon, on seeing this, set hand to sword,
Drew the blade, a mere two finger-widths,
And addressed it thus: 'O, bright and brave!
We shall so bear ourselves before this king,
That the Emperor of France ne'er may say
That I died alone, in this foreign country,
Ere they had deemed you among the best.'
'Seek not to prove the point!' the pagans cried.

The nobler Saracens implored the king
To take his place on the seat once more.
Said the caliph: 'You but harm our cause,
Seeking to wreak harm upon the Frank;
Better to hear what the man has to say.'
'Sire,' said Ganelon, 'I'll suffer, meekly;
Yet not for all the gold God has created,
Not for all the treasure in this very land,
Shall I fail to tell, if I am so permitted,
What my king, Charlemagne, commanded
That I should convey to his mortal enemy.'
Ganelon wore a cloak of Alexandrian silk
Lined with sable, which he now removed,
Leaving it in the hands of Blancandrins,
Yet declined to leave hold of his sword,
Grasping its hilt of gold in his right hand.
Cried the pagans: 'A noble baron, is this.'

Ganelon drew closer to King Marsilius,
Saying: 'Sire, your anger is all in error.
Charlemagne, who rules France, demands
Simply that you receive the Christian faith,
And half of Spain shall be your fiefdom.
The rest Roland, his nephew, will receive,
A proud partner, in him, you shall possess!
If you'll not yield to Charlemagne's wish,
Only then will he lay siege to Saragoza.
Seize you and then bind you hand and foot,
And bear you off to his royal seat at Aix.
But not on a charger, nor a sober palfrey,
Nor on a mule or donkey shall you ride,
But tied like a sack, on a beast of burden,

Once there you'll be judged, and beheaded.
Such are the terms that our emperor offers.'
He placed the letter in the pagan's hands.

Verses 37-38: He is drawn into close conversation

King Marsilius was consumed by anger.
He broke the seal, and hurled the wax aside,
Looked at the letter, and read the writing.
'Charlemagne, who rules France, demands
That I acknowledge both his wrath and grief,
Regarding Basan, and his brother Basilies,
Whose heads I severed there at Haltilie.
If I wish to save my life, then he demands
That I send to him the caliph, my uncle,
Or he will withdraw his favour from me.'
His son then spoke thus to Marsilius:
Saying: 'The messenger spoke recklessly,
His boldness such he should no longer live.
Leave him to me, and I'll grant him justice.'
Ganelon, at this, unsheathed his sword,
And set his back against the pine-tree there.

The King now drew aside into the orchard,
Together with the noblest among his men;
The white-haired Blancandrins was there,
And Jurfaret, the monarch's son and heir,
With the caliph, the king's friend and uncle.
Said Blancandrins: 'Speak yet to the Frank;
He has pledged to me that he will aid us.'
Marsilius replied: 'Then bring him to us.'
Blancandrins took Ganelon's right hand,
And led him through the orchard to the king.
There he planned with them vile treachery.

Verses 39-42: He is questioned regarding Charlemagne

'Fair master Ganelon,' said King Marsilius,
'I treated you somewhat ill when you spoke,
In seeming to aim a blow at you, in anger.

An offering of sable furs may make amends;
Five hundred livres they are worth at least.
Tomorrow night, that gift you shall receive.'
Ganelon answered him: 'I'll not refuse it;
May it please the Lord to grant you mercy.'

Marsilius said: 'Ganelon, to tell the truth,
I am disposed to find you to my liking.
I would hear you speak of Charlemagne.
He is very old, his time is well-nigh done.
Some say he has lived two hundred years!
He has led his armies through many lands,
And many a blow received upon his shield,
And many a rich king brought to beggary.
When will he cease to wage endless war?
Ganelon replied: 'He is not one to do so.
There's not a man that sees and knows him
That will not endorse the emperor's courage.
No matter how I might praise the monarch,
His honour and virtues would merit more.
Who can measure the extent of his valour?
God has illumined him with such grace,
He'd rather die than quit the battlefield.'

The pagan says: 'You make me wonder more
At Charlemagne, who's old and white of hair.
Two hundred years or more he's lived, they say!
Many the lands through which he's led his host,
Many the blows from spear and lance he's met,
Many a wealthy king he's brought to poverty,
Again I ask, when will he cease from warring?'
'Never,' said Ganelon, 'while his nephew lives.
There's not such a knight as him neath the sky;
And his companion Oliver is well-skilled.
The Twelve Peers, whom the king holds so dear,
Act as his guards, with twenty thousand more.
Charles is secure, and looks on none fearfully.'

Said the Saracen: "My wonder is the greater,
At Charlemagne, who's pallid and white-haired.
For two hundred years and more, so it seems,

He has gone forth, conquering many a land,
And many a blow received from pointed lance,
Many a rich king conquered in war, and slain.
When will he choose to shun the battlefield?’
‘Never,’ said Ganelon ‘while Roland lives,
From here to the Orient none can compare,
And Oliver his friend’s a most skilful knight.
The Twelve Peers, whom Charlemagne loves,
With twenty thousand Franks, guard the king.
Charlemagne is secure, and fears none living.’

Verses 43-47: Marsilius and Ganelon pledge to kill Roland

‘Fair master Ganelon,’ said King Marsilius,
‘Many knights have I, none finer ever seen.
Four hundred thousand such, I can muster.
May I not rout Charlemagne and his Franks?
Ganelon answered: ‘Not in this campaign!
Great would be the losses among your men.
Quit such foolishness, and hold to wisdom;
Gift the emperor such a wealth of treasure
That every Frank of his is lost in wonder.
Given you send him twenty noble hostages,
Charlemagne will return to fair France.
And his rearguard will follow on behind,
Led by his nephew, Count Roland, I deem,
And Oliver, that courteous, skilful knight.
Dead shall they be, if you place trust in me.
The emperor will see the pride of his host fall,
And lack the means to then make war on you.’

‘Fair master Ganelon,’ King Marsilius said,
‘How might I bring about Roland’s death?
Ganelon answered: ‘That I will make clear.
The King will cross by the best pass, Sizer,
Leaving a rearguard to defend his forces,
Led by, his nephew, this wealthy Roland,
And Oliver, in whom he places such faith,
With twenty thousand Franks in company.
Send a hundred thousand men against them,
Who may fall upon the unsuspecting Franks.

Their army will be bruised, and bled white,
Though, I dare say, many of yours will die.
Then let them face, at once, a second battle.
Of Roland and his like you'll thus be free,
Having done a fair deed, on behalf of all.
Nor, in all your life, shall be at war again.

Could one be certain that Roland was slain,
Charlemagne's right-hand man would be lost.
However wondrous the army that remained,
The king would ne'er again raise such a host.
The greater world would be at last, at peace.'
Marsilius, at this, kissed him about the neck,
Then made request upon his splendid treasury.

Said Marsilius: 'Why needs discuss this more?
Such counsel is of no worth without an oath.
Swear treachery to Roland, while he yet lives.'
Ganelon answered: 'Let it be, as you please.'
On the relics sealed in the sword, Murglies,
He swore treachery, and betrayed his trust.

A folding-stool stood there, made of ivory;
Marsilius had them place a book thereon,
That gave the law of Mahound and Tervagant.
On this, he swore, the Saracen king of Spain,
That should he find Roland in the rearguard,
He and all his men would move against him,
And attempt to slay him there, if they could.
Ganelon said: 'May it be as you command!'

Verses 48-52: Ganelon receives various gifts, and departs

At once, a pagan, Valdabrun, came forward,
The commander of King Marsilius' guard.
Smiling most warmly, he said to Ganelon:
'Take my sword, for no man owns a finer;
A thousand coins went to create its hilt.
I offer it to you now, fair sir, in friendship.
Give us your help concerning this Roland,
That we may be sure to find him at the rear.'

Count Ganelon answered: 'It shall be done.'
Then they kissed each other, on the mouth.

After him another, Climorins, approached.
Smiling most warmly, he said to Ganelon:
'Take this my helm, none finer e'er was seen;
Grant your help, concerning Count Roland,
And ensure we bring dishonour upon him.'
Count Ganelon answered: 'It shall be done.'
Then they kissed each other, on the mouth.

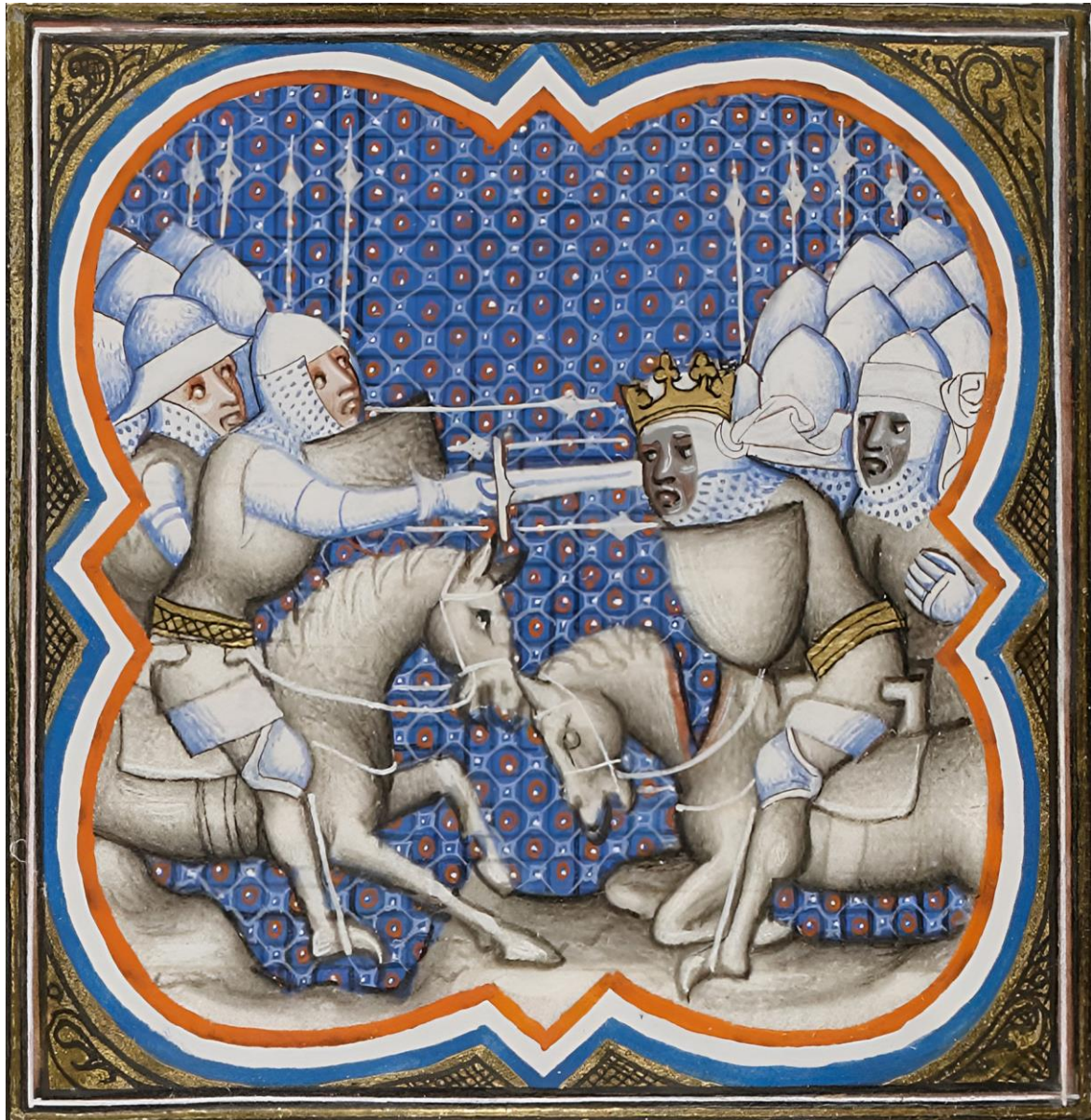
At once the queen appeared, Bramimunde.
'I like you well, sir,' she said to the count,
'Since my lord, and all, hold you in regard.
I bring you two fair brooches, for your lady,
With amethysts and jacinths set in gold,
Worth more than is all the wealth of Rume;
Your emperor has none as rare as these.'
Ganelon received, and pocketed, the pair.

The king then called Malduit, his treasurer:
'Is the tribute yet prepared for Charlemagne?'
He answered him: 'Yes, Sire, and rich indeed;
Seven hundred camel loads of gold and silver,
And twenty hostages, sons born of the noblest.'

Marsilius clasped Ganelon round the shoulder,
And said to him: 'You are both wise and bold.
Now, by the creed that you hold most sacred,
Let not your courage wane, nor from us stray.
I'd like to grant you riches from my store,
Some ten mule-loads of fine Arabian gold,
And look to do the same for you each year.
Take in your hand the keys to this great city,
And bear our noble tribute to Charlemagne;
Then ensure that Roland leads the rearguard.
If I find him in some pass, or narrow valley,
I'll be sure to engage him in mortal battle.
Ganelon replied: 'I must not linger, here!'
And, swiftly mounting, set forth on his way.

The End of ‘La Chanson de Roland: Part I’

Part II: Roland Leads the Rear-guard



Battle of Roncevaux Pass from the Grandes Chroniques de France, Paris, BNF, Fr. 2813, fol. 121r

Picryl

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Verses 53-55: Ganelon returns; the army departs for France

Charlemagne had drawn nearer his kingdom,
And the fortress of Galne had thus attained.
Count Roland, seizing it, had razed the walls,
To leave the site in ruins for a hundred years.
The king awaited tidings, there, of Ganelon,
And for tribute from the wider land of Spain.
At dawn of day, as the heavens brightened,
Count Ganelon reached the encampment.

The emperor had risen, at the break of day,
Heard Matins, and the Mass, and prayed.
He sat before his tent on the green grass,
Where Roland stood, and Oliver the brave,
Duke Neimes and many another nobleman.
Ganelon arrived, the felon, the perjurer,
And began to speak, while aiming to deceive:
'God save you, Sire!' was his first greeting,
'I have brought you the keys of Saragoza.
Great wealth from the Saracen's treasury,
And twenty hostages; let them be guarded!
Marsilius, called the brave, requests of you,
That the caliph, his uncle, not be blamed,
Though I saw four hundred thousand men,

Clad in armour, with their visors closed,
Swords with hilts of gold at their sides.
Follow the caliph from the Spanish shore,
Deserting Marsilius, since Christianity
They neither wished to know or to receive.
Yet, ere they'd sailed four leagues or less,
There came a mighty storm from the north,
There they drowned, nevermore to be seen.
Were he alive, I would have brought him here.
The pagan king, indeed, Sire, bids you trust
That ere you have seen this first month pass,
He will follow you to France, to your realm,
And will accept the creed to which you hold.
Hands together, he'll do you homage there,
And will rule the realm of Spain in your name.
Said the emperor: 'Thanks be to God above!'
You have done well, and earned a rich reward.'
And then he had a thousand trumpets sounded,
The Franks struck camp, the mules were loaded,
For the army would set forth, for fair France.

Charlemagne, having laid waste all Spain,
Taken the castles there, ravaging the cities,
Had thus declared his campaign was over,
And he would ride towards France the fair.
Count Roland had fixed his pennon to a lance,
And set it high, on a cliff, against the sky.
The Franks were lodged all about that place.
Meanwhile, the pagans rode midst the valleys,
Breastplates they wore, and helms laced tight,
Visors closed, with fine swords at their sides,
Lances sharpened, and shields newly painted.
There, in the mist, beyond the peaks, lurked
Four hundred thousand waiting for the dawn;
Lord, what sorrow for the unknowing Franks!

Verses 56-57: Charlemagne's vision

The day now being past, the night had fallen,
And the emperor, Charlemagne, lay asleep;
He dreamt he stood in the wide Pass of Sizer,

And gripped in his hands his ash-wood spear;
Count Ganelon seemed to seize it from him,
Shake it aloft, brandish it, in such a way
That great splinters from it flew up to the sky.
Charlemagne slept, nor woke from his dream.

For, after this, he glimpsed another vision,
That in France he was, in his chapel at Aix.
A vicious bear was gnawing his right arm,
And a leopard, from the Forest of Ardennes,
Made assault upon his body, most fiercely.
But then a hound sped forth from the hall,
That raced and leapt towards Charlemagne,
And, first, it caught at the bear's right ear,
Then angrily made war upon the leopard.
The Franks then spoke of a mighty battle,
Yet he knew not which combatants had won.
So Charlemagne slept on; nor woke as yet.

Verses 58-63: Roland is appointed to lead the rear-guard

The night flew past, and the bright day dawned.
The emperor rode proudly midst his host,
Regarding them oft, closely, as he passed.
'My lord barons,' King Charlemagne declared,
'You see the pass, here, and the narrow valley,
Advise me now; who should lead the rearguard?'
'Why not my step-son, Roland?' said Ganelon,
'You've no greater vassal amongst the barons.'
On hearing this, the king gazed at him fiercely,
And said to him: 'You're the devil incarnate.
There's a mortal hatred in that heart of yours.
Who then shall go first, to lead the vanguard?'
'Why, Oger of Denmark.' Ganelon replied,
'You have none better to occupy that place.'

When Count Roland heard his name proposed,
He addressed these few words to Ganelon:
'Step-father, whom I should hold most dear,
So you would see me lead the rearguard!
Yet Charlemagne of France shall not lose.

Not a single charger or palfrey he owns,
Donkey, or mule that can raise a canter,
Nor pack-horse, shall he lose, no not one,
Unpaid paid for at the point of my sword.'
Said Ganelon: 'Tis true, I know that well.'

Once proposed as the leader of the rear-guard,
Roland spoke to his step-father, most angrily:
'Ah, villain! You wretch, of doubtful heritage,
Think you my glove will fall to the ground,
As your wand of office did, before the king?'

Then: 'My true emperor,' said Count Roland,
'Grant me the bow you carry in your hand,
And ne'er shall any man say, in reproach,
That it fell from my grasp to the ground,
As the wand of office did from Ganelon's.'
The emperor stood with lowered gaze,
Grasped his chin, and tugged at his beard,
Nor could move for the tears in his eyes.

Now, after that, Duke Neimes stepped forth,
(There was no finer vassal there at court)
And said to the King: 'You have heard him;
Roland is greatly angered, and is insistent.
It has been proposed he leads the rear-guard:
You have no baron here would do as well.
Give him the bow you have strung and bent,
Then grant him men, to form his company.'
The king complied; Roland received the bow.

The emperor then addressed Count Roland.
'My fair nephew, truly I'd have you know
That, as of now, you have half my army.
Accept them; they will be your safeguard.'
Then said the count: 'No, I'll not take all.
God confound me if I fail still in the task!
Twenty thousand brave Franks I'll accept.
Withdraw through the pass in safety, now,
You need fear no enemy, while I'm alive.'

Verses 64-66: He positions his men

Count Roland soon mounted his charger,
Beside him rode his comrade Oliver,
With Gerins, and the proud Count Gerers,
And Otes followed, also Berengers,
And Sansun, and the aged Anseis,
Gerart of Rossillon, bold and fierce,
And then the Gascon duke, Engeliers.
'By my life!' Archbishop Turpin said, 'I'll go,'
'And I go with you,' cried Count Gualters,
'Roland's man am I, and shall not fail him.'
They selected twenty thousand knights.

Count Roland summoned Gualters de l'Húm:
'Take a thousand Franks of our dear France,
And so dispose them, mid cliffs and crags,
That the emperor loses not a single man.'
Gualters replied: 'For you, I'll do that same.'
Gualters then ordered his thousand Franks
To range themselves about the cliffs and crags,
And not descend, however ill the tidings,
Until full seven thousand swords be drawn.
King Almaris, of the kingdom of Belserne,
Would meet them in battle on the fatal day.

High were the peaks, the valleys full of shade,
Rugged the cliffs, the mountain passes narrow.
The Franks spent the day possessed by gloom,
Their presence being noised for fifteen leagues.
Since they had been in Spain, that wider world,
They'd dreamed of Gascony, their lord's realm,
Remembering their fiefdoms, their honours,
Its most lovely ladies, and their noble wives.
Not a man there failed to shed a tear of woe,
Yet Charlemagne's anguish was the greater,
At leaving his nephew in that narrow pass.
He wept from pity, and sorrow gripped him.

Verses 67-78: Twelve enemy champions offer to slay the Twelve Peers of France

The Twelve Peers, thus, remained in Spain,
Twenty thousand Franks in their company.
They had no fear, and death they disdained.
Meanwhile, the emperor withdrew to France,
Hiding his countenance beneath his mantle.
Duke Neimes, came riding up beside him.
And said to the king: 'What troubles you?'
Charlemagne replied: 'You err in asking;
My sadness such I can do naught but grieve.
France will be ruined, through Count Ganelon.
Last night an angel visited me, in dream:
And seemed to break the spear in my hand,
Judging me negligent towards the rear-guard.
I have left them there, in that foreign land.
By God, if they're lost, I'll not be forgiven!'

Charlemagne could not but be moved to tears,
With him grieved a hundred thousand Franks,
Filled too with wondrous fear for Roland's life.
That wretch, Ganelon, had wrought treachery.
And from the pagan king gained rich reward,
Silver, and gold, and robes, and silken cloth,
Chargers and mules, camels, and lions too.
Marsilius had summoned his lords in Spain,
His counts, viscounts, dukes, and admirals,
His emirs, and all the sons most nobly born.
Four hundred thousand gathered in three days,
In Zaragoza they sounded the battle-drums.
Mahound they called on from the minarets,
There was ne'er a pagan failed to follow him.
Then they rode forth, amidst great confusion,
Through land they held, by mountain and vale,
Till they saw the banners of the Franks on high.
The Frankish rear-guard, and its Twelve Peers,
Could not fail to meet their enemies in battle.

Marsilius' nephew rode up to the vanguard,
On a mule, which he goaded with his baton.
Smiling brightly, he then addressed his uncle:
'My lord and king, since, in your service,

I have endured much pain and suffering,
Have fought in battle, and have won the field,
Grant me a boon: the right to meet this Roland.
I'll slay him with my lance, tis good and sharp,
If Mahomet will but be my guarantor,
I'll remove the French yoke from Spain's neck,
From the Spanish Pass as far as Durestant.
Charlemagne will weary, and the Franks flee,
And there'll be no more war while you live.'
Marsilius then placed the gauntlet in his hand.

Marsilius' nephew, the glove in his hand,
Made request, full of pride, of his uncle:
'Fair lord and king, great the gift you grant.
Choose now for me eleven of your barons
So that we may fight their Twelve Peers.'
Of those barons, Falsaron first made reply,
He that was brother to King Marsilius:
'Fair, nephew, let us go then, you and I,
And truly battle shall be done upon them,
The rear-guard of Charlemagne's vast host;
For tis decreed that we shall slay them all.'

King Corsalis, the lord of another realm,
A barbarian, and steeped in the evil arts,
Spoke to them, as befits a loyal vassal,
By God's riches he would prove no coward.
Malprimis de Brigant, then sped forward,
As quick on his feet as a nimble steed,
And, before King Marsilius, cried loudly:
'My person will appear at Roncesvalles;
Should I meet Roland there, he's mine.'

There was an admiral there from Balaguet,
Of noble form, of gaze fierce and high.
Since first he had e'er mounted a steed,
He had been proud indeed to bear arms.
Well-known as a true vassal of the king,
He was a Christian, yet a baron there.
Before Marsilius he spoke out, loudly:
'To Roncesvalles my body too shall go!

If I meet Roland, he shall meet his death,
As will Oliver, and all the Twelve Peers;
The Franks will die of shame and grief.
Charlemagne is old, and in his dotage;
He will be weary then of waging war,
And Spain will be ours to enjoy in peace.'
King Marsilius rendered thanks to him.

An admiral too was there from Moriane,
None more vicious in all the land of Spain.
Before King Marsilius he made his boast:
'To Roncesvalles I shall lead my company,
Twenty thousand men with shield and lance,
Find Roland, and acquaint him with death;
And every day shall Charlemagne feel woe.'

From the crowd came, Turgis of Turteluse,
He was a Count, and that city was his own.
He sought to wreak ill on these Christians.
Before Marsilius he stood, as had the rest:
And said to the king: 'Be in nowise dismayed!
Mahound yields naught to Rome's Saint Peter!
Serve him well, and the battle honours are ours.
To Roncesvalles, to meet Roland, I shall go;
No badge of safety's granted him by Death.
See here my sword, that is long and sharp,
I'll bear it to its encounter with Durendal,
And you will shortly hear which will yield.
Those Franks will die, whom we fall upon;
Old Charlemagne will suffer grief and shame,
Nevermore to wear his crown in this world.'

From the crowd came, Escremiz of Valterne;
A Saracen, that same land was all his own.
Before Marsilius he cried, midst the host:
'To Roncesvalles I'll go, to humble pride.
Should I find Roland there, I'll take his head,
And Oliver's, he the first among the rest.
The Twelve Peers are all doomed to death;
Franks shall die, and France be widowed,
And Charlemagne lose many a fine vassal.'

From the crowd came pagan Esturganz;
Estramariz also, who was his comrade;
Treacherous and sinful men were they.
Then said Marsilius: 'You may advance!
Into the pass, go then, to Roncesvalles,
And aid in marshalling my people there.'
They made answer: 'Sire, as you command!
We will make war on Oliver and Roland;
Death grants the Twelve no badge of safety.
Our swords are good, and are sharp indeed;
We'll crimson the blades in seething blood,
Franks will die, and Charlemagne feel woe,
And wider France we'll give into your hands;
Go yourself, Sire, if you would see it true,
Their emperor himself we'll give to you.'

Margariz of Sibilie, he too came forward,
Who held land about Cadiz, to the sea.
For his beauty, all the ladies loved him;
Not one could view him without delight;
Not one on seeing him but must smile,
For ne'er was there as chivalrous a pagan.
Midst the crowd, above them all, he cried:
'Be not dismayed now, King Marsilius!
To Roncesvalles I go, to slay this Roland,
Nor shall Oliver escape there with his life.
The Twelve Peers are doomed to martyrdom.
See this my sword, whose hilt is pure gold,
I received it from the admiral of Primes.
I pledge to drench it with crimson blood,
Franks shall die, and France be humbled.
To old Charlemagne, with flowing beard,
No day shall come, but brings grief and rage.
Within a year we'll seize all of fair France,
And lodge in the city, there, of Saint Denis.'
The pagan king bowed his head profoundly.

From other realm came Chernubles de Munigre,
His hair well-nigh sweeping the very ground,
Who, for a jest, would bear a heavier weight

Than four mules that strained beneath the yoke.
In that land, I have named, in which he dwelt,
No sun shone, nor did the ground yield crops,
No dew fell there, nor e'er a shower of rain,
And never a stone there but was blackened.
Many a devil lived there too, it was said.
Chernubles cried: 'My sword is at my side.
I'll stain its blade crimson at Roncesvalles.
Should I find Roland, should he meet my sight,
I'll assail him, else ne'er trust my word again.
Durendal I'll conquer, with this blade of mine,
Franks shall die, and France shall be laid waste.'
And with this, those twelve champions departed,
Leading forth a hundred thousand Saracens,
All hastening on to battle, in their eagerness.
In a fir-wood, they prepared to take the field.

Verses 79-81: Oliver, from a height, views the Saracen forces

The pagans donned their Saracenic hauberks,
Which, for the most part, were in three layers;
Then they laced on good Zaragoza helmets;
Girding on their swords of steel from Vienne.
Fine shields they had, fine spears from Valence,
And ensigns in white, and blue, and crimson,
They'd left their mules and palfreys behind,
Mounting their chargers, riding side by side.
The day was clear, the sun brightly shining,
Its rays reflected from their gleaming gear.
They sounded a thousand war-horns, proudly,
In a mighty fanfare, to impress the Franks.
Said Oliver: 'My lord and friend, I believe,
That we must meet these Saracens in battle.'
Answered Roland: 'Ay! God grant us victory!
War we must wage, in the emperor's cause;
For a man must suffer pain for his true lord,
Enduring the fiercest cold, or burning heat,
Exposing his flesh and hair to the elements.
Let every man now deal them mighty blows,
So minstrels sing no shameful songs of us.
The pagans err; the Christian faith is true.

Ne'er shall I be, to others, an ill example.'

Oliver climbed to a high vantage-point,
And, gazing to his right along the valley,
He saw the pagan army there, advancing;
He called to Roland, then, his companion:
'Hear the tumult that rises out of Spain;
See the bright hauberks, the gleaming helms!
They will fall upon the rear-guard in anger.
Ganelon knew; he played the traitor's part,
In offering up our names before the king.'
Count Roland answered: 'Hush now, Oliver!
He is my step-father; not one word more.'

Oliver stood thus, on the heights above.
Clear was his view of the realm of Spain,
And of the Saracens, gathering in numbers,
Their gleaming helmets, adorned with gold,
Their shields, their embroidered hauberks,
And their lances, with fluttering pennons.
Countless the ranks beyond ranks of them;
So many there, no measure could be set.
He was astonished, wondered to himself,
And clambered down as swiftly as he could,
Reached the Franks, and there told his tale.

Verses 82-87: Oliver begs Roland to sound his war-horn and recall the army

Said Oliver: 'I've viewed the pagan host.
No man on earth has e'er seen a greater,
A hundred thousand bearing their shields,
Helmets laced, and their hauberks shining;
Raised on high the wooden lances gleam.
A battle we'll have, such as ne'er has been.
Lords of the Franks, God grant you valour!
Hold your ground, and we'll not be beaten!'
Said the Franks: 'Shame on him that flees:
Fight, now, to the death; let no man falter.'

Said Oliver: 'The pagan force is mighty,
While we Franks, it seems to me, are few;

Roland, my comrade, sound your war-horn!
Charlemagne will hear, the army will return;
Roland answered him: 'I'd seem but foolish,
And lose all my renown in France the fair.
Great blows I shall deal, with Durendal,
And, to the hilt, drench its blade in blood.
The wretched pagans shall not take the pass;
I pledge you this: to death they are doomed.'

'My comrade, Roland, sound your ivory horn.
When the emperor hears, the army will return;
The king and his knights will come to aid us.'
Roland answered: 'By God, ne'er shall it be
That my kin be brought to shame through me.
Nor fair France through me know ignominy!
Rather I'll deal fierce blows with Durendal,
This mighty sword that hangs at my side;
Until you see its blade drenched with blood.
These vile pagans gather to their doom;
I pledge you, I'll send them to their deaths.'

'My comrade, Roland, sound your ivory horn!
If Charlemagne hears; still within the pass,
I promise you, he and the army will return.'
'Such is not God's will!' Roland answered.
'Ne'er shall it be said, by any living man,
That I blew my war-horn for mere pagans!
Not through me shall they reproach my kin.
When I am there in the thick of the battle,
And deal a hundred blows, a thousand, more,
You'll behold Durendal's crimsoned blade.
Franks are fine men; they'll act courageously;
These warriors of Spain, Death will not spare.'

'There's no blame in sounding it,' cried Oliver,
'I've viewed their host, these Saracens of Spain;
It clothes the very mountains, and the valleys,
The wastelands here, and all the farthest plain.
Great are the numbers of these foreign folk,
While we are but few, our little company.'
Roland replied: "My wrath and anger grows.

Ne'er, may it please God and all his angels,
To behold, through me, Frankish valour fail!
Rather I'd seek to die than be dishonoured.
Greater the emperor's love, if we fight well.'

Roland was proud, where Oliver was wise.
Yet both of them showed wondrous courage;
Once they had mounted, and were fully armed,
They'd rather have died than evade the battle.
Bold were the counts, fierce their language.
As the vile pagans came riding on apace.
Says Oliver: 'Look, Roland, see before you
How near they are, while Charlemagne is far.
Deign, now, to sound your horn of ivory.
Were the king here, there'd be no fear of harm.
Only look there, towards the Spanish Pass,
And see the whole rearguard full of woe.
He that attempts this deed, will do no other!'
Roland answered him: 'Speak not so ill!
Evil his heart, whose thoughts are cowardly!
We shall remain here, and hold our ground.
From us will come the blows and the assault.'

Verses 88-92: Roland and the rearguard prepare to attack the foe

When Roland saw that battle must ensue,
He grew fiercer than a lion or a leopard;
He called aloud to the Franks, to Oliver:
'An end to words, my friends, my comrade!
The emperor, who left us as the rearguard,
Chose twenty thousand men, set us apart,
And knew not one would prove a coward.
A man should suffer any ill for his lord,
Enduring the bitter cold, or burning heat,
Giving freely of his flesh, and his blood.
Strike with the lance, as I with Durendal,
My lovely blade, a token from my king,
Such that if I die, who wields it may say,
(As well he must) it was a noble knight's.'

From the ranks there came Archbishop Turpin,

He spurred his horse, and mounted a hillock;
Called to the Franks, and began this speech:
‘My lord barons, Charlemagne set us here;
It is well that we should perish for our king.
Help you, now, to sustain all Christendom!
Battle you’ll see, that you are bound to face,
Your eyes behold the Saracen foe before you.
Confess your sins, and pray for God’s mercy!
To heal your souls, I grant you absolution,
So, though you die, you shall be martyrs,
And thrones you’ll have in blest Paradise!’
The Franks dismounted, knelt on the ground,
And the archbishop gave God’s benediction,
And bade them, as their penance, strike hard.

The Franks then rose, and stood in their ranks,
Absolved and rendered clean of all their sins,
The archbishop making the sign of the cross.
Then they mounted on their eager chargers.
They were dressed according to knightly lore,
Well-apparelled, armoured, for the battlefield.
Count Roland spoke with his comrade Oliver:
‘Friend and companion, it is apparent now,
That Ganelon has betrayed the king’s trust,
Gold he has received, much wealth indeed.
Tis the Emperor must seek revenge for this.
King Marsilius has bought our lives for little;
Yet at sword-point he shall pay the balance!’

Roland now rode through the Spanish pass,
Spurring on his fine charger, Veillantif.
He bore his arms; well they became him,
Riding with his lance gripped in his hand,
Its point raised towards the skies above.
A white ensign he’d affixed to the shaft,
The gilded fringe fluttering o’er his hand;
Noble his form, his face smiling brightly.
And Oliver, his comrade, followed him,
For in Roland the Franks placed their hopes.
Proud was his gaze towards the Saracens,
Humble and benign towards the Franks,

Whom he now addressed most courteously:
'My lord barons, now hold a steady pace!
These pagans come seeking martyrdom.
Fine and noble is the prize this day brings,
None so brave e'er won by Frankish king.'
With these words, the armies met together.

Said Oliver: 'There is no more to say.
You deign not to sound the ivory horn.
And so Charlemagne can send no aid.
Naught has he heard, so bears no guilt.
Nor are those about him to be blamed.
So gallop on, as fiercely as you're able!
And you lord barons, hold your ground!
I pray you in God's name, be prepared
To strike a blow, receive, and strike again!
Forget not the war-cry of Charlemagne!'
At this, the Franks shouted as one man.
Who heard the cry there, of 'Montjoie!'
Might well recall their days of service.
They rode on, God on high, with such pride,
Spurring on their mounts, to gather speed!
They rode to the attack, to strike, what else?
While the Saracens, as yet, showed unafraid.
The Franks and pagans, then, met together.

Verses 93-94: Roland and Oliver slay two of the Saracen champions

Marsilius' nephew, whose name was Aelroth,
First of them all, rode out before the ranks,
Speaking ill of the Franks, as he went forth:
'Come you Frankish villains, joust with us.
He's betrayed you that ought to guard you.
Mad is the King who left you in this pass.
So shall fair France's brave renown be lost;
Charlemagne's right arm be torn from him.'
On hearing this, what anger Roland felt!
He pricked his spurs, driving on his steed;
He sought, at once, to strike with all his force,
The other's shield he broke, split the hauberk,
Sliced his belly, and shattered bone beneath,

The whole spine he severed, broke his back,
Hurling soul from the body, with his lance.
He brandished the corpse, pinned hard, on high,
And, with the hilt, he flung it from its steed:
He had broken this Aeroth's neck in two,
Nor quit the corpse, they say, till he'd cried:
'Begone, villain! Charlemagne is not mad!
He has no love of treachery, nor works it.
Proud was his deed, in granting us our post,
Fair France's brave renown shall ne'er be lost.
Strike on, you Franks! Ours, the mightier blows.
We are in the right, these wretches in the wrong!'

A duke came forth, his name was Falsaron,
And he was brother to King Marsilius.
He held the realms of Datliun and Balbiun;
No worse a villain between earth and sky.
The space between his eyes was so broad
It measured half a foot, at least, in width.
Grief it brought to see his nephew slain.
Through the ranks he now came, riding,
While voicing the pagan war-cry, aloud,
Sounding his opposition to the Franks:
'The honour of fair France shall be lost!'
Now Oliver heard this, and waxed furious,
With his golden spurs, he pricked his steed,
And moved to strike, as befitted a baron.
He shattered his foe's shield, pierced his hauberk,
And drove his lance, pennon deep, into the flesh,
Flinging Falsaron, dead, from the saddle.
He gazed at the villain, lying on the ground,
And cried aloud, rightly, in proud words;
'I've cleansed your mouth, now, of menaces.
Strike on, you Franks! Readily, we'll conquer!'
'Montjoie!' he shouted, Charlemagne's war-cry.

Verses 95-104: The rest are slain, except for Margariz

From the enemy ranks came King Corsalis,
The barbarian lord of a foreign country.
He called aloud to the other Saracens:

‘Well it is we join battle here together,
For there are but few Franks in the field.
Most vile those that present themselves,
And none has succour from Charlemagne.
This is the day they shall meet their death.’
Archbishop Turpin heard the monarch’s boast;
No living man was he so disposed to hate.
He pricked his steed with his golden spurs,
And, moved by true virtue, rode to the attack,
Broke the foe’s shield, pierced the hauberk,
Thrusting his lance through the king’s body,
Pinning it so well, he brandished the corpse,
Then flung it from his lance to the ground.
Gazing at the villain, lain dead in the dust,
He lingered there, and spoke thus, they say:
‘Vile pagan, all can see now that you lied!
In Charlemagne, my lord, dwells our safety.
Not one Frank here has thoughts of fleeing.
And all your company will, here, remain;
Such are my tidings, for death you’ll suffer.
Strike on, we Franks! And no surrender!
Thanks be to God, the first attack is ours!’
‘Montjoie!’ he cried, for all the field to hear.

Gerins then struck Malprimis de Brigant,
Whose stout shield offered scant defence,
Shattering the boss, wrought from crystal,
As one half flew downwards to the ground.
His blow tore through hauberk to the flesh.
On his good lance, he caught the dying man,
Then from the shaft the pagan’s body slid,
While, swiftly, Satan carried off his soul.

Geres, his comrade, dealt with Balaguet,
Broke his shield, and burst his hauberk,
Such that the lance drove deep into his guts.
So tightly he’d pinned him through the body,
He flung him from his lance to the field.
Cried Oliver: ‘Right noble is this fight.’

Duke Sansun struck the emir, Moriane.

He broke his shield, gold-flower-embossed,
While the hauberk provided scant defence,
Sliced through his heart, lungs, and entrails,
And flung him down dead, for good or ill.
Cried Turpin: 'Tis a baron's thrust, indeed.'

Now, Anseis let his steed leap ahead,
And charged at Turgis of Turteluse,
Shattered his shield below its golden boss,
And pierced the hauberk's double layer.
His lance-tip pierced his enemy, as well,
Such that the steel blade emerged behind.
Then he flung the dying man to the field.
Cried Roland: 'Right skilful was that blow!'

Next, Engeliers the Gascon, of Burdele,
Spurred on his charger, letting fall the reins,
And moved to strike Escremiz of Valterne,
Breaking his chin-guard which shattered,
And tearing the ventail from his hauberk.
Between the arm-pits he pierced his chest,
And flung his foe, dead, from the saddle;
Shouting: 'Thus, I send you to perdition!'

Then Otes struck the pagan Esturganz.
Upon the shield, upon its leathern band,
Slicing through the white and the crimson,
Piercing the thick layers of his hauberk,
Thrusting his lance right through the body,
And flung him dead, as his steed passed by.
Then he cried: 'No safety for you, now!'

And Berengers, then, charged Estramariz.
He broke the shield, and split the hauberk.
His sharp lance pierced the man's body;
Dead he fell, seen by a thousand Saracens.
Of their twelve champions, ten were dead.
The two foes who, as yet, remained alive,
Were Chernubles, and Count Margariz.

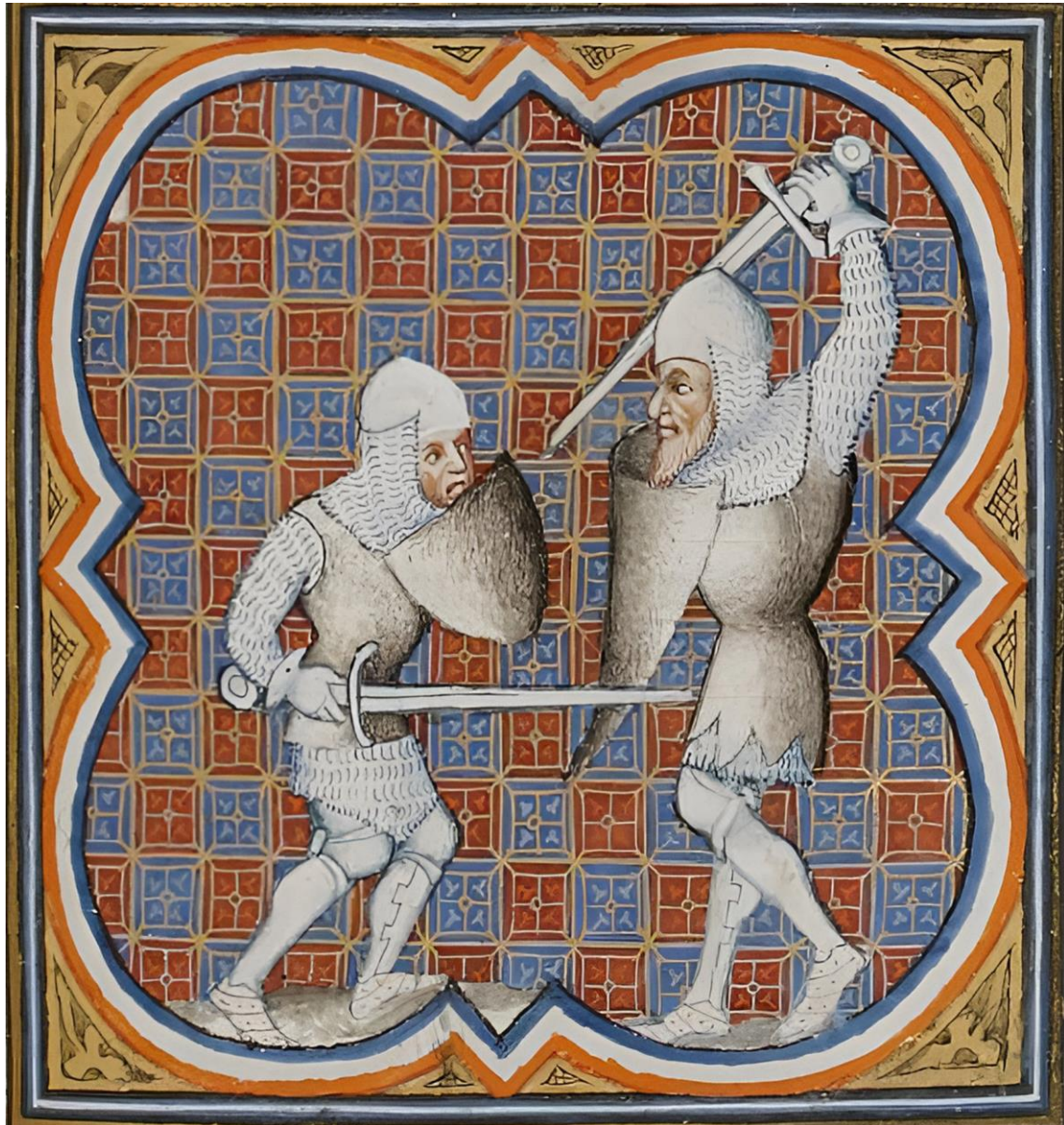
Margariz was a most courageous knight.

Handsome and strong, swift and nimble;
He spurred his steed to strike at Oliver
Whose shield he broke, lancing its gold buckle.
Along his ribs, slid the pagan's spear-point;
God spared Oliver, his body yet unpierced.
The shaft broke, while Oliver kept his seat;
The other turned away; he stopped for none,
Sounding a trumpet, then, to rally his men.

Wondrous the fight engaged in now by all.
Count Roland, ignoring his own safety,
Struck with his lance, while the shaft endured.
After fifteen blows, it broke, and was lost.
Then he drew Durendal; with naked blade,
Spurring his steed, to strike at Chernubles.
Broke the helm, on which bright garnets shone,
Sliced the cap, and sheared the hair below,
Cut through the forehead, between the eyes,
The bright hauberk, of close-woven mail,
Down through the body, likewise, to the groin,
Reaching the saddle tooled with beaten gold.
By the steed below arrested but a moment,
The blade cut its spine, splitting it in two,
And horse and man lay dead, upon the field.
Then Roland cried: 'A false move, villain!
You shall win no help now from Mahomet.
By such as you the field shall not be gained.'

The End of 'La Chanson de Roland: Part II'

Part III: The Death of Oliver



Combat of Roland and the giant Ferragut from the Grandes Chroniques de France, Paris, BNF, Fr. 2813, fol.

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Verses 105-107: Roland and Oliver fight side by side

Count Roland galloped onwards through the field.
Gripping Durendal, that sliced away and thrust.
Great damage he thus wrought the Saracen foe,
Who were seen, dying, hurled on one another.
Through all that place the blood flowed clear!
His hauberk and arms were drenched with blood,
And the shoulders and neck, of his good steed.
Meanwhile Oliver failed not in striking hard.
No blame should fall upon those dozen peers,
For all the Franks fought fiercely there and slew.
Pagans fell dead, some fainted in the saddle.
Said Archbishop Turpin: 'Noble work, indeed!'
'Montjoie' he shouted, Charlemagne's war-cry.

Brave Oliver galloped on through the ranks;
His lance now broken, thrusting with the hilt;
He moved to strike a pagan lord, Malun;

And broke his shield, gilded all with flowers,
The pagan's eyes burst forth from his head,
And all his brains poured out into the dust;
He flung him, dead, midst seven hundred others.
And then he downed Turgis and Esturguz;
Though his lance-stub shattered all to pieces.
Cried Roland: 'My companion, what is this?
In such a fight, plain wood is of scant use;
Iron and steel must show our valour here.
Where is your sword, Halteclere, by name,
Whose hilt is gold, with crystal set therein?
'I'd no time to draw the blade,' cried Oliver,
'Needing to strike one blow upon another!'

Then Oliver drew forth his sword of steel,
As his comrade Roland had demanded,
And courteously showed him the blade.
He struck a knight, Justin de Val Ferree,
And split the man's head, at once, in two,
Sliced the chest, the embroidered robes,
The fine saddle, all embossed with gold,
And, through the spine, the pagan's steed.
Dead, on the field, before his feet, they fell.
Said Roland: 'For that, I call you brother!
Our emperor will love us for such blows.'
On every side there rose the cry: 'Montjoie!'

Verses 108-109: Gerins, Gerers and Turpin are in action

Count Gerins sat astride his horse Sorel,
Gerers, his friend, beside him, on Passecerf.
They loosed their reins, and sped on together,
Attacking a pagan knight, one Timozel;
One struck the shield; the hauberk, the other,
Their two lances piercing the man's body,
Hurling him, dying, to the ground below.
I know not, for I've ne'er heard it said,
Which of the two fought more skilfully.
Esprieres was slain, the son of Burdel,
While the Archbishop did for Siglorel,
The vile enchanter, that was once in hell,

Where Jupiter led him by his magic art.
Turpin cried: 'Here was he forfeit to us!'
Roland replied: 'His villainy is ended.
Such lance-blows, friend Oliver, I like well.'

The battle grew immeasurably fiercer,
Franks and pagans dealing wondrous blows.
One struck as some other knight defended.
Many a blood-stained shaft was shattered,
Many a banner, and many a pennant torn.
Many a Frankish youth that day was lost;
Gazed on by his wife and mother no more,
Nor by the Frankish host amidst that pass.
Charlemagne, maddened, weeps their fate?
What matter? For no aid can help them now!
Evil service, that day, did Ganelon render,
When he sold his countrymen, in Zaragoza.
Later, he would lose his limbs, and life,
Condemned to die, facing justice, at Aix,
With thirty more, together, of his kindred,
Who had ne'er expected, thus, to be slain.

Verses 110-112: Battle rages and the forces are thinned

Now the battle was marvellously intense.
Right well they fought, Oliver and Roland.
The archbishop, he dealt a thousand blows;
None of the Twelve fell much short of them.
All of the Franks engaged now in the battle.
The pagans died by hundreds, by thousands.
He that fled not from death found no safety,
But, whether he would or no, left this life.
The Franks had lost the flower of their force,
No more to see their fathers, and their kin,
Nor Charlemagne, where in the pass he stood.
In the skies, a wondrous tumult beset France;
A fierce tempest, of wind and thunder-cloud,
With immeasurable bursts of hail and rain,
As lightning-bolts struck, often, everywhere.
And the solid ground shook, as if in answer.
From Saint-Michel de Peril as far as Sens,

From Besançon to the harbour at Wissant,
Never a house but its walls were cracked:
At midday, the darkness proved so intense,
No light was there, unless the heavens split.
None there viewed all this except in terror.
Many cried: 'Comes the Day of Judgement;
And the end of all things is close at hand.'
They could not know they spoke in error;
Twas but the day of woe at Roland's death.

The Franks fought hard, with heart and vigour.
The pagan ranks they slew, in their thousands.
Of that hundred thousand barely two remained.
Roland said: 'Our men may boast their prowess.
Ne'er on earth has any man commanded better.'
And in the Chronicle of the Franks tis written,
What fine service our emperor there received.
Through the field they went, seeking friends,
Tears in their eyes, born of pain and sorrow,
For kinsmen, dear to their hearts, they'd loved,
As King Marsilius and his host drew near.

King Marsilius led his men along the valley,
The mighty host that yet remained to him.
Twenty great columns the king had gathered.
With studs of gold their helmets gemmed,
Shields and embroidered robes gleaming.
Seven thousand trumpets sounded the charge,
And loud was the noise through all that place.
Said Roland: 'Oliver, companion, brother,
That wretch Ganelon has sworn to end us;
His treachery can be concealed no more.
Mighty vengeance our emperor will take;
A battle we shall have, long and hard,
For never has any man beheld the like.
With Durendal, my blade, I shall strike,
And, you my comrade, wield Halteclere.
On many a field have we borne them,
And with them have ended many a fight;
No shameful song shall be sung of them.'

Verses 113-115: Archbishop Turpin slays Abisme, the Saracen

Marsilius had seen the slaughter of his men.
And had the horns and trumpets sounded.
And advanced the greater part of his host.
In the vanguard rode a Saracen, Abisme,
None more villainous in all that company.
Full of sin, of every form of wickedness,
He believed not in God, the Son of Mary;
His heart was as black as pitch, while he
Felt more desire for treachery and murder,
Than all the gold there was in Galicia;
Ne'er had any seen him smiling, or at ease,
A madness was in him, and such valour,
As made him dear to the king, Marsilius;
His ensign, of a dragon, his folk followed.
The archbishop loved not the sight of him.
Turpin eyeing the pagan, wished to strike,
While saying to himself, beneath his breath:
'This Saracen's a great heretic, it seems:
I'd rather die, than not slay the fellow;
No coward I, nor e'er loved cowardice.'

The Archbishop now commenced his attack.
Riding a steed he'd taken from Grossaille,
A king whom Turpin had slain in Denmark.
The charger was swift, and of a noble line,
Fine the hooves, the legs smooth and straight,
Short in the thigh, and the crupper full wide,
Long in the ribs, and the spine raised high,
White the tail, while yellow was the mane,
The ears neat and small, and tawny the face;
No creature e'er was born could outrun him.
Archbishop Turpin, spurred on by courage,
Paused not until he met with this Abisme.
He struck the man upon his wondrous shield,
Studded with jewels, amethysts and topaz,
And garnets, and other gems, that shone.
A devil gave it, as a gift, in Val Metas,
Handing it to the admiral Galafes.
Turpin struck home, sparing it not at all;

After that blow, twas not worth a penny.
He sliced the man; and cut away his ribs,
And flung his corpse to the empty ground.
The Franks cried, then: 'What courage is his!
With such an archbishop, the Cross is safe.'

The Franks, seeing so many pagans there,
Covering the battlefield, on every side,
Often called out to Oliver, and Roland,
And others of the Twelve, to defend them.
Archbishop Turpin spoke loudly to them:
'My lord barons, banish your ill thoughts!
For God's sake, I pray, flee not the field,
Lest men should sing but ill of our valour!
Far better that we die here, as combatants.
Certain it is that we must meet death soon,
For not a man here shall outlive this day;
And yet, of this, I'll give you guarantee:
Paradise now opens, blessed, before you,
And you shall be seated midst the Innocent.'
At this, the Franks were all emboldened;
Not one of them but cried aloud 'Montjoie!'.

Verses 116-117: The Saracen Climborins slays Engeliers of Burdele

A Saracen there was, come of Zaragoza,
And one half of that same city he ruled;
Climborins his name; one of no great birth;
He swore an oath to serve Count Ganelon,
And kissed him on the mouth, in friendship,
Gave him his sword, and a fine garnet too.
He said he'd bring shame to wider France,
And take the emperor's crown for his own.
He sat astride his charger, Barbamusche,
Far swifter than swallow or sparrowhawk,
Spurred him fiercely, and loosed the reins,
And attacked Engeliers, the Gascon lord.
Nor shield nor mail proved useful in defence.
The pagan's lance-tip pierced him deeply,
Pinned him well, and transfixed his body;
From the shaft was he flung to the ground.

Climborins cried: 'So we'll confound them!
Strike, Saracens, and rout the enemy ranks!'
Cried the Franks: 'Lord, woeful is his loss!'

Count Roland called aloud to Oliver:
'Our comrade, Engeliers now lies dead.
No knight more valiant was among us.'
The other cried: 'Let me avenge him, Lord!'
With his golden spurs, he pricked his steed
Gripped Halteclere, its blade blood-stained,
And, seeking to strike the pagan fiercely,
Wielded the blade, and felled the Saracen;
God's adversaries snatched his soul away.
Next Oliver slew a duke, one Alphaën,
Struck the head from the pagan Escababi,
And another seven Arabs then unseated;
Leaving them wounded, and unfit for war.
Said Roland, then: 'My friend grows angry,
I cannot but praise him for that encounter;
Charlemagne holds us dearer for such blows,'
And shouted: 'Strike hard, knights of France!'

Verses 118-119: The pagan Valdabrun slays Duke Sansun

Came, then, another pagan, Valdabrun.
Warden he'd been to King Marsilius,
And admiral of four hundred vessels;
No sailor was there but knew his name.
Jerusalem he'd once taken, by treason,
And violated Solomon's great Temple,
And slain the Patriarch beside his font.
He'd pledged his oath to Count Ganelon,
Gifting his sword, and a thousand coins.
He rode a horse, its name Gramimund,
That was swifter than a falcon in flight.
He pricked the steed, with his sharp spurs,
And went to strike the rich Duke Sansun,
Splitting his shield, piercing his hauberk,
And driving the lance's pennant through.
With the hilt he pushed him from the saddle:
'Strike Saracens,' he cried, 'thus we conquer!'
The Franks: 'Lord, woe for the baron's loss!'

Count Roland, viewing the death of Sansun,
Was filled with great grief, as you'll believe.
He spurred his horse on, and galloped hard,
Gripping Durendal, worth more than gold.
He struck the pagan, as fiercely as he could
Upon the helm, that with gold was studded,
Split the head, the hauberk, and the body,
The saddle, that was gold-embossed also,
And cut through the steed's spine below;
Both he'd slain, blame or praise who might.
The pagans cried: 'A blow to us, is this!'
Roland answered: 'Love you, I may not!
For before you now lies pride, and error.'

Verses 120-121: Malquiant slays Anseis

Out of Africa, there came an African prince,
One Malquiant, the son of King Malcud,
His armour all embossed with beaten gold,
That shone, above all others, neath the sun.
He sat his steed, that he called Salt-Perdut,
And never a creature sped as swift as he.
Now, Malquiant struck Anseis on the shield,
Slicing through the crimson and the blue,
Tearing, then piercing the hauberk's layers,
Driving the steel and shaft through the flesh.
Dead was the Count, and his days no more.
Cried the Franks: 'Baron, twas evil chance!'

O'er the ground flew Archbishop Turpin.
Such shaven-head ne'er sang Mass before,
Nor showed such bodily prowess in the field.
He said to the pagan: 'God send you all ill!
You have slain one my heart can but regret.'
His good steed he drove to the encounter,
Struck the man on his shield from Toledo,
And flung him dead upon the verdant grass.

Verses 122-124: Grandonie slays Gerins, Gerers, Berengers and Guion

Came forth another pagan, Grandonie,
The son of Capuel, Cappadocia's king.
He sat his steed that he called Marmorie,
That sped swifter than any bird that flew.
He slacked the reins, and worked his spurs,
And struck at Gerins with all his might.
Shattering the crimson shield at his neck,
All the hauberk then, below, he tore away,
Driving his azure pennant through the flesh,
And flung Gerins, dead, upon the stones.
He slew brave Gerers his comrade, too,
Berengers, and Guion of Saint-Antoine;
Then moved to strike a rich duke, Austorje,
That ruled Valence, and all about the Rhône.
He flung him dead; the pagan ranks rejoiced.
Cried the Franks: 'Many of ours, thus, fall!'

Count Roland's blade was stained with blood,
He heard the cry from the Frankish ranks,
And felt such pain as if his heart was split.
To the foe he cried: 'God send you every ill!
Such have you slain as shall cost you dear!'
He spurred his steed, and sped o'er the field.
They met together, seeking who might win.

Grandonie was skilful, and most valiant,
A powerful and courageous combatant.
He now encountered Roland in his path,
Whom he'd ne'er seen before, but knew
By his proud visage and his noble form,
By his gaze, and his steely countenance.
He could not fail to tremble at the sight;
He wished to flee then, but to no avail.
The Count struck at his enemy so fiercely
He split the pagan's helm to the nose-plate,
Likewise, the nose, the teeth, and the jaw,
The hauberk of fine mail, and the body,
The golden saddle, fringed with silver,
And deep into the charger's back below.
He'd slain them both, beyond all rescue,

And the men of Spain cried their dismay;
The Franks: 'He fights well our champion!'

Verses 125-127: The battle rages fiercely

The battle raged, and was wondrous fierce.
The Franks struck hard with lance in hand.
There you'd have seen such a wealth of woe,
So many dead, broken, blood-stained men,
One on another hurled, upturned, writhing!
The Saracens could not endure such losses,
And quit the field, whether they would or no.
The Franks, by main force, drove them forth.

The battle raged, and it was wondrous lively;
The Franks struck with vigour, in their wrath,
Slicing through wrists, and ribs, and backs,
Through garments to the living flesh beneath.
Amidst the green turf, the red blood flowed.
A cry arose then from the Saracen ranks:
'Mahomet curse you, and your wide realm!
Your people are more stubborn than others.'
Not a one of them but shouted: 'Ride forth,
Marsilius, our king, for we have need of aid!'

Tw'as Count Roland called aloud to Oliver:
'Friend, you may now bear witness, freely,
That our archbishop is a formidable knight;
None better on this earth, or above, in heaven.
The man strikes hard with lance and spear.'
Oliver replied: 'We must grant him succour!'
With this, the Franks recommenced the fight.
Harsh were the blows, the slaughter, the woe.
And the Christians too met with sorrow there.
Seen to the fore were Oliver and Roland,
Striking and killing with their good blades;
Well might men praise the dead lying there.
In song, and chronicle, the tale is written:
Four thousand fell, those histories declare.
Against four bold attacks the Franks resisted,
But then the fifth brought misery and woe;

Nigh on all those Frankish knights were slain,
All but for sixty, whom God chose to spare,
Who'd sell their lives dearly, ere they perished.

Verses 128-132: Roland thinks of sounding his war-horn, Oliver demurs

Count Roland viewed the losses on his side,
And called aloud to Oliver his comrade:
'Good sir, dear friend, by God, what think you?
So many warriors lie dead upon the ground!
Well may we mourn the flower of fair France.
Shorn of such noble men she'll long remain!
Ah, king and comrade, were you but here!
Friend Oliver, can we yet bring that about?
May we yet send him tidings of our plight?
Answered Oliver: 'I know not what to do.
Rather I'd die now than retreat in shame.'

Said Roland: 'I will sound my ivory horn.
If Charlemagne's yet in the pass, and hears,
I pledge to you that the army will return.'
Said Oliver: 'Yet great would be the shame,
And bring reproach on all your kith and kin,
A shame, indeed, that will endure lifelong!
When I asked it of you once, you blew it not.
To do so now, will win no praise from me.
Sound it, and you show yourself less brave,
Although your arms are drenched with blood!'
The Count replied: 'Full many have I struck!'

Said Roland: 'This battle of ours waxes fierce.
I'll sound the horn so Charlemagne may hear.'
Said Oliver: 'Scant courage such will show!
You would not do so when I asked it, friend.
Were the king here, twould have done no harm;
That the army are not, is no fault of theirs.'
Said Oliver: 'By this beard of mine, my friend,
If we should yet see my noble sister Alde,
She'll not clasp you now in a fond embrace!'

Then said Roland: 'Why so angry with me?'

He answered: 'Friend, all this was through you.
True service lies in wisdom, and not in folly;
Common sense is worth more than stupidity.
Here lie these Franks, through your carelessness;
We can do Charlemagne scant service now.
If you had heeded me, he would be here;
This same battle we'd have fought and won.
King Marsilius we'd have taken or have slain.
Your rashness, Roland, brought us but ill!
You'll win no aid now from Charlemagne,
Nor any such till the Day of Judgement.
Here you will die, and France be humbled;
Here will perish all our loyal company;
Ere this night, great our grief in parting!'

Archbishop Turpin heard them, in dispute,
His pricked his steed with his gilded spurs.
Reaching them, he started to reproach them:
'Come, Sir Roland, and you, Sir Oliver,
For God's sake, I beg you not to quarrel!
Though sounding the horn may do no good,
Nonetheless, it may be better so to do.
The King will yet avenge us, if he may;
The Saracens will ne'er retreat otherwise.
Our friends, once here, then dismounting,
Will find our corpses, lifeless, and all torn;
They'll take us up; bear us hence on biers;
And grieve for us, shedding tears of pity;
They'll bury us beneath some church aisle;
No wolf, or swine, or dog shall feed on us.'
Count Roland replied: 'Sir, you speak well.'

Verses 133-135: He blows the horn thrice, and Charlemagne hears

Roland now set his war-horn to his lips,
Gripped it hard, and voiced it loudly.
High were the peaks; the echoes rang afar.
Thirty leagues away they heard the sound.
Charlemagne heard, and all his company.
Then said the king: 'Our men do battle!'
But Count Ganelon replied, disagreeing:

‘Had another said it, I’d deem that false!’

Count Roland, there, sadly and painfully,
With much woe, sounded his horn, again.
Blood sprang from his lips, with the force,
His brow furrowed; the skin there creased.
Loud rang the voice of that ivory horn,
Charlemagne heard it, as he crossed the pass.
Duke Neimes listened hard, and all the Franks.
Then said the king: ‘Roland’s horn, I hear!
He’d not sound it unless deep in combat.’
Ganelon replied: ‘Tis no sound of battle!
You are old; blanced, and white-haired;
To claim such things is mere childishness.
You know how great is Roland’s pride,
And tis a wonder God above allows it.
Noples, he took, without your orders,
Where the Saracens had issued forth,
And would have fought as his vassals,
And yet he slew them all, nonetheless,
Then had the ground rinsed of their blood,
So that what he’d done might not be seen.
He sounds his horn, when hunting the hare.
He ever boasts aloud amidst his peers,
Yet dare not seek an enemy in the field.
Ride on, therefore. Why, should we halt?
The wider fields of France lie far ahead.’

Count Roland, with blood staining his lips,
Nigh on rupturing the veins in his brow,
Sounded the ivory war-horn once more.
Charlemagne heard, as did all the Franks.
Said the king: ‘That horn sounds mightily!’
Duke Neimes replied: ‘The Count’s in need!
For, in my mind, I see fierce battle raging.
He betrays you who’d tell you otherwise.
Take up arms, Sire, give your battle-cry,
And go to the help of these, your people.
You have heard how Roland cries for aid!’

Verses 136-138: Charlemagne turns back; Ganelon is seized

The emperor bade them sound the war-horns.
The Franks dismounted, and dressed for war,
With hauberks, and helms, and gilded swords,
Noble shields, and lances long and weighty,
Their ensigns fluttering, red, white, and blue.
The leaders of the host mounted their steeds,
And spurred in haste, riding through the pass,
As calling out, in unison, to one another:
'If we can but reach Roland ere he's slain,
We'll deal some mighty blows by his side.'
To what avail? For they had stayed too long.

Evening it was, although the sky was bright;
Their armour gleamed, lit by the setting sun,
Hauberks and helms shone, as if with flame,
Their shields glowed, all painted with flowers,
Their lances glittered, decked with pennants.
The emperor now galloped forth in anger,
And all the Franks, in wonder and dismay,
Could not, to the last man, refrain from tears,
Being much afraid for Count Roland's life.
The king had bid them seize Count Ganelon,
And called on the scullions of his household,
Of whom most called Besgun their master:
'Guard him well, like to the felon he is,
That, in my ranks, has wrought such treachery!'
He took him, and set on the scullion band,
Out of the canteens, the better and worse,
And had them shave off Ganelon's beard.
Then each gave him four blows with the fist,
Beating him hard, with cudgels and staves,
And round his neck clasped an iron chain,
And so enchained him much like to a bear.
And set him on a pack-mule to his shame,
And held him until summoned by the king.

High were the peaks, and vast, and shadowy,
The valleys deep, and swiftly ran the streams.
They sounded the trumpets from van and rear,
All blaring in answer to that ivory horn.

The emperor galloped onwards, in his anger,
And all of the Franks, in wonder and dismay.
There was not a man there but wept with woe,
And prayed to God to aid their Count Roland,
Till they might reach the battlefield together,
And, beside him, strike the foe, and valiantly.
To what avail? Their pleas were little worth.
They came too late, not reaching him in time.

Verses 139-140: Roland laments the death of his companions

Charlemagne galloped onwards, in anger,
His white beard flowing o'er his hauberk,
All the barons of France spurred on, likewise.
Not a man of them could contain his wrath
At being far from their champion, Roland,
Who battled against the Saracens of Spain.
If he was dead, not one there would remain.
Lord, but sixty had he in company now,
Yet no king or leader e'er had finer men!

Roland, ere this, was gazing at the hillside;
Many the dead of France, he saw, lay there.
As befits a noble knight, he wept for them:
'Lord barons, may you know God's mercy,
And your souls, through Him, find paradise!
May you lie there amidst the holy flowers,
For greater service have I seen from none!
Long have you served me; it seems forever;
Many a land, for Charlemagne, you gained.
The emperor gathered you here but for ill;
And the land of France, so sweet a country,
Lies deserted, through your so bitter exile.
Barons of France I watched you die, for me,
Yet no aid, no defence, I proved to you.
God be your aid, who ne'er proved false!
Oliver, my brother, you I must not fail.
If I am not slain, I shall die of sorrow.
Come, my friend, let us ride forth again!'

Verses 141-142: Marsilius' army flees the field

Count Roland then returned to the battle.
Gripping Durendal, and striking bravely.
He sliced Faldron de Pui through the waist,
And twenty-four of their finest warriors.
Ne'er did any take such joy in vengeance.
Every pagan he met with fled as swiftly
As a stag flees before the chasing hounds.
Cried the archbishop: 'Well fought, indeed!
Such valour each true knight should reveal,
That carries arms, and sits a decent horse.
In battle he should show strong and proud,
Otherwise, he's scarce worth four deniers,
And better had been a monk in his cloister,
Praying, all his days, for us poor sinners!'
Answered Roland: 'Strike on, sparing none!'
At his words, the Franks set to, once more,
Yet suffered many a loss, those Christians.

The man who swears that he'll not be taken,
Is fierce in his own defence, in such a battle.
And so, the Franks showed fierce as lions.
Marsilius too, fought bravely, like a baron,
Astride his charger, that he called Gaignun.
Spurring hard, he charged and struck Bevon,
He that was lord of Beane, and fair Dijon.
He shattered his shield, pierced his hauberk,
And flung him dead, as easily as one might.
Then took the lives of Yvoeries and Ivon,
Together with that of Gerart of Rossillon.
Count Roland, who was fighting nearby,
Cried to the pagan: 'God confound you!
Wrong you do in slaying my comrades!
A blow you shall receive ere we, two, part,
And you may learn the weight of my sword.'
He charged at the man, like a brave baron.
The Count sliced his right hand clean away.
Then cut the head from Jursaleu the Blond,
That was the son of the king, Marsilius.
The pagans cried: 'Mahomet, be our aid!'

Our god take vengeance on Charlemagne,
That has sent these wretches to our land,
Who would rather die than quit the fight!’
They shouted, together: ‘Let us begone!’
And, with that, a hundred thousand fled,
Ne’er to return, summon them who might.

Verses 143-147: Marganices wounds Oliver fatally

What matter? Though Marsilius had fled,
He’d left behind his uncle, Marganices,
Who held Carthage, Alfrere, Garmalie,
With Ethiopia, a most accursed country.
He ruled that land’s tribes; black of skin,
Broad-nosed, and flat-eared, were they.
Fifty thousand of them, made up his host.
They rode forth, proudly, and full of wrath,
Calling out their pagan leader’s war-cry.
Roland spoke and said: ‘Martyrs, we’ll be.
I see we can but live a short while longer,
But wretched he that sells his life cheaply.
Strike hard my lords, with those keen blades.
Fight hard for your lives, and to the death,
So fair France shall not be shamed by us!
When Charlemagne reaches this battlefield,
And views the fallen ranks of Saracens,
For one us of, of them he’ll find fifteen,
And will not fail to grant us benediction.’

Looking upon those misbegotten people,
Whose faces were as black as blackest ink,
And only their teeth the brightest white,
The Count said: ‘I see that we must die,
Their numbers are immeasurably great.
On, Franks; and to God, I commend you.’
Cried Oliver: ‘Shame be to the slowest!’
At these words, the Franks laid on again.

When the pagans saw the Franks were few,
They were full of pride, and waxed content.
Saying to one another: ‘Their emperor erred.’

Caliph Marganices, riding a sorrel steed,
Pricking it hard with his golden spurs,
Struck Oliver, from behind, on the spine,
Pushing the white hauberk into the flesh,
And driving his lance-tip through the chest.
Then cried he: 'There's a harsh blow for you!
Charlemagne should not have left you here.
He wronged us, and so we owe him naught.
Through you alone, I avenge our people.'

Oliver knew that he was bound for death.
Gripping Haltclere, his bloodied blade,
He struck Marganices on his gilded helm,
And its gems and flowers fell to the field.
He split his head, down to the very teeth,
Brandished his blade, and flung him dead.
Crying: 'All woes, be yours, now, pagan!
You'll not speak ill of Charlemagne now.
Nor shall you boast to your wife, or lady,
That you've done a denier's harm to me,
Nor brought misery on me, or any other.'
Then he cried aloud to Roland for aid.

Oliver, feeling himself not far from death,
Had little time now to avenge himself.
Midst the press he struck, proudly, fiercely,
Shattering lances, and rounded shields,
Slicing fists and feet, sides and shoulders.
Who saw those Saracens thus dismembered,
The corpses piled, there, one upon another,
Retained the memory of a faithful knight,
He forgot not the war-cry of Charlemagne:
'Montjoie!' he called out, high and clear,
Summoning Roland, his friend and peer.
'Comrade,' he cried, 'hasten to my side,
For, in bitter sorrow, we two must part.'

Verses 148-150: The death of Oliver

When Count Roland gazed on Oliver's face,
The colour draining, the flesh grown pale,

The crimson blood spurting from his body,
Down to the ground, and flowing in streams,
'Lord,' cried he, 'what can a man do here?
Fatal your valour proves, my companion.
Ne'er before did knight prevail against you.
Ah, fair France, now you are rendered waste,
Shorn of brave souls, shamed and confounded.
Great now is the harm our emperor sustains.'
And with these words, he swayed in the saddle.

Roland swayed there, a moment, on his steed,
Alike to Oliver, who was now bound for death,
So great his loss of blood, his eyes dimming.
He could see neither near nor far, so clearly
As to know the visage of any mortal man,
And so, when his companion knelt beside him,
He struck at Roland's helmet set with gold,
The blade sliding down o'er the nose-piece,
But harming not the head, nor Roland's face.
After that blow, Roland gazed at him keenly,
And asked of him, in sweet and gentle voice:
'Did you mean that blow, dear companion?
Roland is here, that e'er holds love for you;
No mistrust was there ever twixt we two!
Said Oliver: 'I see you not, yet hear you.
The Lord, keep you; my eyes grow dim!
I have struck you, and I ask your pardon!'
Roland replied: 'I have received no harm.
I forgive you, here, in the sight of God.'
With these words, each leant on the other,
And their love was seen in such parting.

Count Oliver thus felt the pangs of death;
His eyes were rolling, now, in their sockets,
Naught could he see; his hearing was lost.
Dismounting, he knelt there on the ground.
Declaring his sinfulness, firmly and aloud,
Clasping his hands towards the sky above,
Praying God to grant him sight of paradise,
And blessing Charlemagne, and fair France,
And above all men, Roland his companion.

His heart failed him, his helmed head bowed,
And so, upon the earth, full length he lay.
Dead was the Count, who breathed no more.
Roland, the brave, mourned, sighing deeply;
Ne'er, on earth, did ever a man grieve more!

The End of 'La Chanson de Roland: Part III'

Part IV: The Death of Roland



Death of Roland from the Grandes Chroniques de France, Paris, BNF, Fr. 2813, fol. 122v

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Verses 151-153: Roland sways in the saddle but recovers

Roland, on seeing that his friend had died,
Who, face down, had bitten the earth beneath,
Most sweetly, he began this sad lament:
'Dear companion, thus is your valour lost!
We have lived side by side so many years,
Nor aught ill has been, twixt you and me.
Now you are dead, now but grief I know!'
With these words the count swayed again,
Full faint in the saddle, as he sat Veillantif,
Kept upright by his stirrups wrought of gold,
Nor could he fall, whichever way he leaned.

When the Count was in his senses once more,
And recovered from the faintness he'd felt,
Great indeed was the slaughter he viewed.
Dead were the Franks, all of them were lost,
Save the archbishop, and Gualters de Hum

Who, descending from the mountain-side,
Had fought fiercely gainst the men of Spain.
His own were dead, slain by the Saracens,
And whether or no he wished, he now fled,
Calling to Roland to aid him in his plight:
‘Noble count, valiant soul, where are you?
For whenever I’m with you, I feel no fear.
Gualters is here, that conquered Maelgut;
Nephew was I to old white-haired Droün.
My courage you ever thought most high.
My lance is broken, and pierced my shield,
Shattered my hauberk, and shorn of mail,
For eight times has a spear-thrust struck me.
Now am I close to death, yet buy it dearly.’
Roland heard his cry and, swiftly responding,
Spurred his horse on, fiercely, towards him.

Grief-filled, Roland was driven to anger,
And galloped into the press striking fiercely.
Twenty, of the Saracen foe, he left for dead,
And Gualters six, Archbishop Turpin five.
Cried the pagans: ‘Bold wretches are these!
Take care, my lords, that they flee not, alive!
A wretch is he that fails to counter them,
A recreant the man that grants them safety.’
So recommenced the mighty hue and cry,
As from every side they rode to the attack.

Verses 154-155: Gualters is slain, Turpin badly wounded

Count Roland now played the noble knight,
Gualters de Hum proved a goodly warrior,
While Archbishop Turpin showed his skill;
None of them falling far behind his friends.
Among the press of pagan foes they struck,
A thousand Saracens fighting now on foot,
And upon horseback forty thousand men.
Daring not to approach too close, I deem,
Their lances and spears they hurled instead,
Arrows, and barbs, and darts, and javelins.
At the first flight, brave Gualters was slain,

Turpin of Reims' shield was pierced through,
His helmet cracked, and his head wounded,
His hauberk all torn, and shorn of its mail.
Four spear-wounds he bore upon his body,
While, beneath him, his war-horse fell dead.
Great grief it was when Turpin was unseated.

Then Turpin of Reims, feeling he must die
Of the four spear-wounds through his flesh,
Nonetheless, rose right swiftly to his feet,
And, seeking Roland, he sped towards him,
Uttering this cry: 'I am not conquered yet!
A brave man ne'er yields while life remains.'
He drew Almace, his blade of glowing steel,
And struck a good thousand blows and more,
Granting no quarter, as Charlemagne declared,
Who found him later, midst four hundred foes,
Some wounded, and some struck dead amain.
So, the tale, and so says one that was there,
The brave Saint Gilles, of God-given virtue,
That wrought the charter of Laon minster.
He knows little that has not heard that same.

Verses 156-157: Roland blows his horn once more

Count Roland had fought the fight most nobly,
But now his body was all drenched in sweat.
His flesh was hot as coals, his head pained him.
He'd strained to sound his war-horn so loudly.
Longing to know if Charlemagne would come,
He blew the ivory horn again, though feebly.
The emperor heard, and halted where he was:
'My lords' he said 'great trouble is upon us,
For Roland, my nephew, it seems, is fading.
I hear his war-horn yet the cry barely carries.
He that would be in time, ride swiftly now,
And have every trumpet blown behind you!'
Sixty thousand blared out at their command.
The mountains rang, and the valleys echoed.
The pagans heard and recognised the import,
And cried, as one: 'Charlemagne approaches!'

‘The emperor,’ they cried, ‘rides forth to battle;
Tis the sound of Frankish trumpets that we hear!
Meet the emperor and great losses we’ll sustain;
For while Roland lives, he will renew the war,
And the land of Spain we’ll lose, that’s ours.’
Four hundred then assembled, helms gleaming,
The best of those that fought amidst their ranks.
And made a bold and fierce attack on Roland,
Who’d much to do in seeking to withstand them.

Verses 158-161: Roland and Archbishop Turpin make their stand

Roland, when he saw the Saracens approach,
Seemed, visibly, to wax stronger and fiercer!
While he had breath, he’d ne’er yield his life.
He sat his mount, the steed named Veillantif,
And pricked him hard with his golden spurs.
Into their ranks he plunged to meet them there,
And by his side, yet, rode Archbishop Turpin.
The pagans cried to each other: ‘Friends, flee!
Those are the trumpets of the Franks we hear,
Charlemagne approaches, their powerful king!’

Count Roland had no love at all for cowards,
Nor the arrogant, nor those with evil hearts,
Nor any knight that was not brave and loyal.
He called aloud now to Archbishop Turpin:
‘Sir, I am mounted, while you fight on foot.
For love of you, here shall I make my stand.
Together, we shall receive the good and ill;
I’ll quit not your side for any mortal man.
We’ll render these Saracens all they give,
For Durendal will strike the harsher blow.’
Said Turpin: ‘Vile is he that does not so;
Charlemagne comes, and will avenge us.’

The pagans cried: ‘Ill, the day we were born;
For a fateful day it is that’s dawned for us!
Now we have lost our masters and our peers,
And Charlemagne comes, with his brave host.

We hear the trumpets of the Franks blaring,
Great the noise of their war-cry: "Montjoie!"
Count Roland is a knight of such fierce pride
By no one man will such as he be conquered.
Aim towards him, and slay him on the spot!
Fierce darts and arrows they let loose, indeed.
Lances, spears, and many a feathered shaft
Shattered, and penetrated, Roland's shield,
And tore the mail from the Count's hauberk.
Yet not one of their blows pierced his flesh,
Though Veillantif was wounded thirty times,
And the horse fell dead beneath his master.
The pagans fled, and left the Count alone;
Yet Roland stood upon his feet once more.

The pagans fled, fearful, and full of anger;
Back towards Spain they made their way,
Roland lacking the means to give chase,
Since Veillantif, his brave steed, lay dead.
He, like it or not, was forced to go afoot,
Yet still brought aid to Archbishop, Turpin.
He unlaced the gold helm from Turpin's head,
Removed the white hauberk from his body,
Cut its folds in strips, bound up his wounds,
Setting the cloth about his limbs and chest,
And then clasped him quietly to his heart;
And upon the green grass laid him, gently.
Most sweetly Roland then made this request:
'Ah, noble knight, grant me now your leave;
Our comrades, men whom we held so dear,
Are all dead, yet we cannot leave them lie;
I will go seek for them, and bear them here,
Set their bodies down in ranks before you.'
Said the Archbishop: 'Go then, and return.
Thanks be to God, the field's yours, and mine!'

Verses 162-164: The Saracens having fled, Roland searches for his friends

So, Roland turned, and trod the field alone,
Searching all the hillsides and ravines.
There he found Gerins, and Gerers

And his comrade, Otes, and Berengers,
And there he found Anseis and Sansun,
And then Gerart the old, of Rossillon;
One by one he bore away those barons,
Bringing them to the archbishop's side,
And laying them in ranks before his eyes.
The archbishop could not help but weep,
And lifted high his hand, in benediction;
Then he said: 'Ill, was your fate, my lords!
Now the Lord above, He has your souls,
Sets you among the flowers in paradise!
Now my own death-pains are upon me;
Nor shall I live to greet our Emperor.'

Roland turned, and searched the field alone,
And, in a while, found Oliver, his friend.
Clasping his body tight against his chest,
He returned once more to the archbishop,
And laid him on a shield next the others.
The archbishop absolved and blessed him,
Whereupon his grief and pity waxed anew.
Then said Roland: 'Fair comrade, Oliver,
You were the son of good Count Reinier,
Who held the marches nigh Val de Runers;
Ne'er has any land known a better knight
For shattering lances, breaking bucklers,
Shearing the mail from many a hauberk,
Conquering, and dismaying, the proud,
Leading men, and giving good counsel,
Overcoming, and confounding, the vile.'
As Roland contemplated his dead peers,
And Oliver, whom he had dearly loved,
He grew most tender, and he shed a tear.
The colour drained further from his face,
He could scarce stand, so great his grief,
And whether he would or no, he fainted.
Said the archbishop: 'Ill-fated, brave lord!'

Verses 165-167: The death of Archbishop Turpin

When the archbishop saw him in a faint,

Ne'er had he felt so great a weight of woe.
He stretched his hand out to the ivory horn,
For through Roncesvalles a river flowed,
And he would bear its water to the Count.
Step by step, he stumbled o'er the ground,
So weak was he, that he could go no further,
Lacking strength now from loss of blood;
Ere he'd crossed an acre of the battlefield,
His heart failed him, and he fell full length,
And there the pangs of death overcame him.

Count Roland recovered from his faintness,
And rose to his feet, great was his sorrow,
As he gazed at the hillsides and the vale;
And on the grass, beyond his companions,
He saw him lying there, that noble baron
The archbishop, who had fought in God's name.
He spoke his sins aloud, and gazed on high,
Raised his conjoined hands to the heavens,
And prayed to God to grant the man paradise.
Dead was Turpin, Charlemagne's warrior,
In mighty battles, and many a fine sermon,
Ever a champion against the pagan hosts.
'God grant him,' he prayed, 'His blessing now!'

Count Roland gazed upon the dead archbishop
Viewed his entrails spilling from his body,
And saw the brains leaking from his brow.
Folding the baron's arms across his chest,
He crossed the two hands, so white and fine,
And voiced his grief, as was the custom then:
'To celestial glory I hereby commend you,
Noble lord, and knight, so great in manner;
Never a man served Him more willingly,
Since the apostles; ne'er did a prophet so
Maintain the creed, and draw men to him.
Now may his soul know no suffering!
May the gates of Paradise be open wide!'

Verses 168-170: Roland withstands a last attack, and shatters his war-horn

Roland felt that death was drawing close,
As if his brains were seeping from his ears.
He prayed to God to summon up his friends,
And that the angel Gabriel be at his side.
He took the ivory horn, forever blameless,
And, grasping Durendal in the other hand,
Crossed a bare place facing towards Spain,
As wide as a cross-bow's quarrel might fly,
And, climbing the cliff, underneath a tree,
He saw four terraces of gleaming stone.
There he lay down upon a patch of turf,
Fainting again, and feeling death was near.

High were the mountains and tall the trees,
About those terraces of gleaming stone;
There lay Roland, faint, upon the grass.
A Saracen had watched him all this while,
Who, feigning death, lay among the dead,
His face and body all stained with blood.
He rose to his feet, and drew near Roland.
Strong and fierce, he was full of courage,
The mortal hate within fuelled by his pride.
He clutched Roland's body, then his sword.
'Charlemagne's nephew lies here!' he cried,
'To Arabia I shall bear this blade of his.'
Yet, as he unsheathed it, the Count awoke.

He felt the sword drawn from its sheath,
Opened his eyes, and addressed the man:
'I see that you are no warrior of ours!'
And, gripping the war-horn, yet his own,
Struck at his enemy's gold-studded helm,
Shattering the steel, the bones of the skull,
And driving the eyeballs from their sockets,
The pagan tumbling dead, before his feet.
'Wretch, you proved over-bold,' he cried,
'Seizing my sword, careless of the cost!
Had any man seen, a fool he'd name you.
Now I have shattered my war-horn, too,
The crystal and gold it bore all scattered.'

Verses 171-173: He tries to shatter his sword, Durendal

Then Count Roland's sight seemed to dim;
Exerting his remaining strength, he rose,
The remaining colour draining from his face,
Struck with his sword, a boulder before him,
And dealt ten blows, in his rage and sorrow;
The steel rang out, but did not bend or break.
The Count cried: 'Mother of God, aid me!
Ah, good Durendal, ill must be your fate!
No need have I now for you; my life is lost.
Many a battle we have gained in the field,
In many a broad land have we two fought
That white-bearded Charlemagne holds now!
No man has owned you that e'er fled another!
Long has a brave man held you in his grasp;
Ne'er shall sovereign France behold your like.'

Roland struck the gleaming stone again.
The steel rang out, but did not bend or break.
When he found it could not be shattered,
He began to complain to himself, aloud:
'Ah, Durendal, you shine so bright and fair,
Reflecting these fiery rays of the sun!
Charlemagne was in the Vale of Morian,
When God, in the heavens, bade an angel
Carry you to a count and captain there;
That great and noble king girt it upon me.
With you, I won him Brittany and Anjou,
Then, with you, won Poitou, and Maine.
With you, I won him Normandy the free,
Then, with you, Provence and Aquitaine,
Lombardy, and the whole of Romagna.
And then I won Bavaria, and Flanders,
And fair Burgundy, and Apulia entire.
Constantinople now pays him homage;
While Saxony does all as he commands.
With you, I won Scotland, Wales, Ireland,
England also, wherein he has a dwelling;
Such are the lands that I've won, with you,
For Charlemagne, whose beard is white!

Sorrow weighs upon me, now, my blade.
I'd rather die than leave you midst pagans.
Our Father on high, let not France be shamed!'

Roland struck the gleaming stone again,
Breaking off more of it than I can say.
The steel rang out, but did not bend or break.
Up to the skies it recoiled from the blow.
When he found it could not be shattered,
Quietly he complained, to himself again:
'Ah, Durendal, most fair, and most holy!
For many a relic's within your hilt inset.
Saint Peter's tooth, the blood of Saint Basil,
With a lock of hair of my lord Saint Denis,
And a piece of the robe Mother Mary wore.
Tis wrong that pagan hand should hold you,
For Christian men alone you should serve.
No man should grip you that is a coward!
Many the lands that I have won, with you,
For Charlemagne, whose beard is white,
And rendered my king both rich and proud.'

Verses 174-176: The death of Roland

Count Roland felt that death was upon him,
Descending now from his head to his chest.
Beneath a pine, he stumbled then in haste,
And lay there prone upon the grassy turf,
His sword and shattered horn beneath him.
He turned his head towards the pagan dead,
Doing so that Charlemagne might truly say,
And all that stood there of the Frankish host:
'Ah, noble count, victory was his in death.'
He confessed his sins, then, repeatedly,
And called on God, offering up his gauntlet.

Count Roland felt now that his life was done.
Gazing at Spain, he lay, on that high cliff,
And with his right hand he struck his breast:
'Mea Culpa, Lord; cleanse me of my sins,
Through your virtue, my sins great and small,

All I've committed, since the day I was born
Until this day, when this life is done with!
And he held aloft his gauntlet as he spoke,
Hoping an angel might descend from on high.

Count Roland lay there, beneath the pine,
Turning his gaze towards the land of Spain,
While memories of the past filled his mind,
Of the many lands that he had conquered,
Of fair France, and those of his noble line,
Of Charlemagne, his lord who'd raised him,
And, doing so, could not but weep and sigh.
But his own self, he had not yet forgotten.
He spoke his sins, and asked God's mercy:
'True Father, in whom no falsehood lies,
You that raised Lazarus from the dead,
And rescued Daniel from the lions' den,
Guard my soul now from every peril,
Born of the sins I have wrought in life!
He offered his right gauntlet to the air,
And Saint Gabriel took it from his hand.
Over his right arm his head he bowed,
Joined his hands, and so his life ended.
God sent to Earth His angel Cherubim,
With Saint Michael of Peril; to his side
Descended there, as well, Saint Gabriel.
They bore the Count's soul to paradise.

Verses 177-180: Charlemagne takes revenge on the pagan army

Roland lay dead; God had his soul in heaven.
The emperor to Roncesvalles now came.
There was not a place or path anywhere,
Not a patch of soil, not a foot of ground,
Upon which no dead Frank, or pagan lay.
Charlemagne cried: 'Nephew, where are you?
Where the archbishop and Count Oliver?
Where Gerins, and his friend brave Gerers?
And Otes, and the good Count Berengers,
And Yvoeries and Ivon, so dear to me?
What's become of the Gascon, Engeliers,

Sansun the duke, and Anseis the bold?
Where's old Gerart of Rossillon, where
The dozen peers that I left behind me?'
To what avail, for no man there replied.
'Lord!' cried the king, 'now am I dismayed
That I was not here, to command the fight!'
And he tore at his beard fiercely, in anger,
While all the noble knights about him wept.
Twenty thousand were shaken at the news;
The fierce Duke Neimes was moved to pity.

Not a knight or baron present but wept,
Feeling the deepest pity and grave sorrow.
For sons, brothers, nephews they grieved,
And for their friends, and their liege lords,
While many slumped to the ground below.
Whereupon Duke Neimes acted wisely,
And said to the emperor, speaking first:
'Before us, and not two leagues away,
See, a cloud of dust spurts from the road;
The pagans are there, and a mighty host,
Ride on, therefore! Avenge this slaughter!'
'Lord,' cried Charlemagne, 'they're far already!
Regain for me now my realm, and honour;
They've stolen from me fair France's flower.'
The king summoned Gebuin and Otun,
And Tedbalt of Reims, and Count Milun:
'Guard this field, these hills, this vale,
Let the dead remain, all just as they lie,
Let no lion, or other fierce creature, near,
Nor let any squire or groom, be present.
I forbid any man to approach this ground,
Till I, if God wills it, return once more.'
They replied nobly, showing their love:
'True emperor, dear Sire, so will we do.'
And a thousand knights he left with them.

The emperor had all the trumpets sounded.
And galloped forth with his mighty host.
The Franks, as one, started on their chase,
Pursuing those of Spain as they departed.

When the king saw that evening was nigh,
He dismounted in a grass-green meadow,
And, kneeling there, prayed to God above,
That the sun might yet linger in its course,
And night be delayed, the day prolonged.
And then an angel seemed to speak to him,
And without pausing, issued this command:
'Ride on, King Charlemagne, you need no light.
The flower of France, as God knows, is dead;
Take your revenge upon those sinful folk.'
At those bold words, the emperor remounted.

God granted Charlemagne a wondrous thing:
For the sun appeared to linger in one place.
The pagans fled, the Franks pursued swiftly,
Through the Vale of Shadow, that lay there,
And chased the pagans towards Zaragoza,
Dealing heavy blows against their rearguard,
And barring all the side-roads and the paths.
The river Ebro lay before the pagans' eyes,
Deep it was, its flow was wondrous strong;
No barge they found nor any kind of boat.
Some called upon their god, on Termagant,
And plunged in, but found no safety there,
Many, dragged down by their heavy armour,
Drowning swiftly in the river's onward flow,
While the rest were thrust by it downstream.
A deal of water the most fortunate yet drank,
Till all but a few found there a watery grave.
The Franks cried: 'Ill, Roland, was your fate!'

Verses 181-184: Charlemagne pitches camp by the Ebro

Once Charlemagne had viewed the pagan dead,
Some slain, while the greater part had drowned,
After his knights had gathered up the spoils,
That noble king descended from his charger,
Knelt on the ground, and gave thanks to God.
When he rose to his feet, the sun was setting.
Said the emperor: 'Tis time to pitch our tents;
Tis too late, I deem, to regain Roncesvalles,

For our horses are worn out, and foundered:
Unsaddle them, now, remove their bridles,
And let them graze the grass in these fields.
The Franks replied: 'Sire, you counsel well.'

The emperor pitched his encampment there;
The Franks dismounted in the wilderness,
Took the saddles from their horses' backs,
Unstrapped the gold bridles from their heads,
And let them roam among the grassy places.
No better service could they render them.
The weariest men then slept on the ground,
And none kept watch as sentinels that night.

Charlemagne had lain down in the meadow,
His mighty lance planted beside his head;
On such a night he would not go unarmed.
He wore his white embroidered hauberk,
His helmet, laced, studded o'er with gold,
Girt with Joyeuse, that was his peerless sword,
That changed its colour thirty times a day.
All know of, and have spoken of, that lance
By which Our Lord was wounded on the Cross:
Charlemagne, by God's grace, held its blade,
Which he had ordered set in his sword's hilt.
The sword itself was then named Joyeuse,
As witness to the honour, and its sanctity.
The barons of France are pledged to recall it,
Thus 'Montjoie,' is their war-cry in battle,
Such that no army e'er can overcome them.

Clear was the night, brightly shone the moon.
Charlemagne lay down, mourning Roland,
While thoughts of Oliver weighed upon him,
And of all the Twelve peers, all the Franks,
Those blood-stained dead, left at Roncesvalles.
He could not help but weep, and be wrathful,
Praying that their souls be in God's keeping.
The king was weary, for his grief was great.
Thus he fell asleep, too mournful to do more.
About the meadows slept the Frankish army;

And not one mount of theirs was on its feet,
The steeds that grazed, they did so lying down.
He's a wise man that understands their plight.

Verses 185-186: Charlemagne's two dreams

Charlemagne slept, like one worn out by toil.
The Lord sent Saint Gabriel down to him,
Commanding him to guard the emperor,
And the angel stood all night at his head.
In a vision the angel addressed him, speaking
Of a battle that would be fought against him,
And in signifying so, showed all troubled.
For Charlemagne felt he gazed on high,
And beheld fierce gales, and thunderstorms,
Hail, tornadoes, and horrendous tempests.
Flashes of fire, and flame appeared to him,
Swift lightning-bolts that struck his people,
Scorching their lances of ash and apple-wood,
And their shields, even to their gilded bosses,
Splitting the shafts of the sharpened spears,
Crushing their hauberks, and helms of steel.
He saw his knights all mightily distressed,
Bears and leopards ready to consume them;
Serpents and wyverns, dragons and demons,
And of gryphons more than thirty thousand,
And not one but set upon some Frank of his.
The Franks called out: 'Aid us, Charlemagne!'
Which stirred the king to grief and pity.
He wished to do so, but was impeded,
For, from a wood, came a mighty lion,
Fierce, proud, and vicious in appearance,
That sought him out, and leapt upon him.
Each gripped the other tight in his arms,
Yet he knew not which fell or conquered,
For the emperor dreamt no more, but slept.

Then, later on, there came a second vision.
He was in France, at Aix, upon a terrace,
And he held a bear by two long chains;
Out of the Forest of Ardennes came thirty,

And each bear spoke, as a man can speak:
Saying: 'Sire, render this one to us again!
It is not right he should remain with you,
For he is of our kin, and we must aid him.'
Then a bear-hound shot from his palace,
And attacked the mightiest of the bears,
On the green grass, far beyond the others.
The king marvelled at the wondrous fight,
Yet he knew not which fell, or conquered,
For God's angel chose to reveal no more.
Charlemagne slept on, till the dawn of day.

Verses 187-188: Marsilius retreats to Zaragoza

King Marsilius was in flight to Zaragoza.
Neath an olive he dismounted, in the shade;
He laid aside his sword, helm and hauberk,
And lay down, on the green grass, heavily.
His right hand had been wholly shorn away;
He'd shed such blood, he fainted with pain.
Before him his wife, Queen Bramimunde,
Wept and wailed, in the depths of sorrow.
About him stood full twenty thousand men,
Cursing Charlemagne, and France the fair.
Apollo's statue they surrounded, en masse,
Threatening, shouting, loud in disapproval:
'Why bring such shame upon us, vile god?
Here is our king; why must you confound him?
To those who serve you well, you deal evil!'
They downed the statue's sceptre and crown,
And hung it by the arms from a high column,
Then shattered the idol beneath their feet,
Striking it hard with heavy sticks and cudgels.
They robbed Termagant of his bright ruby,
Throwing an effigy of Mahomet in a ditch,
For the dogs and swine to devour and foul.

When Marsilius recovered from his faintness,
He had himself borne to a vaulted chamber,
Whose walls were all painted and inscribed.
Bramimunde, his queen, wept for him there,

Tearing her hair, crying her wretchedness.
These words she spoke out, loud and clear:
'Ah! Fair Zaragoza, robbed thus you'll be
Of the noble king that had you in keeping!
Our god has allowed great mischief here,
Who in battle, in the morn, has failed us.
Our generals will reveal mere cowardice,
If they fight not against that hardy people,
So fierce that they're careless of their lives.
Their emperor, he of the whitened beard,
Commands brave men, and proves stubborn.
Such that he'll never flee the battlefield.
A great grief it is that none has slain him!'

Verses 189-193: The advent of Baligant and his army

Now, Charlemagne, displaying his power,
Had campaigned for seven years in Spain,
And taken many a castle and many a city,
Much to King Marsilius' sore displeasure;
At the start, the king had sent a missive,
To Babylon, to summon Lord Baligant;
He was an admiral, full old in antiquity,
Who'd outlived both Homer and Virgil.
He bade him bring succour to Zaragoza.
Should he not, the king would quit his creed,
Abjuring the idols whom he'd worshipped,
Receive the creed then of the Christian foe,
And be reconciled to their noble emperor.
Baligant, being far off, was much delayed.
But gathered his army from forty realms,
And then made ready a vast fleet of vessels,
Barges, skiffs, great warships, and galleys.
In a bay, upon the coast, near Alexandria,
He there assembled his whole fighting fleet.
This was on the first summer's-day in May,
And, with his whole force, he set out to sea.

Great was the number of those combatants;
Swiftly they sailed, skilled their navigation.
They set, in the yards, and at their mast-heads,

Many a flame, many a lamp dispersing light,
And so at night such was the light they shed
The sea was well-nigh as visible as by day,
And so, as they attained the land of Spain,
The countryside all about was brightly lit.
The news of their coming reached Marsilius.

That pagan host delayed for scarce a moment,
For they left the saltwater, then, for the fresh;
And, leaving Marbrose, and Marbrise behind,
That whole army, sailed upriver, on the Ebro.
Many a flame they had there, many a lamp,
That all night long gave them ample light;
And on the morrow they came to Zaragoza.

Clear was the sky, and the sun was bright,
When the admiral disembarked his barge,
And Espaneliz issued forth beside him,
While seventeen kings followed on behind,
With I know not how many dukes and counts.
Beneath a laurel that grew amidst a field,
On the grass they spread a white silk mat,
And set upon it an ivory folding-chair.
Baligant, the pagan, seated himself there,
And all the rest stood ranged about him.
That lord of them all was the first to speak:
'Hearken to me, you knights, brave and free!
Charlemagne, the emperor of the Franks,
Shall not eat, save it be at my command.
Throughout Spain a mighty war he's waged,
But I will go seek him now, in fair France,
Nor will cease to do so while I yet live;
I'd rather die, and lose my claim on life.'
With his right gauntlet his knee he struck.

What he had said he now was bound to do;
Nor would he fail, for all the gold on earth,
To seek out Aix, and Charlemagne's court:
His men cheered, such was their counsel too.
Then he summoned two of his bold knights,
One was Clarifan, and Clariën the other:

'You two are the sons of king Maltraïen,
 Who once bore my messages, and gladly.
 I command you to journey to Zaragoza.
 There announce, to Marsilius, in my name,
 That I am here to help against the Franks.
 And if I find them, great will be the battle.
 Give him this glove, gold-embroidered,
 And ask him to wear it on his right hand.
 Take this wand of office, of purest gold,
 And bid the king come, to pay me homage.
 To France I go, to war with Charlemagne.
 Save he kneels at my feet, and cries mercy,
 And rencounces the Christian creed forever,
 I'll snatch the crown from his aged head.'
 The pagans cried as one: 'Sire, well said!'

Verses 194-198: Baligant sends his envoys to Marsilius

Cried Baligant: 'Now, gallop forth, my barons!
 One grip the wand, the other grasp the glove!'
 They answered: 'Dear Sire, that we shall do!'
 They rode out, and quickly reached Zaragoza.
 Passed its ten gates, crossing its four bridges,
 And entered the streets, amidst its citizens.
 As they approached the citadel, on high,
 They heard a great noise from the palace,
 Which was surrounded by many pagans,
 Weeping and groaning, filled full of woe,
 Cursing their gods, Mahound, Termagant,
 And Apollo, who'd failed to bring them aid.
 Said each to each: 'What can we do now;
 Now vile confusion has overcome us so?
 We've lost the strength of King Marsilius,
 Whose hand bold Roland severed yesterday;
 We've lost his son too, Jursaleu the Blond,
 And all of Spain lies widowed and bereft.'
 The envoys both dismounted on the terrace.

They left their mounts beneath an olive tree,
 Two Saracen lads seizing them by the reins.
 The envoys wrapped their cloaks around them

And climbed the great stairway to the palace.
They entered, and found the vaulted chamber
Where Marsilius was, and him they greeted.
‘May Mahomet, who has us in his keeping,
And Termagant, and our true lord Apollo,
Preserve the king, and e’er defend the queen!’
Says Bramimunde: ‘Mere foolishness I hear!
Those gods of ours are full of cowardice.
In Roncesvalles they wrought an evil deed;
They left our warriors dead upon the field,
And failed my lord too, in his hour of need,
For his right hand was severed in the battle,
By that rich Frankish knight, Count Roland.
Charlemagne will rule the whole of Spain.
What will become of me, a woeful wretch?
Alas! That I have none that will slay me!’
Said Clarien: ‘Come, speak not so, my lady!
We are pagan envoys of Lord Baligant;
Who brings aid and protection to your lord.
He sends a wand of office, and his glove.
We have four thousand boats on the Ebro,
Barges, skiffs; with four thousand galleys,
Countless vessels more, of various kinds.
Our admiral is both powerful and wealthy.
And goes to seek Charlemagne in France.
To prove him a coward there, or slay him!’
Said the queen: ‘An ill-considered task!
The Franks are far closer than you think;
Charlemagne has warred here seven years,
The emperor’s a courageous combatant,
One who’d rather die than quit the field;
And all other kings he considers children.
King Charlemagne’s afraid of none alive.’
‘Cease such talk! cried Marsilius the king:
To the envoys he said: ‘Pray, speak to me.
You see that I am destined soon to die,
And no son now or daughter will inherit.
One son I had, that yesterday was slain,
Ask your lord to come, and see me here.
The admiral has the right to rule in Spain;
I’ll yield my claim to the realm, if he will,

And he shall defend her from the Franks!
I've advice to give regarding Charlemagne,
For within a month he may be defeated.
Bear to your lord the keys of Zaragoza,
And let him go no further, if he trusts me.'
They answered: 'Sire, so he does, indeed.'
Marsilius said: 'The emperor Charlemagne
Has slain my men and laid waste the land,
Shattered their walls, and sacked my cities;
And he camps this night beside the Ebro;
I account him scarcely seven leagues away.
Bid the admiral lead his host towards me,
And tell him he may seek his battle here.'
Then, he gave them the keys of Zaragoza.
The messengers bowed low before the king,
Took their leave so, and went on their way.

Verses 199-203: They return, and Baligant rides to Zaragoza

The messengers, mounting their swift steeds,
Issued forth, without delay, from the city,
And, concerned, went to seek the admiral,
To whom they bore the keys of Zaragoza.
Said Lord Baligant: 'What have you learnt?
Where is Marsilius whom I summoned?
Clarien replied: 'He's destined, Sire, for death.
The emperor left the pass but yesterday,
Wishing to be on the road to fair France,
Setting a rearguard, to maintain his safety.
Count Roland, his nephew, there remained,
With Oliver, the rest of the Twelve Peers,
And twenty thousand Franks in full armour.
Marsilius fought against them most bravely;
He and Roland jousting there upon the field.
The Count's blade, Durendal, dealt a blow
That severed the right hand from his body.
Marsilius' son, so dear to him, was slain,
And full many of the barons whom he led.
With no strength to fight longer, he fled,
And the emperor chased him to his city.
The king begs you to bring him succour.
And yields to you all the realm of Spain.'

Baligant began to think on this, deeply,
Bowed down by a mighty weight of woe.

‘My lord Admiral,’ Clarien then continued,
‘At Roncesvalles indeed was that day’s battle.
There the Count lies dead, with him Oliver,
Dead the Twelve Peers, dear to Charlemagne;
Of those Franks twenty thousand perished.
King Marsilius has lost his right hand there,
The emperor has chased him from the field.
Throughout this land scarce a warrior is left,
Nigh all were slain, or drowned in the Ebro.
Charlemagne has camped beside the river,
Into this land so far has he now advanced;
Yet, if you will it, you can bring him woe!’
Baligant regarded him, and waxed proud,
He felt joyful, at ease, filled with courage;
And leapt up from the stool on which he sat,
Calling out: ‘Barons, linger here no more;
Leave the vessels, mount, and gallop forth!
If old Charlemagne neglects to flee in time,
Then at least Marsilius shall be avenged;
An emperor’s head shall pay for that hand!’
The pagans from Araby soon disembarked,
And, mounted their horses, and their mules,
Ready to gallop forth, without more ado.
The admiral who ruled that mighty host,
Summoned Gemalfin, one of his captains:
‘I appoint you commander of this army.’
Baligant then mounted his sorrel steed,
And, with four dukes following on behind,
Rode forth until he came to Zaragoza.
He dismounted on the marble pavement,
With four counts at his stirrup assisting,
And ascended the stairway to the palace.
Bramimunde hastened forth to meet him
Complaining: ‘Sorrow is now my fate,
In losing my lord, Sire, so shamefully.’
She fell at his feet; Baligant raised her.
Sadly, they entered the king’s chamber.
When Marsilius saw Baligant before him,

He called to him two Saracens of Spain:
'Raise me by the arms, I would sit upright.'
One of his gloves he took in his left hand,
And said to Baligant: 'Your Royal Admiral,
I yield to you all this wide realm of mine,
Zaragoza, and all honours that appertain,
For I am doomed to die, as were my people.'
Baligant answered him: 'I grieve the more,
That we may not speak together at length;
Nonetheless, I'll take the glove from you,
Charlemagne expects no attack from us,'
He turned away in tears, such grief he had.
He traversed the palace steps once more,
Mounted his horse, and sped to the army,
Galloping hard till he found the vanguard;
From rank to rank he went then, shouting:
'Come, pagans, for the Franks flee already!'
In the morn, once the dawn had broken,
Charlemagne awakened from his sleep.
Saint Gabriel, who watched there o'er the king,
Raised his hand, and set his mark upon him.
The king rose, but cast aside his weapons,
And the rest of the host, did so, likewise.
Then they mounted, and galloped swiftly,
Thus, by wide roads and by lengthy trails,
Returning to view the wondrous slaughter,
On the battlefield, there, at Roncesvalles.

The End of 'La Chanson de Roland: Part IV'

Part V: Battle is Renewed



Death of Ganelon from the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, BNF, Fr. 2813, fol. 124r
Picryl

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Verses 204-206: Charlemagne returns to Roncesvalles

Charlemagne came again to Roncesvalles,
And wept for the dead that he viewed there.
He said to the Franks: 'My lords, hold back,
For I myself should now set forth, alone,
To find my nephew, whom I'd see again.
At Aix, it was, upon the feast of Noel,
When my brave knights all were boasting,
Of mighty battles, ones fought most fiercely,
That I heard our Count Roland say a thing:
That, ere he died in some foreign country,
To his enemies' land he'd turn his head,
And make thus, bravely, a victorious end.'
Then Charlemagne advanced before them,
Mounting the slope, a stone's throw or more.

As the emperor went to seek for his nephew
He found the flowers, the grass, of the field
Turned to crimson, with our barons' blood.
Pity he felt, and pity moved the king to tears.
He approached the slope between two trees
Upon three terraces saw the marks of blows
And found his nephew's body on the grass;

Small wonder that Charlemagne waxed angry.
He dismounted there, for his heart was full
And clasped his nephew's body in his arms;
And fainted o'er him, such was his anguish.

When the emperor recovered from his swoon
Neimes the duke, and the Count Aceline
Gefrei of Anjou, and his brother Henri
Raised him, and bore him beneath a pine.
Gazing towards his nephew on the ground
The king began to lament most sweetly:
'Roland, my friend, God have mercy on you!
Ne'er did any man behold so fair a knight
For jousting and defence upon the field.
Now I fear the decline of all my honour!'
Charlemagne could scarcely stand upright.

Verses 207-210: His lament for Roland

When Charlemagne recovered from his swoon.
Three of his barons raised the king, gently.
He looked at his nephew lying on the ground;
All colour had drained from the king's face
His gaze was shadowed, his eyes troubled.
Charlemagne's lament was filled with love:
'Roland, may God set you midst the flowers
In Paradise, there, among the glorious!
Ill-fated was your coming here to Spain!
Ne'er a day in which I'll not mourn you.
My power, my strength, has diminished!
None have I now to maintain my honour
No friend such as you, neath the heavens.
Kin have I, but none of them so stalwart.'
And, with both hands, he tore at his hair.
A hundred thousand Franks grieved so
That not a one could hold back his tears.

'Roland, my friend, I shall away to France.
And when I am at Laon, in my chamber,
Many a knight will come from other realms,
And ask: "Where is your captain, the Count?"'

I shall answer that he lies dead in Spain.
In deepest sorrow I shall reign henceforth.
Ne'er a day where I weep not and lament.

Roland, my friend, so young, so fair, so brave
When I am there, at Aix, in my chapel
Many will arrive there seeking tidings;
I'll say to them, in my wondrous sorrow:
'My nephew's dead, he who conquered all!
The Saxons will now rise up against me
Hungarians, Bulgars, the hostile peoples
Rumanians, Poles, those in Pannonia
And in Africa, and those in Califerne;
Then my pain and suffering will deepen.
For who will lead my forces with such skill
Now he is slain, that guided them always?
Ah! France the fair, now are you widowed!
My grief is such, that I would live no more!'
He then began to tear at his white beard
And, with both hands, the hair on his head.
A hundred thousand Franks slumped low.

'Roland, my friend, God show you mercy!
May your soul now dwell in Paradise.
He that slew you, has slain France also.
My grief for those who have died for me
Is such, I say, that I would live no more!
May God, the Son of Mary, grant me this:
Ere I am come to the grand pass of Size
Let my soul depart from this, my body!
Set my soul among their glorious souls
And let my corpse be set down by theirs.'
His eyes filled with tears; he tore his beard.
Duke Neimes said: 'Indeed, his woe is great.'

Verses 211-213: The corpses of the dead are recovered

'My emperor,' Gefrei d'Anjou exclaimed
'Let not your sorrow overcome you so.
Let us search the battlefield for our dead
Those the men of Spain slew in the fight

And bear them to where we'll bury them.'
Said the King: 'Sound your war-horn, then!'

Gefrei d'Anjou then did as was requested
The men dismounted, at the king's command.
The bodies of their friends, dead in battle
They bore to where they would bury them.
The bishops that were there, many an abbot
Canons, vicars, monks with shaven crowns
Gave absolution, made the sign of the cross,
And swung their heavy censers all around
Burning incense and myrrh, to fill the air
Then they interred them, with great honour.
And left them there; what more did men do?

The king had Roland laid to one side
With Oliver too, and Archbishop Turpin.
He had their corpses opened before him
Their hearts bound up in silken cloth
And placed in coffers of white marble.
Next they took up the warriors' bodies
And washed them clean, in spiced wine,
Then wrapped the three in soft deer-hide.
The King summoned Tedbalt and Gebuin
With the marquis Otes, and Count Milun:
'Set them in three carts, and guard them well.'
They covered them in fabrics from Galata.

Verses 214-226: The Franks prepare to renew the campaign

Charlemagne was all ready to ride forth
When the pagan vanguard suddenly appeared.
Two heralds soon issued from their ranks
In the admiral's name, challenging him to fight.
'Proud king, here's not the time for departure!
Admiral Baligant advances soon upon you
Great the host he has led here from Arabia;
Now, let us view the courage that you claim.'
King Charlemagne grasped at his white beard
Recalling all his sorrow, and the slaughter
And fiercely he looked towards his people

Calling out, in a voice both loud and clear:
'Lords of the Franks, to horse, to battle, now!'

The emperor was the first to arm himself.
He donned his fine hauberk in a moment
Laced his helm, seized his sword, Joyeuse
Whose brightness matched that of the sun
Hung a shield, from Biterne, round his neck
Grasped his lance, holding the shaft on high
Mounted his fine steed, named Tencendur
Whom he'd won at the ford below Marsune
Where he sent to death Malpalin of Nerbone
And loosed the reins, spurring on his mount
A hundred thousand sped forth behind him
Calling on God, and the Apostle of Rome.

O'er all the field the Franks had dismounted
A hundred thousand men had armed as one
Their garments and armour most befitting.
Their horses were swift, their weapons fine;
Mounted, they were ready, should knowledge
Come to them of the foe, to render battle.
Their pennants fluttered above their helms.
When Charles saw that pleasing display
He summoned to him Jozeran of Provence
Duke Neimes, and Antelme of Maience:
'A man may place his trust in such as these
While he is but a fool that lacks such faith.
Unless the Arabians come here to repent
They'll pay dearly for Count Roland's life!'
Duke Neimes replied: 'May God so consent!'

Charlemagne called Rabels and Guinemán.
Said the King: 'My lords, I command you
To embrace the roles of Oliver and Roland.
One take the sword, the other the war-horn.
Ride on, before all, and head the vanguard
Together with some fifteen thousand Franks
Young fledgling knights, the most valiant.
And as many more shall follow on behind
Whom Antelme shall lead, with Gibuins.'

Duke Neimes, and Count Jozeran departed
To assemble their troops in proper ranks.
Find the foe and great would be the fight.

The first columns were composed of Franks.
After these two, they assembled a third
Wherein were ranked the Bavarian knights;
Some twenty thousand strong that force.
Where they fought, ne'er a battle was lost.
Charlemagne held no vassals of his dearer
Save those of France, who'd conquered realms.
The Danish chief, Oger, the warrior-count
Lead those men; full of pride, their bearing.

Three fine columns, now, had Charlemagne
And Duke Neimes, he established a fourth
Composed of noble and courageous barons.
Germans were they, come out of Germany
Twenty thousand, as other tales have said
Well-equipped, with fine steeds and weapons;
Men that had rather fall than quit a fight.
They were led by Herman, Duke of Trace
Who'd have died ere he be thought a coward.

After that, Duke Neimes and Count Jozeran
Selected a fifth column; all were Normans
Twenty thousand, or so say all the Franks
With splendid weapons, and swift chargers;
Men that would rather die than quit a fight
None neath the sky as stubborn in the field.
Richard, called the Old, lead them to battle
Who struck hard with his powerful lance.

The sixth column was composed of Bretons
Thirty thousand knights were they in sum;
They rode in the manner of great barons
Their lances raised, with pennants fluttering.
The lord that led them forth was Oedun
And he appointed, then, Count Nevelun
Tedbald of Reims, and Oton, the marquis:
'Lead forth my men, for such is in my gift.'

The emperor had six columns now at hand.
Duke Neimes then assembled the seventh
Of Poitevins, and barons from Auvergne.
Forty thousand knights were chosen there;
Their steeds were fine, their weapons good.
In a vale, beneath a cliff, they were ranked.
Charlemagne raised his hand to bless them.
They were led by Jozeran and Godselves.

Duke Neimes then swiftly formed an eighth,
Made up of Flemings, and Frisian barons
The column forty thousand strong or more
And not one of them had e'er lost a battle.
The King said: 'These will serve me well.'
Between Rembalt and Hamon de Galice
Lay the leadership, two lords of chivalry.

Duke Neimes and Count Jozeran then chose
A ninth column, formed of valiant fighters,
Lotharingians, and men from Burgundy,
Full fifty thousand knights, by all accounts,
All clad in hauberks, their helmets laced;
Strong were their spears, the shafts cut short.
Should the Arabians choose to come forth,
And meet with them, they'd cut them down.
Tierris led them, the bold Duke of Argonne.

The tenth column were all barons of France
A hundred thousand of our bravest captains;
Strong of limb, their faces filled with pride.
Pale were those heads and pale those beards.
They were dressed in doublets and hauberks
At their sides Frankish and Spanish swords
Clasping noble shields, with varied emblems.
Once mounted, the troops demanded battle
'Montjoie' the cry; with them rode Charlemagne.
Gefreid d'Anjou bore forth the Oriflamme;
Saint Peter's it was, and bore a Roman name
Which was altered on that day of 'Montjoie'.

The emperor dismounted from his horse
Knelt, and bowed his head towards the turf
Turning his gaze towards the rising sun
And called upon God in heartfelt speech:
‘True Father above, defend me on this day
You who rescued Jonah, for such is true
Out of the whale that had swallowed him
You that once spared the king of Nineveh
Saved Daniel from most dreadful torment
When he was prisoned in the lions’ den,
And those three lads from the fiery furnace
May your gracious love be present here;
May it please you, in your mercy, to consent
To my avenging, here, my nephew Roland.’
Once the king had prayed, he rose to his feet
Making the sign of the cross before his face.
He mounted his swift charger, once again
As Jozeran and Duke Neimes held the stirrup
Grasping his shield, gripping his sharp lance.
Firm was his body, and noble, and well-set
Clear was his face, and fine his countenance
As he cantered forth in vigorous manner.
Before, behind him, the trumpets sounded
Above them all, rang out the ivory horn.
There, the Franks wept in pity for Roland.

Verses 227-229: Baligant, in turn, prepares to fight

The emperor rode forth in noble manner
His beard flowing down o’er his hauberk.
For love of him, the rest came on behind
A hundred thousand Franks in fair array.
They went, by the cliffs, the peaks on high
Through deep valleys, and narrow ways
Issuing from the pass, and the wasteland
Into the Spanish Marches spread below
Halting then in the midst of a wide plain.
Meanwhile his guards came to Baligant.
One Sulians had brought him fresh news:
‘We’ve seen the proud king Charlemagne;
His men are fierce, intending not to fail.

Arm yourself, for battle you shall have!’
Said Baligant: ‘Many brave men are mine.
Sound the war-horns, let my pagans hear!’

Throughout the host the drums were sounded
And the bugles and trumpets, loud and clear.
The pagans dismounted, to arm themselves.
The admiral would stay but short time there
Donned his doublet, with embroidered hem
Laced his helmet, studded o’er with gold
And girded his sword then, to his left side.
Out of sheer pride, he had named the blade
As Charlemagne had done, so he had heard
And, therefore, called his own *Précieuse*.
It was his war-cry, when he went to fight
And all his men called out the name again.
His broad shield was hung about his neck
Whose boss was gold and set midst crystal
Its strap a twisted rope of silken strands.
He gripped his lance he’d named *Maltet*
With a shaft that was thick as a cudgel’s
Its steel enough to bow a strong mule’s back.
On his charger, Baligant had mounted
Marcules the Outlander held his stirrup.
The mighty admiral was long in the leg
Slender his thighs, his ribs were broad
Wide was his chest, and nobly-formed
His shoulders broad, and clear his gaze;
His look was proud, his hair ringleted
Beard blanched like hawthorn in summer.
His courage had many a time been proved.
Lord, what a knight, were he a Christian!
He spurred his steed, the blood spurted;
He galloped on, and o’er a ditch he leapt
Full fifty feet broad, if it were measured.
The pagans cried: ‘We’ll hold the Marches!
There’s ne’er a Frank can joust with him
Without his life be lost, despite his will.
Charlemagne’s a fool not to quit the field.’

The admiral looked fine as any baron

Beard white as a hawthorn in summer.
Wise he was in the laws of his creed
While in battle he was fierce and proud.
His son Malpramis was most chivalrous
Big and strong, traits of his noble line.
Said he to his sire: 'Let us gallop forth!
Wondrous twill be to see this Charlemagne.'
Said Baligant: 'Yes, he is famed indeed;
Of the honour he's won, many a tale tells.
Yet he's without Roland his nephew now
And so will lack the strength to counter us.'

Verses 230-231: Malpramis, Baligant's son, seeks to strike the first blow

'For, Malpramis, fair son,' said Baligant
'Roland the valiant, died but yesterday
And Oliver, that brave and skilful knight.
The Twelve Peers, dear to Charlemagne
Lie dead midst twenty thousand Franks.
I'd not unglove my hand for those he has
Yet the emperor, has returned in strength
So Sulians my man but now informed me;
Ten echelons comprise his mighty army.
The proud man, who sounds that war-horn
With a clear call, rallies their companies.
Those of the vanguard gallop in advance
And with them are fifteen thousand Franks
Young knights, the king calls his "children"
And many another follows on behind
Men who will fight with every show of pride.'
Said Malpramis: 'Allow me the first blow!'

'My fair son, Malpramis,' said Baligant
'I grant the boon that you request of me.
Strike the Franks, and strike them hard.
Take the Persian king, Torleu, with you
And Dapamort, the Lutician monarch.
If you can humble the Frankish pride
I'll grant you a slice of my kingdom
From Cheriant as far as Val Marquis.'
'I thank you, Sire!' Malpramis replied.

He rode on, in acceptance of that gift
Of the lands once held by king Flurit
Yet, he ne'er had the chance to see them
Was ne'er invested, nor held that realm.

Verses 232-236: Baligant arrays his troops for battle

The admiral rode forth amidst his host
His son, large of frame, followed after.
The two kings Torleu and Dapamort
Swiftly assembled some thirty columns
Comprising a wondrous knightly host;
For the least echelon held fifty thousand.
The first comprised men from Butentrot
The next large-headed men of Micenes
Along their backs, centred on the spine
They bristled with hair like wild boars.
The third was raised from Nubles and Blos;
The fourth from Bruns and from Esclavoz;
The fifth held men from Sorbres and Sorz;
The sixth troops from Ermines and Mors;
The seventh held warriors from Jericho;
The eighth from Niger; the ninth from Gros;
And the tenth from Balide the mighty
Whose tribes were devoid of all goodwill.
The admiral swore, as was his custom:
'By the body of Mahomet, and his virtue
Charlemagne of France acts foolishly;
Battle he'll have, unless he now departs;
No more shall he wear his crown of gold.'

Ten further echelons Baligant arrayed.
Of the ugly tribes of Canelius, the first
Who had crossed the land from Val-Fuit;
The next was of Turks, the third Persians;
The fourth was of those from Pinceneis
The fifth raised from Solteras and Avers;
The sixth from Ormaleus and Eugiez;
The seventh were of the tribe of Samuel;
The eighth from Bruise; the ninth from Clavers;
And the tenth from Occiant, the desert waste.

They were a tribe, that served no god at all
Such villains as ne'er were known elsewhere
Hard was their hide, as though made of iron
Such that they needed nor helm nor hauberk;
Slaughterous monsters were they in battle.

Ten more echelons the admiral reviewed.
The first was of giants from Malprese;
The next of Huns, the third Hungarians;
The fourth of men from distant Baldise.
The fifth of warriors from Val-Penuse;
The sixth of tribesmen from Maruse;
The seventh from Leus and Astrimónies;
The eighth Argoilles; the ninth Clarbone;
The tenth of bearded folk from Val-Frunde
Another tribe, that ne'er new love divine.
The tale of the Franks tells of thirty columns.
Great the host, loud the war-horns brayed.
The pagans rode forth like men of valour.

That admiral was rich in his wealth of men
He had his dragon emblem borne before him
The banners of Termagant and Mahound
And the image of Apollo the villainous.
Ten men of Canelius rode at his side
And they called aloud his proclamation:
'Let those who'd win our gods' protection.
Serve and worship them with devotion.'
The pagans bowed their heads full low
Doffing the helmets from their heads.
The Franks cried: 'Villains, now you die!
This day shall bring you all to confusion!
God grant his aid to King Charlemagne
And the battle we shall gain in his name!'

Great the war-knowledge of the admiral.
He summoned his son and the two kings:
'My lord barons, gallop on in advance
Form the vanguard to all the columns;
But of the best of them I'll keep three:
The ranks of Turks; those of Ormaleus;

And the third of the Giants of Malprese.
Those of Occiant will ride beside me
Till we meet the Franks and Charlemagne.
If the emperor will seek to joust with me
He must lose the head from his shoulders;
It must be so; he's earned no other fate.'

Verses 237-239: The two armies engage

Vast were the armies, and the columns fair
Not a peak, or cliff, or vale between them
Nor a wood, nor grove to set an ambush;
They viewed each other clearly o'er the plain.
Cried Baligant: 'Now, my fighting pagans
Ride on; seek the battle that awaits you!'
Amborres of Oluferne, he bore their ensign.
The Pagans shouted its name: 'Precieuse!'
Cried the Franks: 'Great loss be yours this day!'
And gave their war-cry, loudly: 'Montjoie!'
The emperor had them sound the trumpets
While the ivory horn rang out above all.
The pagans said: 'Fine is Charlemagne's host.
A battle we shall have, one fierce and harsh!'

Great was that plain, and broad the field;
The helms gleamed, studded o'er with gold
As did the embossed hauberks, the shields
And the lances, all with fluttering pennants.
The trumpets sounded, clear, their call.
While the ivory-horn rang out on high.
Now the admiral, called to his brother
Canabeus, that was king of Floredee
He that held land as far as Val-Sevree
And pointed to Charlemagne's vast host:
'Behold the pride of France the famed!
Haughtily now the emperor rides forth
His bearded warriors follow on behind;
O'er the hauberks their full beards flow
That are as white as the freezing snow.
They will strike us with lance and spear:
Harsh, bitter the battle we shall have;

Ne'er has a man seen such a gathering.'
No further than one might hurl a stick
Baligant passed before his companies.
He showed them his intent, and shouted:
'Come my pagans; now, I take the field.'
He grasped his spear, and brandished it
Turning its point towards Charlemagne.

Charlemagne, viewed the admiral there
And the dragon, his ensign and standard
And all that mighty army, from Arabia
That clothed every part of that broad plain
Save that which the emperor now held.
Then the King of France called, loudly:
'Barons of France, brave men are you all.
Many a battle you've fought in the field.
Behold these pagans, cowardly villains
Whose laws and creed are not worth a sou.
What matter that their host seems so vast?
He that would fail me, let him vanish now!'
He dug his spurs into his horse's flanks;
Tencendor made four great leaps ahead.
Cried the Franks: 'Brave is our monarch!
Ride on my lords; none here seek to fail!'

Verses 240-242: The counts Rabels and Guinemán slay Torleu and Dapamort

Clear was the day, and the sun was bright.
The hosts in fine array, their columns grand.
The leading echelons were soon engaged.
Now Count Rabels and Count Guinemán
Loosed the reins, and let their chargers run,
As, spurring hard, the Franks rode swiftly,
All set to strike home with their sharp lances.

Count Rabel was a battle-hardened knight.
He pricked his horse, his spurs of pure gold
And went to strike the Persian king, Torleu.
Nor shield nor hauberk could stay the blow.
The gilded lance passed through his body
And, hurled upon the thorny ground, he died.

The Franks cried aloud: 'The Lord aid us!
Fail not, for Charlemagne's cause is right!'

Then Guinemán fought the Lutician king
Broke his shield embossed with flowers
Shattered his hauberk, pierced the doublet
Drove his lance's pennant through the flesh
And slew him, no matter who might weep.
At that great blow, the Franks cried aloud:
'Strike on, my lord, wait for no man here.
Charlemagne is right to slay these pagans.
God sent us here to drive his justice home.'

Verses 243-246: Baligant and Charlemagne rally their troops

Malpramis, mounted on a pure white steed,
Forged his way among the press of Franks,
Dealing great blows at one and then another,
Often sending one dead to join his brothers.
Baligant, called out, loudly, o'er them all:
'My barons, have I not long nourished you.
Behold my son, who seeks out Charlemagne,
Attacking many a man with his weapons.
I can ask for no braver service than is his.
Aid him now with your sharpened lances!'
At his words, the pagan echelons advanced.
Harsh blows they struck, great the slaughter,
For wondrous heavy was the fighting there.
Before nor since ne'er was so fierce a battle.

Vast were the hosts, and proud the echelons
Fighting their foes all over that wide field.
The pagans were most wondrously fierce.
Lord, the many lance-shafts split in pieces
Shattered shields, hauberks shorn of mail!
So stained was the ground that could be seen
That o'er the field the grass, fresh and green
Was now all dyed crimson with men's blood.
The admiral rallied his kith and kin, crying:
'Barons, strike hard, break the Christian line.'
Now, most harsh and keen was the fighting

That ne'er before or since was e'er as fierce.
And not till nightfall came was end in sight.

The admiral called aloud to all his people:
'Strike, pagans; are you not here for this?
I promise you women, noble and most fair
I promise you honours, lands, and realms.'
The pagans answered: 'We shall earn them,'
Shattering their lances, dealing great blows
A hundred thousand blades, or so, unsheathed.
Heavy and dolorous was the slaughter there.
Battle he saw, that viewed those two armies.

The emperor, Charlemagne, called to his Franks:
'Lord barons, I love you, as I trust you, well;
Full many are the wars you've fought for me,
Conquering kingdoms, toppling their kings!
And well I know how much I owe to you,
Of land, and wealth, and my bodily efforts.
Avenge now your brothers, sons, and heirs,
Who were slain at Roncesvalles that day!
My cause is just against these pagan foes.'
The Franks replied: 'Sire, you speak true!'
King Charlemagne led twenty thousand,
Who, one and all, were sworn to loyalty;
They'd not fail at the very gates of death.
Not one of them now employed his lance,
But, with their swords, they struck en masse.
The battle now grew wondrously fierce.

Verses 247-252: Duke Neimes attacks, and is attacked in turn

O'er that field, galloped Malpramis the bold
Who'd wrought much damage on the Franks.
Duke Neimes now gazed upon him fiercely
And went to strike him, like a man of valour.
He broke the upper rim of his foe's shield
Pierced the double folds of the strong hauberk,
Thrust his yellow pennant through the flesh
And left him dead midst seven hundred others.

King Canabeus, the admiral's own brother
Pricked his horse fiercely with his spurs
Drew his sword, its hilt set with crystal
And struck Duke Neimes hard on his helm.
He sheared one half of the covering away
Through five plates the steel blade cleft
Leaving the helmet barely worth a sou
Slicing to the flesh right through the cap
And sending a piece flying to the ground.
Fierce was the blow, and stunned the duke
Who'd have fallen had God not sent aid.
His charger's neck he embraced, tightly.
Had the pagan his attack then renewed
That noble servant had indeed been slain
But Charlemagne of France brought succour.

Fierce was the pain Duke Neimes endured,
While the pagan soon turned to strike again.
Charlemagne cried: 'Villain, ill you've earned!
And, courageously, he moved to deal a blow.
He drove the broken shield against the chest,
And tore the ventail from the other's helm,
Then toppled him, dead, the saddle emptied.

Great was the grief of Charlemagne, the king
On seeing Duke Neimes, there, on the ground
Shedding his bright blood o'er the green grass.
Yet the emperor shouted his encouragement:
'Good Sir Neimes, mount, and ride with me.
The villain's dead that had you in such straits;
I drove my lance straight through his body.'
The Duke replied: 'Sire, that I do believe.
You have here living-proof, should I survive.'
Then both rode forth, swearing love and loyalty;
Full twenty thousand Franks rode about them
And not one but fought hard, and slaughtered.

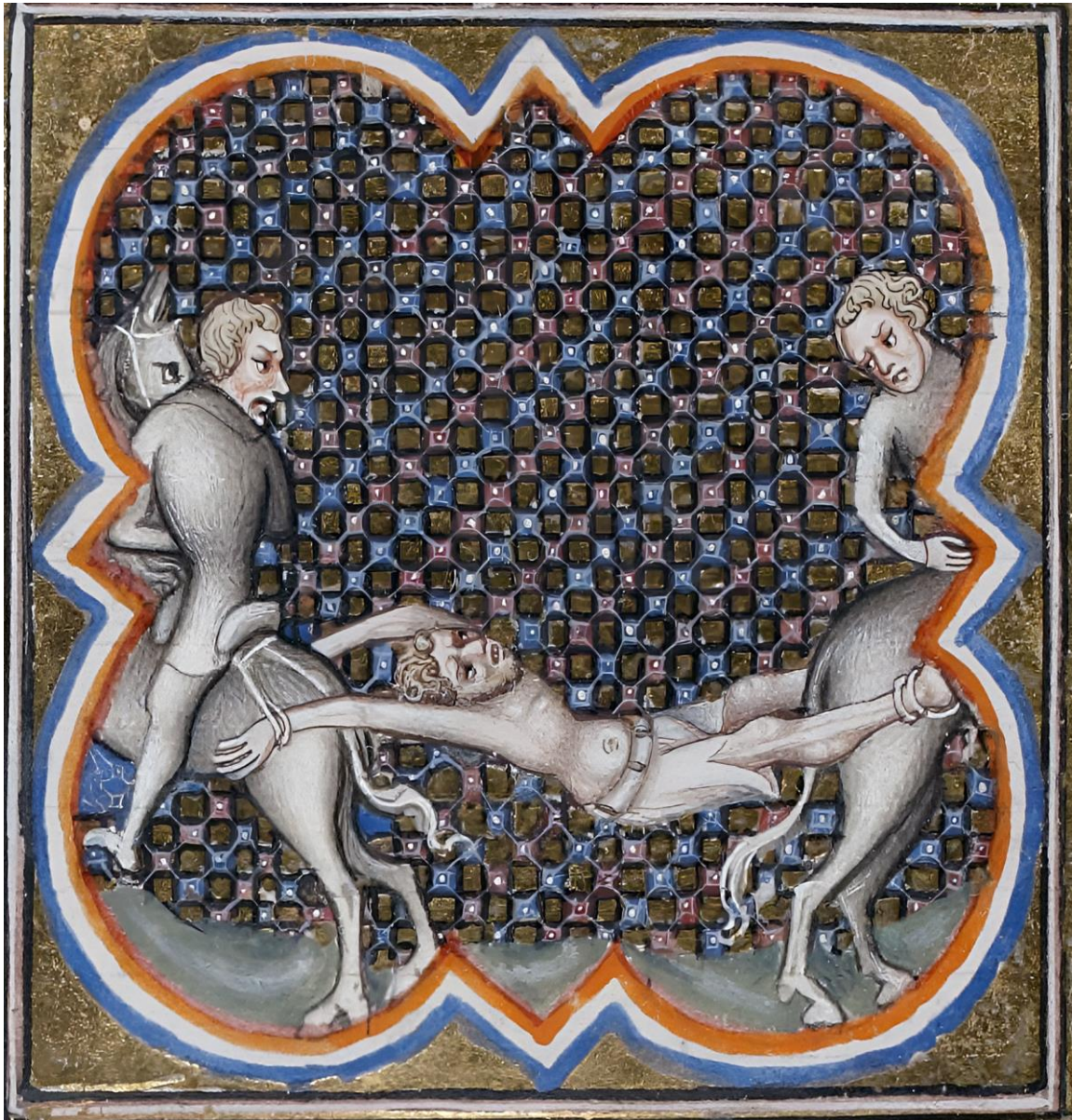
Through the field there came the admiral
Who moved to strike at Count Guinemán;
He drove the white shield against his chest
And split the hauberk and doublet apart.

He hacked two of his ribs from his side
And flung him dead from his swift steed.
And then he slew, with Gebuin and Lorain
Richard the Old, the lord of the Normans.
The pagans cried: 'Precieuse shall prevail!
Strike, barons; for therein lies our defence!'

Who then had seen those men from Araby
From Occiant, and Argoillie, and Bascle
Had seen how well they plied their lances!
Nor had the Frankish knights a mind to flee!
Many there were that died on either side
For fierce war was waged till evening fell.
The barons of France incurred much damage.
Grief would there be, ere the armies parted.

The End of 'La Chanson de Roland: Part V'

Part VI: Ganelon's Fate



Death of Ganelon from the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, BNF, Fr. 2813, fol. 124r
Picryl

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Verses 253-254: Baligant seeks counsel

The Franks and those from Araby fought well,
Breaking the shafts of their polished spears.
He that could have seen the lances shatter,
And heard the gleaming hauberks clash,
And heard the shields beat on iron helms,
And seen the knights falling to the ground,
And the men, dying, groaning on that field,
Would ne'er have forgot that day of sorrow,
For the fight was hard, in truth, to endure.
The admiral called upon the god Apollo;
Termagant and Mahound, he addressed:
'My Lords divine, I have done you service;
Your images, in gold, I'll see fashioned,
If you but aid me gainst this Charlemagne.'
His friend Gemalfin now came before him,
Bearing but evil news, for thus he spoke:
'Lord Baligant, this day brings ill tidings,
For you have lost your son, Malprimis,
And Canabeus, your brother, he is slain.
They fell in fair fight to two brave Franks;

For the emperor, as I witnessed, was one.
Great is his form, for he is a lordly man.
White is his beard as hawthorns in May.'
The admiral bowed his helmeted head,
Lowering his gaze towards the ground,
Longing to die, so great was his sorrow;
He called to him Jangleu the Outlander.

Said the admiral: 'Jangleu, come before me!
You are wise, and your knowledge great,
And thus your counsel I've ever sought.
How seems this battle with the Franks,
Shall we pagans win victory on this field?'
Jangleu replied: 'Baligant, you must die!
You'll win no protection from the gods.
Charlemagne is proud, his men valiant,
I've ne'er seen so combative a people.
But call now upon the lords of Occiant,
The Turks, Enfruns, Arabs and Giants;
Seek not to delay that which must be.'

Verses 255-257: He attacks, and battle rages

The admiral smoothed his flowing beard;
As white it was as is the hawthorn flower.
Whate'er might come, he sought not to hide.
He set to his mouth a clear-voiced trumpet,
And sounded it, so all his men might hear.
O'er all the battlefield his companies rallied.
Those of Occiant, who brayed and bleated,
Those of Arguille, who barked like hounds,
Sought out the Franks, with such wild folly
They broke and scattered all their echelons.
At that blow, seven thousand men fell dead.

Count Oger who knew naught of cowardice,
A more courageous man no hauberk knew,
Saw that the Frankish troops had broken,
And summoned Duke Tierri of Argonne,
Count Jozeran, and Gefrei of Anjou;
While addressing Charlemagne, proudly:

‘Behold how the pagans slay your men!
God remove the crown from your head
If you strike not and avenge our shame!’
Not a single word did any, there, reply,
But spurred hard, and let their horses run,
Striking fiercely at those they encountered.

Right well he fought, Charlemagne the king,
And Duke Neimes, and Oger the bold Dane,
And Gefrei d’Anjou, who bore the ensign.
Oger the Dane revealed his great prowess;
He spurred his horse, and let it gallop,
And struck the man who bore the dragon,
Trampling both beneath his horse’s feet,
Both the dragon and the king’s ensign.
Baligant saw his gonfalon brought low.
Saw the standard of Mahomet downed,
And thus at once the pagan admiral knew
That Charlemagne, not he, was in the right.
More than a hundred warriors turned about.
The emperor called out to his Franks again:
‘Say, my barons, will you aid me, by God?’
The Franks replied: ‘Ill, that you need ask!
He’s a villain that seeks not deeds of war!’

Verses 258-260: Baligant and Charlemagne fight man to man

The day passed, and evening was upon them,
Franks and pagans struck with their swords.
Brave were they, who led the mighty hosts,
Ne’er had they neglected their standards,
The admiral still called out ‘Precieuse!’,
Charlemagne ‘Montjoie!’, his famous cry.
Each knew the other’s commanding voice;
Midst the field, they met now in encounter.
They moved to strike, dealing mighty blows,
Driving their lances at each other’s shields,
Shattering them beneath the broad buckles;
Splitting their hauberks, and their doublets,
But failing as yet to pierce each other’s flesh.
The girths were broken, the saddles freed;

Both kings went tumbling to the ground.
And yet at once upon their feet they stood,
Boldly, unsheathing their gleaming swords.
Neither would turn aside from that duel,
Rather one king must die, ere it ended.

Brave was Charlemagne of France the Fair;
The admiral knew neither fear nor caution.
Drawing their naked blades from the sheath,
They dealt fierce blows against their shields;
Piercing the leather, and twin layers of wood.
Out came the nails, the buckles broke apart,
Still the naked blades struck the hauberks.
From their bright helms the red sparks flew.
Neither would break free from that battle,
Till one avowed he was in the wrong.

Said the admiral: 'Charlemagne, take thought
Repent now of your actions towards me!
It was you, or so I think, who slew my son;
And, wrongly, you have attacked my realm;
Become my man, and render me homage;
Serve my will, from here to the Orient!'
Charlemagne replied: 'That were but vile;
Peace nor love shall I grant to a pagan.
Receive the law that our God revealed,
The Christian creed, and I'll love you ever;
Serve, and believe in, the Lord Almighty!'
Said Baligant: 'An ill sermon you preach!'
They struck with their naked swords again.

Verses 261-262: Charlemagne slays Baligant; the enemy flee

The admiral proved himself full of valour;
He struck Charlemagne on his steel helm,
And broke and split it, close to the crown.
Through a mass of hair went the blade,
Sliced away a palm's breadth or so of flesh,
And left the bone bare within the wound.
Charles swayed, and nigh fell to the ground,
Yet, by God's will, was but stunned not slain.

Saint Gabriel it was, came down to seek him,
And asked: 'Great monarch, what is this?'

Charlemagne, on hearing the angel's voice,
Eschewed all fear, and thought not of death.
He regained both consciousness and vigour,
And struck the admiral with France's blade,
Breaking the helm, upon which jewels shone,
Splitting the skull, and scattering the brains,
And next the face down to his white beard;
Such that to death he fell, beyond all saving.
'Montjoie!' cried Charlemagne for all to hear.
At that cry, Duke Neimes sped to his side,
Held Tencendur, and helped the king remount.
The pagans fled; God wished them not to stay;
And the Franks, now, had all they'd prayed for.

Verses 263-266: He takes Zaragoza; the death of Marsilius

The pagans fled, swiftly, as was God's will.
The Franks chased after, led by Charlemagne.
Said the king: 'My Lords, avenge our loss.
Discharge your hearts, release your spirits,
For this morn your eyes were of full of tears.'
The Franks answered: 'Sire, indeed we will!'
Each struck such blows as he could muster,
Such that few foes that remained, escaped.

Great was the heat, clouds of dust arose;
The pagans fled, the Franks harried them.
The hunt was up, from there to Zaragoza.
Bramimunde climbed to a tower on high,
Around her stood all the clerks and priests
Of her false creed, whom God ne'er loved,
Of no Order, and with heads un-tonsured.
Gazing on the rout of those from Araby,
She cried aloud: 'Aid us now, Mahomet!
Ah, my noble king, our side are vanquished,
And the admiral slain, to our great shame!'
Marsilius, hearing, turned towards the wall.
His eyes shedding tears, his visage veiled,

He died of grief, encumbered so with sin
That living devils came to snatch his soul.

Pagans lay dead; others were put to flight,
And Charlemagne conquered in the battle.
He then broke apart the gates of Zaragoza,
Knowing they could not now be defended;
He had taken the city; all his army entered,
And that night they occupied it in strength.
Fierce was that king with the white beard,
And Bramimunde abandoned the towers,
Ten massive, with fifty lesser about them.
Great are his exploits whom the Lord aids!

The day had passed, the sky grew darker,
The stars shed fire, the moon shone clear,
And Charlemagne had taken Zaragoza.
He had a thousand Franks search the city,
The synagogues, and the mosques, within.
With the iron clubs and axes that they bore,
They shattered all the images and idols,
Till naught false or fraudulent remained.
The God-fearing monarch did Him service;
The bishops blessed the water-cisterns,
And led forth the pagans to be baptised,
Threatening any that opposed his wishes
With being burned, beheaded, or hung.
They baptised a hundred thousand or so,
As true Christians, save the queen alone
Who'd be led prisoner to France the fair;
He would convert her to the love of God.

Verses 267-269: Charlemagne returns to Aix; the death of Alde

The night was past, and bright was the dawn.
The emperor garrisoned Zaragoza's towers,
Placing a thousand warrior knights there,
To guard the site according to his orders.
The monarch mounted, his men followed.
Bramimunde was led forth, a prisoner,
Though he intended her naught but good.

Then they rode forth, in joy and triumph.
They entered Narbonne in full strength,
And journeyed on to renowned Bordeaux.
Above the altar of Saint Séverin he set
The ivory war-horn, bound up with gold,
For all the pilgrims, crowding there, to see.
Taking ship, the king sailed past Gironde,
And brought his nephew's body to Blaye,
With that of Oliver, the true companion,
And that of Turpin, the wise and brave.
In white coffers he had their corpses laid,
In Saint-Romain, where those barons lie,
Commending them to God and his angels.
Then Charlemagne rode on, by hill and vale,
Staying nowhere long, till he reached Aix.
As soon as he'd attained his lofty palace,
On the terrace, before it, he dismounted.
By messenger, he summoned his judges;
Bavarian, Saxon, Frisian, and German,
Lotharingian too, and those of Burgundy,
Of Normandy, of Brittany, and Poitou,
The wisest judges in the Frankish realm,
There to commence the trial of Ganelon.

The emperor, thus, journeying out of Spain,
Had returned to Aix, his capital in France.
Entering the palace, he attained the hall,
And there the lovely Alde welcomed him.
To him she said: 'Where's my Lord Roland,
Who swore that he'd take me for his bride?'
Then Charlemagne felt a weight of sorrow,
And, weeping freely, tore his beard again:
'My sister, dear, you speak but of the dead.
I shall wed you, I swear, to a nobler still,
Louis, that is, and what could I say more,
For he's my son, and heir to all my realm.'
Alde replied: 'Your words are alien to me.
By the Lord, by His angels, and His saints,
If Roland lives no more, then, nor shall I!'
Pallid, she fell before Charlemagne's feet,
Stone dead; God have mercy on her soul!

The Frankish barons wept and lamented.

Alde the Fair had, thus, quit this life,
Though he thought at first she'd fainted.
The emperor felt pity for her, and wept,
And went to raise her from the ground.
Her head but drooped upon her shoulder.
King Charlemagne, on seeing she had died,
Summoned at once, to him, four countesses.
To a nunnery they bore her body thence,
And kept vigil all night until the dawn.
She was nobly interred before the altar,
The monarch showing her every honour.

Verses 270-273: The trial of Ganelon commences

Charlemagne, having thus returned to Aix,
Had the vile Ganelon, still in iron chains,
Brought all through the city to the palace.
The guards then bound him fast to a stake,
His hands tied with strong deer-hide thongs,
And beat the man hard with whips and clubs.
For the villain had deserved no better a fate,
And so, in the depths of woe, awaited trial.

It is written, in the old tales of the Franks,
That Charlemagne summoned many a lord,
And from many a land, to Aix-la-Chapelle.
Then, upon a holy day, for it was the feast,
As many a man relates, of Saint Silvestre,
The trial began, with the pleas in defence
Of Ganelon, who had committed treason.
The emperor had him brought before him.

'My lords' declared Charlemagne the king,
'Judge, now, the case of Ganelon for me!
He was among the host, with me, in Spain
And robbed me of twenty thousand Franks,
Of my nephew, whom we'll see no more,
And Oliver, the valorous and courteous,
Betraying all the Twelve Peers for gain.'

Said Ganelon: 'Vile were I, if I hid aught.
Roland took both gold and goods from me,
And so I sought his death and destruction;
Yet any thought of treason, I, here, deny.'
The Franks replied: 'We must take counsel.'

Before the emperor, then, Ganelon stood,
Handsome of frame, and noble of aspect.
A fine lord he'd seemed were he but loyal.
He gazed upon the Franks, and the judges,
With thirty of his kin to plead his cause,
And cried aloud, in a great booming voice:
'Hear me, my lords, for the love of God!
I was among the host, with our emperor.
With loyalty and love I did him service.
Roland, his nephew, full of hatred for me,
Swore he would bring me death and woe.
I played the messenger to King Marsilius,
And by my wit and wisdom, saved myself.
I defied Roland, and nigh came to blows,
With him, and Oliver, and their comrades.
Charlemagne and his barons witnessed it.
Vengeance I took; in that there's no treason.
The Franks replied: 'We must take counsel.'

Verses 274-276: Pinabel adopts Ganelon's cause

Now, when Ganelon began to plead his case,
He had full thirty of his kinsmen by him.
One of them, to whom the others listened,
Was Pinabel, lord of the castle of Sorence.
He was eloquent and spoke good sense,
A brave man, strong in his own defence.
Ganelon said: 'I set all my hopes on you.
Save me, this day from death and calumny!'
Said Pinabel: 'You shall be saved, indeed.
There's not a Frank thinks you ought to die.
Were the emperor himself to meet with me,
With my good steel blade, I shall refute it.'
Count Ganelon knelt down to kiss his feet.

Lords from Saxony and Bavaria were there,
With Normans, and Franks and Poitevins;
Many Germans attended, and Tiedeis.
Those of Auvergne showed him courtesy,
But most declined to face Lord Pinabel.
Saying each to each: 'Best leave this alone,
Accept the plea, and request of the king
That he quits the action gainst Ganelon;
Who then may serve in love and loyalty.
Roland is dead, and we'll see him no more,
No gold or treasure will bring him back.
Most fool he who'd seek trial by combat.'
There was but one that opposed their plan;
He was Tierri, brother to Gefrei d'Anjou.

The barons returned, seeking Charlemagne.
They said to the king: 'Sire, we beg of you,
To forgo your claim against Count Ganelon,
Who then may serve, with love and loyalty;
Let him live, for he is a most noble man.
Your nephew is dead; to be seen no more;
Naught is there will bring him back again.
Then cried the King: 'Villains are you all!'

Verses 277-279: Tierri takes up the challenge

Once Charlemagne saw they would fail him,
He bowed his head, gazing at the ground,
Naming himself but a coward, in his grief.
But one of his knights, Tierri, stood forth,
That brother to Gefrei, Duke of Anjou.
Long and lean was he of limb, and wiry;
His hair was black, his complexion dark;
Not great in size was he, yet not too small.
He addressed the emperor, courteously:
'My fair and royal Sire, be not concerned.
You know I have ever served you well.
By my ancestors, I'll uphold your cause.
And if Roland took aught from Ganelon,
Your debt to him gave him full warrant!
Ganelon proved vile in betraying you so;

He perjured himself, wrought you harm;
So I judge that he be taken up, and slain,
His corpse thrown to the dogs and ravens,
As a villain who contrived pure villainy.
If any of his kindred would dispute it,
With this sword that's sheathed at my side,
I will at any time defend that judgement.'
The Franks replied: 'This is well-spoken.'

Pinabel now approached the emperor.
Large was he, strong, brave, and nimble;
And he whom he struck, oft saw his last.
He said: 'Sire, all this is at your pleasure.
Command an end, now, to all this noise.
Behold Tierri here, who passes judgement;
I cry him false, and I accept his challenge.'
His left glove Pinabel handed to the king.
The emperor said: 'Guarantors are needed.'
The thirty kinsmen gave him their pledges.
'Likewise I grant as much to you,' said he.
The left glove he held, till a right be shown.

Tierri, his challenge having been accepted,
Gave his right-hand glove to Charlemagne.
The emperor then took the offering hostage.
Four benches were brought and set in place,
On which the combatants and kin would sit.
In accord with the wise judgement of others,
Oger the Dane held parley between the two;
Then they asked for their steeds and armour.

Verses 280-285: The duel commences

And now the pair were readied for the duel.
Confessed, absolved, they crossed themselves.
Having heard the Mass, taken Communion,
Rich offerings they rendered Mother Church.
Before Charlemagne both then appeared:
Their spurs already strapped to their ankles,
Their hauberks bright, strong and yet light,
Their gleaming helms fastened on their heads,

Their swords girt on, all hilted in pure gold.
With quartered shields hung about their necks,
In their right hands, they grasped sharp lances.
Then they mounted their swift-running steeds.
And a hundred thousand knights shed a tear,
Who, for Roland's sake, supported Tierri.
God alone knew how the fight would end.

Beneath the walls of Aix lay a meadow,
Marked out for the combatants' battle.
The two were skilful and full of courage,
And their horses were steadfast yet swift.
They spurred hard, and loosened the reins,
And moved to strike each other forcefully;
Their shields were rent apart and shattered,
Their hauberks split; the girths were broken,
The straps slipped, the saddles fell to earth.
A hundred thousand watched on and wept.

Both the knights, now, were on the ground;
Yet both men leapt, at once, to their feet.
Pinabel was nimble, and strong yet light.
Each now, unhorsed, sought out the other.
With those swords, whose hilts were gold,
The beat on, and struck at, their steel helmets:
Hard were the blows, their helmets split.
The knights of France were troubled then.
'Lord,' cried Charlemagne, 'reveal the right!

Cried Pinabel: 'Tierri, come, surrender!
I shall be your man, in love and loyalty,
And yield my wealth, for your pleasure,
If you'll but have the king absolve Ganelon.
Tierri answered: 'I'll not take that offer.
I'd be a villain forever to thus concede.
The Lord will judge whose cause is right!'

He spoke on: 'Pinabel you are courageous,
Large and strong, your body well-formed.
Your peers think you a good man in a fight:
Why not make an end then of our battle?

I'll see you friends with Charlemagne;
Such punishment will fall on Ganelon
That will be spoken of for many a day.'
Said Pinabel: 'God would be displeased!
I seek to maintain my kinsman's cause,
Nor have I ever fled from mortal man;
Rather I would die than be shamed so!'
The pair struck hard again with their blades,
Beating on those gold-studded helmets,
Showering bright sparks towards the sky.
The two combatants would not be parted,
Nor make an end, ere the other lay dead.

He was skilful, Lord Pinabel of Sorence,
He struck Tierri on his Provençal helm,
Raising such a spark the turf was scorched;
He presented, next, the point of his blade,
And sliced hard down on Tierri's brow,
So shattering the visor, on which it fell;
The right cheek was drenched with blood;
And Tierri's hauberk split to the belly;
Yet the Lord saved him from sudden death.

Verses 286-287: Tierri slays Pinabel, and so wins the fight

Tierri finding that his face was wounded,
A stream of bright blood falling to the turf,
Struck Pinabel on his helmet, now dulled,
Splitting the steel down to his nose-piece,
And scattering his brains o'er the ground.
He gripped his blade till the man fell dead,
And with that blow the contest was won.
The Franks cried: 'God's justice is shown!
Now tis right that Count Ganelon be hung,
And those of his kin adhering to his cause.'

Now that Tierri had won the victory,
The emperor Charlemagne approached;
With forty of his barons in his train.
Including Duke Neimes, Oger the Dane,
Gefrei d'Anjou, and Willalme of Blaye.

The king took Tierri in his close embrace,
Wiped his face with fistfuls of marten-skins,
Then dropped them, as others were brought.
Most gently then, the knights disarmed him;
Then, mounting him on an Arabian mule,
They led him forth in style, most joyously.
They entered Aix, and there dismounted.
Then punishment of the offenders began.

Verses 288-289: Ganelon and his thirty kindred are executed

Charlemagne called to his dukes and counts:
‘What shall be done with those held here?
For they came here in support of Ganelon;
Rendering themselves hostages in so doing,
The Franks replied: ‘Not one of them shall live!’
The King called to his executioner, Basbrun:
‘Hang them on the tree whose wood is cursed!
And by this beard of mine, and its white hairs,
Should one escape, death and shame are yours!’
Basbrun replied: ‘Who would do otherwise?’
A hundred sergeants now led the men away;
All those thirty kindred were swiftly hung.
So traitors condemn themselves and others.

The Germans and Bavarians now departed,
The Bretons, and Normans, and Poitevins.
Midst all who remained the Franks decided
That Ganelon should die in mortal anguish;
Men, leading forth four mighty chargers,
Bound his feet and hands, each to a steed.
The horses were wondrous fierce and strong;
Four sergeants led them by their bridles,
Towards a stream flowing through a field.
Ganelon was soon consigned to perdition.
His sinews stretched until they snapped,
And his limbs torn away from his body.
The crimson blood stained all the grass.
Ganelon died, as should the vilest villain.
None should live to boast of their treachery.

Verses 290-291: Bramimunde is baptised; Gabriel tasks Charlemagne

Once the emperor had extracted vengeance
He called to him all the bishops of France,
And all those of Bavaria, and Germany:
‘A free-born lady is now of my household,
Who has heard such sermons, with precedents,
She now believes in God, and baptism seeks.
Baptise her, that the Lord may have her soul!’
They answered: ‘The rite must be sponsored,
By noble ladies of well-established lineage.’
Such a company gathered to the baths at Aix,
And there the Saracen queen was baptised,
And was given the name then of Juliana,
Rendering her Christian, by true cognisance.

When the emperor had seen justice done,
And was free of his overwhelming anger,
And when Bramimunde had been christened,
The day was done, and the night upon him.
The king lay down in his vaulted chamber.
Saint Gabriel was sent by God, and spoke:
‘Rouse your imperial host, Charlemagne,
And go, in full force, to the land of Bire,
To bring help to King Vivien, at Imphe,
For that city the pagans have besieged.
The Christians, there, cry to you for aid.’
The emperor had scant wish so to journey.
‘Lord’, said the king: ‘My life is full of pain!’
His eyes shed tears; he tore at his white beard.

Here ends the tale that Turold has rehearsed.

The End of Part VI and of ‘La Chanson de Roland’