
H-France Review Vol. 14 (February 2014), No. 35

Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham, trans., *The Chanson d'Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade*. Crusade Texts in Translation, 22. Farnham, U.K. and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011. x + 428 pp. \$124.95 (cl). ISBN 978-0754654896.

Review by Carol Symes, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

This volume's authors are active participants in a welcome effort to make a selection of crusade-related sources more widely available. Susan B. Edgington's edition and translation of Albert of Aachen's *Historia Ierosolimitana* (originally published by Oxford in 2007) has just appeared in this same Ashgate series. Carol Sweetenham has previously translated both the Latin chronicle of Robert the Monk (2005) and, with Linda M. Paterson, the Occitan *Canso d'Antiocha* (2003). Teaming up for this current project, Edgington and Sweetenham have chosen to base their translation of the Old French *Chanson d'Antioche* on the existing edition of Suzanne Duparc-Quoioc, whose source was the oldest extant manuscript of the poem found in Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France fr. 12558 (designated as manuscript A).^[1] In an appendix, however, they provide readers with tools for using their translation alongside Jan A. Nelson's edition of the poem, whose base text was very different (BnF fr. 786, designated as manuscript D by Duparc-Quoioc and as B by Nelson and her co-editors).^[2] They also translate some key passages from that later version of the poem, so readers can compare the two. Additional appendices provide a table of rhymes (to show that, in common with other Old French epics, the verses of each *laisse* or stanza share a single distinctive sound) and a "Dramatis Personae" to aid the reader in tracking the adventures of the poem's characters (most of whom are historical-fictional hybrids). There is also a bibliography and a rather rudimentary index.

Edgington and Sweetenham's prose translation of the poem is preceded by three substantive introductory chapters which attempt to trace the complex textual history of the *Chanson* and to re-assess its value as an historical source and literary artifact. This is a difficult and fraught undertaking. Establishing the relationships between Latin crusading chronicles and their vernacular verse counterparts, and among many manuscript variants of individual narratives, has been the subject of heated debate for at least a century and a half: Which influenced which, when, and how? What evidentiary value can we attach to any of them? The authors venture cheerfully into the fray, adopting a disarmingly breezy tone that unfortunately makes their exposition hard to follow. Their examination of the *Chanson's* composition, transmission, and critical reception is rich in detail but disorganized in exposition, forcing the reader to struggle alongside them as they work to untangle knotty problems of authorship, dating, and revision. This reader would have preferred to see a cohesive argument laid out in a logical manner, with subordinate sections of the discussion nested within major ones and distinguished by clear signposting. Instead, the same typeface is used to introduce all segments, regardless of their place in the overall structure. There are also several places where the interpretive conclusion of the chapter is not aligned with the preceding analysis.

These signs indicate that the introduction should have received a more thorough editing, which could also have tamed the authors' puzzling penchant for peppering their analysis with French vocabulary. Presumably, anyone who needs this translation also needs to know what a *vers orphelin* is (p. 14) and would prefer the word "redaction" to *remaniement* (p. 8 and *passim*). To reference the *enfances* of epic

heroes, rather than their childhoods, seems pretentious (p. 34), and it makes no sense to leave Duparc-Quioc's classifications of the manuscripts in French (p. 38). It is also genuinely confusing that the authors persistently refer to the "twelve couplets" (strophes appended to one version of the *Chanson*) even though they explain (p. 29) that the French *couplet* does not mean "couplet." Moreover, it seems like a dereliction of the translator's duty to sidestep the challenge of rendering Old French into modern English. The *Chanson des chétifs* is certainly a problematic case, but the Middle English "caitiff" captures the dual meaning of "captive" and "wretch" and it could, at the very least, have been offered as an explanation. (An English equivalent is never provided for this or many other difficult words and titles.)

Despite these shortcomings, the authors' introduction makes several interventions that will be of interest to scholars of the crusades, and of medieval historiography and vernacular literature more generally. They begin by debunking the notion that the *Chanson* was authored by a certain *Ricars* (or, in some manuscripts, *Guicars*), a pilgrim named in vv. 9015-16. They also question whether Richard's account was then edited by Graindor (or Hervix) of Douai, a poet (or patron) named in the prologue of some manuscripts. At the same time, though, they acknowledge that the text must have had a compiler and certainly underwent revision, so they ultimately fall back into the habit of using these conventional authorial markers.

Edgington and Sweetenham then address the thorny question of the *Chanson's* place in the fascinating and complex tradition of reporting, reworking, circulating, and embroidering inspired by the movement that we call the First Crusade (1095-99), and in particular by the siege of Antioch (1097-99) and the conquest of Jerusalem that followed it. As Jay Rubenstein has shown, in an important article not cited by the authors, the unprecedented nature and scope of these campaigns, as well as their apocalyptic significance, generated an equally unprecedented historical response. Campfire tales, heroic anecdotes, and moral exempla circulated among the crusaders and the clerics who accompanied them, and were quite rapidly woven into narratives. One of these, possibly extant as early as 1101, may have formed the basis for a plethora of Latin accounts, twelve of which survive from the first half of the twelfth century.^[3] But the chief medium of communication on the battlefield was oral, and the language itself was *roman* (the term "Old French" is obviously modern), so vernacular narratives must have circulated, too, and it is perfectly conceivable that many were couched in epic verse and that some may have found their way into writing. For example, the authors mention that a chronicler working around the time of the Second Crusade (1145-1149), Geoffrey of Vigeois, claims to have seen an Occitan verse account composed in writing by a certain Gregory Bechada, presumably a veteran of the First Crusade. The fact that this text, and others like it, would have circulated in unbound booklets may explain why it doesn't survive.

In any case, the authors assert that a complete *chanson de geste* based on the events of the First Crusade probably didn't come into existence until later in the twelfth century, which means that the *Chanson d'Antioche* is not—as many have contended—an eyewitness or closely contemporary account of the events it describes. Instead, they argue, it was largely based on two Latin narratives: the chronicle of Albert of Aachen supplemented by that of Robert the Monk (texts with which the authors are intimately familiar, as noted above). Although their expertise is unquestionable, I wish that Edgington and Sweetenham had been able to engage the recent work of Svetlana Loutchitsky, who has argued precisely the opposite: that the *Chanson* (or an earlier version of it) was the source for the Latin narratives that appeared in the early decades of the twelfth century.^[4] Even if Loutchitsky is wrong, there are plenty of indicators that the *Chanson*, if not the product of oral composition, retains the markers of orality because these are the guarantors of its authority: its proximity to the battlefield as well as to the heroism of yore.^[5] In fact, it is time to stop playing a zero-sum chicken-or-egg game that pits Latin against vernacular and orality against writing, when all of these media of communication were necessary to the development of the complex storytelling tradition of which this text—as we have it—is a "fossil" (p. 15).

Since the earliest manuscript of the *Chanson d'Antioche* dates from the second half of the thirteenth century, any attempt to trace the phases of its development must be conjectural. Edgington and Sweetenham examine various possible points of genesis and eventually posit that a poem based on Latin sources and couched in the genre of the *chanson de geste* was composed (in the Picard dialect?) late in the twelfth century, perhaps around the time of the Third Crusade (1189-1192). It might have been ascribed to the pilgrim-warrior "Ricans/Guicars" to lend it verisimilitude. This version was subsequently adapted by a poet in the service of a powerful local family, the lords of Saint-Pol-en-Ternois, who claimed descent from certain crusaders featured in the poem, crusaders whose deeds were flatteringly inflated at this stage of the poem's development. This hypothetical "St-Pol text" would have been made in the early thirteenth century, around the time of the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204). This poem, in turn, was redacted (by "Graindor/Hervix") and combined with other materials to become the anchor of a trilogy, which is how it is packaged in all extant manuscripts.

This (they suggest) is how the *Chanson d'Antioche* became the first episode of a very successful literary franchise. It begins with Peter the Hermit's pilgrimage and ends with the fall of Antioch, thus setting up the story and inviting continuation. Its companion texts are the *Chanson des chétifs*, which constitutes a "flashback" to the adventures of crusaders captured at the Battle of Civetot in 1096, and the *Chanson de Jérusalem*, which the authors show to have been closely modeled on the *Chanson d'Antioche*, and which accordingly mirrors the events of that earlier poem. This trilogy, in turn, spawned a series of prequels and sequels known as the Old French Crusade Cycle, which spun out further versions of the *Chanson*—hence the variety of its manuscripts. Most of these were made in Picardy, and the authors briefly summarize the descriptions prepared by Dupcar-Quioc, but without mentioning the analysis of Geoffrey M. Myers.^[6] Although the authors' conclusions are plausible and often persuasive, even those accustomed to the exigencies of the medieval textual tradition will find their analysis unduly taxing.

In the next chapter, Edgington and Sweetenham appraise the historical content of the *Chanson* in light of this argument, reiterating that it cannot be treated as a primary source but noting that it sheds light on the later values attached to crusading and its commemoration, the development of ancestral cults, and the writing of vernacular history and romance. They stress its particular investment in promoting the claims of certain noble Picard families, and its crucial role in the apotheosis of its hero, Godfrey of Bouillon (from Amiens), who would—on the strength of his epic exploits in the trilogy—become one of the Nine Worthies. In the last introductory chapter, the authors address the *Chanson's* literary qualities, insisting that "it is beyond a doubt a *chanson de geste* and not some hybrid form" (p. 63) and that it was not meant to be received as an historical text but as a larger-than-life representation of the past that pushed the already porous boundary between fact and fiction.

Finally, Edgington and Sweetenham preface their English prose version of the poem with "Principles of Translation" and a summary of the plot. They explain that they decided to preserve the formulaic language of the original but not to provide literal translations of colorful expressions like "ne les douta .ii. pois" (literally did not give 2 peas for them)," which seems a shame, since such colloquialisms are historically resonant. The translation itself is readable and sometimes lively, and while it does not always convey the flavor of the original, there are no significant misrepresentations. It is also very thoroughly annotated, though the quality and relevance of the notes is highly varied, ranging from useful (if banal) clarifications to scholarly glosses to snarky asides: e.g., "Unhistorical and about as realistic as a comic strip" (p. 119, n. 74) and "The Rouge Lion, who despite his Disneyesque name is a major Saracen leader" (p. 213, n. 330). These probably should have been cut in the editing process. Indeed, as I have already indicated, the strong hand of a good editor—or more care on the part of the authors—would have done a great deal to improve the whole critical apparatus that supports this translation, which is otherwise a valuable and generous contribution to medieval studies and our understanding of the crusades' lasting appeal.

NOTES

[1] Suzanne Duparc-Quioc, ed., *La Chanson d'Antioche*, 2 vols., Documents relatifs à l'histoire des Croisades, 11 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1976).

[2] Jan A. Nelson, ed., *La Chanson d'Antioche*, in Jan Nelson, ed., *La Chanson d'Antioche*, The Old French Crusade Cycle, vol. 4, (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

[3] Jay Rubenstein, "What Is the Gesta Francorum and Who Was Peter Tudebode?," *Revue Mabillon*, n.s. 16 (=77) (2006): 179–204. He has since published his own narrative: *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

[4] Svetlana Loutchitsky, "'veoir' et 'oïr', *legere et audire*: réflexions sur les interactions entre traditions orale et écrite dans les sources relatives à la première croisade," in *Homo legens: styles et pratiques de lecture: analyses comparées des traditions orales et écrites au Moyen Âge = Styles and practices of reading: comparative analyses of oral and written traditions in the Middle Ages*, ed. Svetlana Loutchitsky and Marie-Christine Varol-Bornes, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 26 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 89–125. The text's first editor, Paulin Paris, took it for granted that this was one of the genuine "Chroniques des croisades" in his *La Chanson d'Antioche*, (Paris: Didier, 1862).

[5] On this point, see Tivadar Palágyi, "Métaphrase et mise en roman: étude comparé des indices d'oralité chez Anne Comnène et Guillaume de Tyr," in *Homo Legens*, pp. 25–88.

[6] Geoffrey M. Myers, "The Manuscripts of the Cycle," in *La Naissance du Chevalier au cygne*, ed. Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel, The Old French Crusade Cycle 1 (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. xiii-lxxxviii.

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ISSN 1553-9172