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Philippa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne in Medieval England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature*. Bristol, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 2017. 480 pp. \$99.00. ISBN 78-1843844723.

Review by Anne Latowsky, University of South Florida, Tampa.

The *Charlemagne: A European Icon* series, published in Bristol Studies in Medieval Cultures, is made up of seven volumes that address the myths and legends of Charlemagne as they manifested themselves in all manners of cultural expression across medieval Europe. Part of a larger multifaceted initiative, the series is under the editorship of the project directors Marianne Ailes and Phillip E. Bennett, whose general preface appears at the beginning of each volume. This present review considers the third book to appear in that series. The other six books in the Icon series focus on other European linguistic and cultural traditions including Latin, Spanish, German and Dutch, Francophonia and Occitan, Italy, and the Norse and Celtic worlds.

The volume on Charlemagne in England is a rich and deeply researched study that is carefully organized and refreshingly readable, especially given the depth and detail that it provides. At 471 pages, the book is extremely long compared to the others that have appeared thus far in the series on the Spanish and the Latin tradition. The England volume is also different in that it takes the form of a monograph rather than an edited volume of articles. The tight focus works well in this case, since it responds to a long history of scholarly neglect and focuses on a relatively small corpus of texts. Readers who might be intimidated by the length of the book should be reassured that the careful organization of the material allows for targeted consumption.

Charlemagne in late medieval English was, for the most part, an avatar of the emperor of the Matter of France, meaning the world of Old French literature that featured the Carolingian king and his peers and rivals. Given the history of medieval England, the study of the Matter of France in its Insular context requires scholars to address a set of complex issues regarding language and culture across ill-defined and often contested linguistic, political, and cultural boundaries. For instance, most Middle English Charlemagne texts were produced during the Hundred Years War, which raises questions about whether Charlemagne when written about in Anglo-Norman, the French of England, had an established Insular identity apart from his continental European identity. Throughout the book, the authors provide convincing cases for overturning long-held beliefs, often products of nineteenth-century thinking, such as the presumed nationalistic character of the Old French *Song of Roland*. The story of the Battle of Roncevaux, as they convincingly argue, did not evolve into pro-English or anti-French narratives once they were adapted to English tastes, even during the long period of strife between the two kingdoms. After all, England was by some estimations still the center of the French-speaking world in the fourteenth century, and Charlemagne figured in the heritage of many English-speaking subjects of the Plantagenet royalty. The question of French or English identity could not really be untangled, which is important when considering the Charlemagne legend in England.

The book opens with the statement that there were three groups of heroic literature in medieval England: English legendary heroes, Arthur and his knights, and Charlemagne and his twelve peers. The last group had, up until now, suffered significant scholarly neglect, perhaps in large part because Charlemagne-themed romances did not continue to be produced past the Middle Ages, unlike the other two traditions, which remained popular. The Charlemagne tradition that flourished in late medieval England derived from the corpus of continental vernacular poems known as the *chansons de gestes* and from the *Pseudo-Turpin* chronicle tradition. The concept of the three matters or *matières*, of which the Matter of France is one, dates to the turn of the thirteenth century when the poet from Arras, Jean Bodel, alluded in one of his prologues to the three existing subcategories of poetry at the time. The Matter of France meant all things related to Charlemagne and his peers and rivals, the Matter of Britain was the Celtic-infused Arthurian world, and the Matter of Rome encompassed works based on stories from Greek and Roman antiquity.

The Matter of France as it was adapted in late medieval England focused largely on the emperor Charlemagne's defense of Christendom against his Saracen enemies. Moreover, English interest in the Matter of France was for the most part limited to three basic narratives: the story of the battle of Roncevaux, the tradition of the mighty Saracen knight turned loyal Christian warrior, Fierabras or Ferumbras, and that of the lesser-known converted Saracen knight, Otinel. The book is organized around these three subgroups as they evolved over time, each of which enjoys a dedicated chapter that follows the three traditions in the corpus as they pass through various periods of reception in manuscript and print form. The authors provide a helpful appendix of the works under consideration, what they refer to as "the insular Charlemagne corpus." Sensitive to the multilingual nature of medieval England, they promise to give equal attention to texts written in Anglo-Norman and Middle English as they examine how this body of literature participated in the shaping of the self-image of late medieval England.

An important stated goal of this study was to move beyond the unfair characterization of the Charlemagne material produced in Middle English as derivative translations. The field of medieval studies has become more sophisticated in its approaches to translation in recent years, and these Middle English texts benefit here from these more nuanced approaches, especially in looking at translations between vernacular texts, rather than from Latin. The authors also note the freedom that seems to have been afforded by the practice of adaptation in a world that did not expect translation to mean reproducing the same work in another language. To give an example of the multilingual nature of the Insular Charlemagne material, the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* circulated widely in three languages in England, in Latin, Middle English, and Anglo-Norman. Moreover, the Middle English Charlemagne romances do not appear as translations, and their translators do not announce themselves as such in their prologues. The decision to translate into English was also seemingly not a matter of asserting English identity or of rejecting French culture. The romances were instead translated to focus largely on the more universal shared conflict between Christians and Saracens.

The first chapter looks at French-language Charlemagne material in the form of *chansons de geste* and at versions of the pseudo-historical prose *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, both of which enjoyed wide dissemination. Manuscripts go back as far as the thirteenth century, but evidence shows that the *chansons de geste*, largely from the *cycle du roi*, continued to hold consistent appeal, especially at the royal court, into the mid-fifteenth century. The number and variety of French-language texts in England is striking, especially when compared to the dearth and limited scope of the same material that was translated into Middle English. Anglo-Norman adaptations of what seems to have been *chansons de geste* material were marked, moreover, by their abbreviated character and by their enhanced use of clerical rhetoric compared to the continental epic tradition. Not many French-language works were translated into English, but those that were focus on encounters with the Saracen enemy. Middle English translations of three *chansons de gestes* survive, *Otinel*, *The Song of Roland*, and *Fierabras*, and were meant to be read in conjunction with one another. These Middle English adaptations, although based on

chansons de gestes, fall into the category of romances, having undergone changes to appeal to evolving tastes and shifting literary expectations.

Charlemagne romances in Middle English include such works as *Roland and Vernagu*, which is based on the *Pseudo-Turpin chronicle*, *Sir Ferumbras*, *Sowdone of Babylone*, and *Roland and Otuel* (Otinel). These romances betray little concern about Charlemagne's status as a French national hero, nor are the works anti-French or even particularly concerned with Frenchness and Englishness, although there are some changes and appropriations worthy of note. The focus is largely on the shared Christian identity of those fighting against the non-Christian enemy. Just as the earlier Anglo-Norman texts were in conversation, so too the Middle English versions contained significant intertextual allusions and share the primary themes of Christian-Saracen conflict, relics, and depictions of the monarchy. Charlemagne is generally depicted as a positive exemplum in the romances and as a unifier of a larger Christian polity belonging as much to the English as the French.

The authors aim to demonstrate throughout their study that Charlemagne texts in England were politically engaged, keeping continuity with their sources while showing signs of change and adaptation to conform to contemporary English concerns. For instance, the focus on religious warfare in the Insular French-language tradition grew even stronger once the romances were translated and adapted into Middle English Charlemagne romances, with even greater emphasis on the Saracen threat as a likely mirror for the threat to Europe from the Ottoman Turks as it grew more troubling. The romances also enhance Charlemagne's role as leader of all Christendom, and he is more glorious than in the earlier works. The Matter of France thus served as a "cultural analogue," functioning as a shared inheritance for the French and English speakers in England. This perception of a shared vision works against the idea that the tradition of Roland and the Battle of Roncevaux was claimed by the French for nationalist reasons, which, as they point out, would have been an anachronism at the time. They also rightly observe that it is important to see the *Song of Roland* not as a source text, but rather as one narrative witness among many, akin to the Tristan legend in its various iterations. To support this claim, they point out, for instance, that the Middle English *Pseudo-Turpin*, Caxton's *Charles the Grete*, and *Otuel and Roland* are all from late fifteenth century, during a time of trouble and disorder for England. The English adaptors of the tradition of the *Song of Roland* used this story for their own needs, the authors contend, but not over and against the claims of the French to Charlemagne. The material underwent "a sustained program of adaptation" in England, with rewritings mirroring contemporary English concerns.

The Insular Fierabras, a tradition that features the recovery of stolen relics of the Passion from Rome, enjoyed enhanced popularity in England by comparison with its dissemination on the continent. It is a mystery to the authors, however, why this story was so captivating to English poets. They devote ample attention to the tradition of Fierabras/Sir Ferumbras, arguing for instance that not all versions adhere to theory that Muslim invasion was a punishment, the scourge, for Christian sins. Instead, the various distinct Ferumbras texts show innovation in their attempts to reveal similarities between Christians and Saracens. The less popular and less esteemed Insular Otinel tradition had no continental precursor, but somehow survived in Middle English in three separate and distinct versions that seem to come from Anglo-Norman sources. Otinel or Otuel is a Saracen knight who eventually comes over to fight on the side of Charlemagne. The Matter of France in this scenario would have served for English poets as the basis for depicting the decision to fight against God's enemies as an expression of kingly values.

The conclusion of the book opens with the acknowledgement that the Charlemagne romances in England barely made the transition to post-medieval culture, unlike more enduring traditions such that of Guy of Warwick. Scholarship on the Matter of France in England was also lacking for a long time, but the subject enjoyed a burst of interest in the 1990s, perhaps because of the ways in which the works lent themselves to inquiry based on themes of postcolonialism, crusade, and racial otherness. The

authors acknowledge their appreciation of and debt to these lines of inquiry, but emphasize that their own approach has been their close focus on individual texts over time to trace both continuity and change, using the most up-to-date scholarly approaches to medieval practices of translation and adaptation, specifically in the context of late medieval Insular society. These works when viewed over time allow readers to engage with essential questions of linguistic, cultural, religious, and political identity. The evolution of the Matter of France in England, as Hardman and Ailes successfully demonstrate throughout, was not about nationalism, but rather re-appropriation and adaptation in changing circumstances. This was a process of creative engagement with the traditions that had been inherited from across the channel, a waterway that served as a line of communication, as the authors poetically observe, and not as a barrier between England and the continent.

Anne Latowsky
University of South Florida, Tampa
alatowsk@usf.edu

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