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‘Saracens’ in the Franco-Italian chansons
de geste: humans not monsters

Marianne J. Ailes
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INDICE

MARCO FRANCESCON	
<i>Le Passioni francesi, Niccolò da Verona e una considerazione sugli «intarsi latini»</i>	5
MARIANNE J. AILES	
‘Saracens’ in the Franco-Italian chansons de geste: humans not monsters	71
MARTINA DI FEBO	
<i>Guerrin Meschino</i> . La circolazione di un romanzo cavalleresco in area veneta	99
EUGENIO BURGIO	
Gli italianismi nella tradizione de <i>Devisement dou monde</i> (sull’interazione fra ecdotica e analisi traduttologica)	127
DAVIDE BATTAGLIOLA	
Il codice Firenze BML Plut. LXXVI.79: annotazioni linguistiche e considerazioni sulla <i>mise en recueil</i>	169
MARCO INFURNA	
Appunti sulla tradizione testuale del “Roman d’Hector et Hercule”	203
PHILIPPE MÉNARD	
Observations critiques sur le manuscrit français 1116 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France	219
RACHELE FASSANELLI	
Considerazioni su lessico, testo e fonti della <i>Passion</i> di Niccolò da Verona	249

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‘Saracens’ in the Franco-Italian chansons de geste: humans not monsters

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ABSTRACT:

The Franco-Italian *chansons de geste* the *Entrée d’Espagne* and the *Prise de Pampelune* have nuanced depictions of certain individual non-Christians. This paper reads the texts alongside particular intertexts which find echoes in the texts themselves, to explore first how the *Entrée d’Espagne* works with the material it takes from the *Pseudo-Turpin*, a text which is evoked at the beginning of the *Entrée*, with particular reference to the treatment of the giant Feragu. It then compares the family grouping of Ysoré and his parents in the *Entrée*, where the emotions of the Saracens are explicitly depicted, with the family dynamics of the Saracens of *Fierabras*, another text with many parallels in the *Entrée*. Finally, the *Prise de Pampelune* is analysed as a response to the *Entrée*; here the noble Saracen Ysoré is finally converted, but his father’s emotions are expressed as complex and very human, despite his refusal of conversion. The two Franco-Italian texts are closely related, but very different in the degree of tolerance towards the unconverted Saracen, yet both present the Saracen enemy in human, not demonised, terms.

KEYWORDS:

Epic – crusade – Other – Saracen – Franco-Italian

«If you prick us do we not bleed; If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?»¹ These are the words of Shylock, Shakespeare’s stereotyped Jew, in a speech stressing the humanity of the religious and racial Other. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare combined othering of the Jew and an acceptance of his humanity. The act of othering the person who is different, and especially reducing one’s enemy to being less than human, is a thread that runs through human history. We are often quick to see it (and condemn it) in periods and cultures which are not our own, perhaps nowhere more so than in the study of the Middle Ages, where the stereotype of the Monstrous Muslim prevails. Scholarship of the *chanson de geste* in particular has, until very recently, often stressed this stereotypical Muslim Other. Paul Bancourt, in his very thorough, seminal study of Muslims in the *cycle du roi*, went as far as to say «on rejette le Sarrasin hors du monde des humains [...] plus proche parfois de la bête que de l’homme»². This extreme is sometimes complemented

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 3, scene 1; for the text and a brief discussion see <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/the-merchant-of-venice/language/if-you-prick-us-do-we-not-bleed> [accessed 20. I. 2023].

² Bancourt 1982: 1004. Bancourt uses the term ‘musulmans’ in his title but frequently uses

by the *'bon sarrasin'*, but he or she is frequently destined for conversion, a 'type' no more tolerant than the monstrous Muslim as their nobility is an indicator that they will not remain Other. Indeed, I have stressed this *'bon sarrasin'* type myself³. Yet our texts are more varied and sometimes more nuanced than this suggests. In contrast to the judgement of Bancourt that the Muslim Other is scarcely human, this paper explores the humanity of the non-Christian Other, or at least of certain individuals, in two fourteenth-century Franco-Italian *chansons de geste*, the *Entrée d'Espagne* and the *Prise de Pampelune*⁴.

The work of scholars since the 1990s has done much to overturn the dismissive attitude of many scholars in the past towards the 'late' *chansons de geste*⁵. It remains true, however, that French texts produced outside of France, including the French of Italy, are often seen as peripheral⁶. Nonetheless, since the later twentieth century, the work of scholars such as Alberto Limentani, Leslie Zarker Morgan, Jean-Claude Vallecalle, Nancy Bradley-Cromeley and Claudia Boscolo has put Franco-Italian *chansons de geste* on the map⁷.

The study of the Other, in this case, is also a study in intertextuality. Literary tradition and authors' responses to that tradition shape this paper, which examines first the *Entrée d'Espagne* and the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, then adds the *Chanson de Fierabras* into the mix, and finally considers the *Prise de Pampelune* as a response to the *Entrée*.

The *Entrée d'Espagne* and the *Prise de Pampelune* are written in a specific, Italian context, and draw on a number of genres, but insofar as they were written in monorhymed *laissez* they conform to a form-based definition of the genre of *chanson de geste*. Reading them in this context also means reading them in a transnational Francophone context while remaining aware that they also belong

'sarrasin' in his text of his study. The 'Saracen' to use the term of the texts themselves, is primarily a Western construct of the Muslim, but the term is also used to cover all non-Christian Others in *chansons de geste*. Jones 2002: 629 writes of a discourse which transforms the Other into an object.

³ I have stressed the *'bon sarrasin'* type as an indicator of likely conversion in Ailes 1996; see also Girbea 2014. On the intolerance of alterity in *chansons de geste* see, among others, Haidu 1993. See also Jones 2002: 632, 637.

⁴ This is part of a larger project, partly funded by a Leverhulme Trust Fellowship, on positive representations of Saracens or encounters between Christian and Saracen in the *chanson de geste*, with particular focus on Saracens who are permitted to remain unconverted.

⁵ This development is epitomised in the publication in 2018 of a dossier dedicated to *La chanson de geste au XIV^e siècle*, see Roussel 2018.

⁶ For a challenge to a France-centred consideration of medieval French literature see Kinoshita 2010. On the French of Italy see also the web-site of the Fordham *French of Italy Project* <https://frenchofitaly.ace.fordham.edu/> [accessed 12. I. 2023].

⁷ Many of Alberto Limentani's articles on the *Entrée d'Espagne* have been collected together in Limentani 1992. See Vallecalle 2011b, Bradley-Cromeley 1993, Boscolo 2017; Morgan made an important contribution to Franco-Italian studies in her edition of the *Geste Francor*. Most recently Boscolo – Morgan 2023.

to the very specific cultural context of later medieval, pre-humanist Italy⁸. In the case of the *Prise* there is also the specific context of the work of a named author⁹.

There seems to be agreement that the *Entrée* dates to the first half of the fourteenth century¹⁰. We know almost nothing about the anonymous poet, except that he tells us he comes from Padua¹¹. The text survives in one more or less complete manuscript (Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Fr. Z. 21 [=257]) plus two fragments¹². The *Prise de Pampelune*, composed in 1343 is a continuation of the *Entrée* by Niccolò da Verona for his patron at the Este court¹³. It is also extant in a single manuscript held in Venice (Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Fr. Z. 5, ff. 1r-101v)¹⁴.

1. *The Entrée d’Espagne and the Pseudo-Turpin*

The premise of the *Entrée* is the Rolandian material with what Bradley-Cromeley categorised as «parallels and divergencies» from the *Chanson de Roland*¹⁵. Part of the creative technique of the anonymous author was an elaboration of some passing references in the *Chanson de Roland* of incidents that had happened earlier in the (fictionalised) history of Charlemagne’s wars, but there is more to it than this¹⁶. The other major vehicle for the narrative of the battle of Roncevaux in Western Europe was the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, a text that had an extraordinarily widespread diffusion and was well-known in Northern Italy. The

⁸ For the texts in their specific Veneto context see Limentani 1976, on the culture of the author see pp. 347-349; Limentani points out that the author has a certain level of knowledge of Latin culture, evident in intertextual references, see pp. 347-348. For a brief introduction to these texts see Limentani – Infurna 1986: 41-43.

⁹ On Niccolò da Verona see Limentani 1976: 360-368.

¹⁰ Limentani 1976: 342-343, argues for a range of 1298-1343, likely in the 1330s; see Bradley-Cromeley 1993: 10; see also de Mandach 1989: 207-208; Boscolo 2017: IX.

¹¹ On this specific context see Boscolo – Morgan 2023: 60-61 and Limentani 1992: 113.

¹² On the manuscripts see the edition: *L’Entrée d’Espagne* (ed. Thomas 1913, reproduced with preface by Infurna 2007): XXIII-XXVIII; see also Boscolo – Morgan 2023: 60, n. 112.

¹³ There are two editions, Niccolò da Verona, *La Prise de Pampelune* (ed. Mussafia 1864, cited in this study) and Niccolò da Verona, *La Prise de Pampelune* (ed. Di Ninni 1992). As Vallecalle points out there are only two references to Turpin in the whole text (l. 361, l. 5653); see Vallecalle 2011b: 153; but compare Specht 1981.

¹⁴ On the manuscript see Limentani 1976: 340.

¹⁵ Bradley-Cromeley 1993: 17, 37-39; on the *Entrée* and the *Roland* see Limentani 1976: 345-346. While there are multiple ‘*Songs of Roland*’ I am using the term here primarily with reference to the Oxford text of the *Roland* narrative as found in Oxford Bodleian Library MS Digby 23; Boscolo – Morgan 2023: 59 describe the Oxford *Chanson de Roland* as the «formal model» of the *Entrée*.

¹⁶ Bradley-Cromeley 1993: 17 notes specifically that the Nobles episode at over 2,000 lines was likely not just introduced as «an amplification of two passing mentions in the *Chanson de Roland*».

Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle is an explicit intertext for the *Entrée*, directly evoked in both prologues (rather like the *Chanson de Roland* the text ‘restarts’ part way through the text with another ‘prologue’)¹⁷. As at the beginning of the *Pseudo-Turpin*, St James appears to Charlemagne in a vision, so does Archbishop Turpin himself appear to the narrator of the *Entrée*, commanding him, for the love of St James, to write the story in rhyme:

Savez por quoi vos ai l'estorie començee?
 L'arcivesque Trepins, qi tant feri de spee,
 En scrit mist de sa man l'istorie croniquee:
 N'estoit bien entendue fors que da gient letree.
 Une noit en dormand me vint en avisee
 L'arcevesque meïme, cum la carte aprestee:
 Comanda moi e dist, avant sa desevee,
 Que por l'amor saint Jaques fust l'estorie rimee,
 Car ma arme en seroit sempres secorue et aidee.
 Et par ce vos ai jé l'estorie comencee.
 A ce qe ele soit e leüe e cantee.
 (*Entrée d'Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 46-56; cf. Thomas, ll. 46-56)

[Do you know why I began this history for you? | The archbishop Turpin, who struck so much with his sword | Put into writing with his own hand the chronicle history; | It could only be understood properly by the educated | One night when I was sleeping, there came to me in a dream | the archbishop himself with the paper ready | He commanded me and said, before his departure | For the love of St James to put the history into rhyme | For my soul would be forever saved and helped by it | And for this reason I began the history | That it might be read and sung].¹⁸

The *chanson de geste* is thus presented as an adaptation of the *Pseudo-Turpin*, but it is also more than this¹⁹. Jean-Claude Vallecalle has noted that the insistence on rhyme means that there is stress here on the literariness – and fictional nature – of the *Entrée* – rather than its historicity; he contrasts this with the French Johannes translation, written in prose in order to be as faithful as possible to the Latin²⁰. In this focus on the literary, rather than the factual, our author is

¹⁷ Vallecalle 2011; see also in the same volume, Morgan 2011: 165. See Moisan 1981. Subrenat 1981: 506 notes that «tout le texte de l'*Entrée d'Espagne* est imprégné d'un esprit jacobite».

¹⁸ I would like to thank Professor Leslie Zarker Morgan for her help with the translations of the Franco-Italian. Any errors remaining are my own. Translations are provided to help with understanding and are not intended to be polished English.

¹⁹ See Vallecalle 2013; see also Vallecalle 2011b: 154-155. On the late fourteenth-century Franco-Italian *Aquilon de Baviere*, which substantially re-imagines the *Pseudo-Turpin* narrative see Vallecalle 2013: 467-468 and Vallecalle 2011b: 158-162.

²⁰ Vallecalle 2011b: 157. The Franco-Italian text does, however, connect to the Anglo-Norman translation (which is also in prose) in its insistence on being received orally as well as being read. In the prologue William de Briane wrote: «ke ceus ke le orrunt ...», [that those who hear it] (l. 24), William de Briane, *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* (ed. Short 1973).

departing from much of the emphasis in the *Pseudo-Turpin*, and in its medieval reception: in England, for example, it is frequently found in medieval catalogues along with historical material. Later the narrator tells us he is following three sources: Pseudo-Turpin supplemented by Jean de Navarre and Gautier d’Arragon, writers whose existence has been called into doubt²¹.

A second prologue states that the author found a copy of the Latin Pseudo-Turpin in Milan. Claudia Boscolo, in her monograph study of the *Entrée*, suggests that this was indeed a possibility²², but it is also evoking and exploiting the usual *chanson de geste* topos of a book found at Saint-Denis, and replacing the conventional, French, authority, with an Italian one²³.

En cronique letree, qe escrist da sa man
 L’arcivesque Trepins, atrovai en Millan
 L’estorie e la conquise dou regne Castellan
 Qe fist le neveu Carles [...]
 (*Entrée d’Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 10978-10981, cf. ed. Thomas, ll. 10978-10981)

[At Milan I found the tale in a written chronicle that the Archbishop Turpin wrote with his own hand, and the conquest of the kingdom of Castille that the nephew of Charles carried out ...].

As Vallecalle has noted, from this point on he departs from the narrative of his model²⁴.

The *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* itself has a complex relationship with the epic world of the *chanson de geste*²⁵. The twelfth-century Latin text took the narrative of the *Chanson de Roland* and incorporated it into a longer narrative of Charlemagne’s wars in Spain, within a clearly religious and propagandistic framework, yet presenting it as historical narrative²⁶. The pseudo-chronicle in turn then became a source and inspiration for later *chansons de geste*. What we find in the *Entrée* is an initial narrative which draws heavily on the *Pseudo-Turpin* and a continuing narrative where the Paduan develops the story in a way which is less constrained by the *données* of the known narrative, allowing him more freedom in the presentation of the non-Christian Others, those whom Charlemagne is fighting.

²¹ See Limentani 1981, translated by Renata Bartoli for Limentani 1992: 84-108.

²² Boscolo 2017: 228.

²³ On this see Vallecalle 2011b: 157.

²⁴ See *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Suard 2011. Discussions of the *Pseudo-Turpin* have presented the combat between the two champions as a kind of judicial combat which demonstrates the rightness of the Christian cause, and which would feed back into depictions of such *combats à deux* in the *chanson de geste*; see Ailes 1995.

²⁶ See Vallecalle 2011a: 5-12.

2. *Feragu/Ferracutus*

The combat between Roland and the gigantic champion of the opposing army, Feragu/ Ferracutus, was well-known through the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* and, indeed, through visual representations of the combat, such as the Charlemagne window in Chartres Cathedral, and numerous manuscript illuminations of the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, which incorporated into the chronicle this fictional narrative (rather as the *Pseudo-Turpin* itself included history and fiction). This combat *à deux* provides a model followed by many such duels in later *chansons de geste*. In the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* we find a description of the Saracen which focusses on the physical, and largely on the size of the opponent: he is described as a giant, of the lineage of Goliath, immediately associating him with evil. We are then given a more detailed description, which varies slightly across the different redactions²⁷:

MS A: Erat enim statura eius quasi cubitorum duodecim et facies eius longa quasi cubiti unius, et nasus unius palmi mensuratim, et brachia et crura eius quattuor cubitis erant, et digiti eius tribus palmis (*Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. Meredith-Jones: 148).

MS Codex Calixtinus: Erat enim statura eius quasi cubitis XII et facies eius longa quasi unius cubiti, et nasus unius palmi mensuratim, et brachia et crura eius IIII cubitis erant, et digiti III palmis (*Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. Meredith-Jones: 149).

The Anglo-Norman text of William de Briane:

«L'estature de ly estoit doze coutes, e le vys de un coute, soun nees de une paume mesuré, ses bras de quatre coutes, ses quisses de quatre, ses deys de treys paumes» (ed. Short: 50, ll. 682-685).

Johannes translation:

«La force de xl homes avoit et d'estature .xii. cotes, e de facon .i. cote, et de nes .i. espan et de braz .ii. cotes, si doi de .ii. esponz» (ed. Walpole: 151, chapter XXXIII, ll. 27-29).

[English translation of Johannes: He had the strength of 40 men, was twelve cubits in height, and his face was one cubit and his nose one span and his arms two cubits, and his fingers were two spans in length].

The *Entrée* follows the narrative of the *Pseudo-Turpin*, but gives us a much more detailed, and nuanced description of the giant opponent. He remains 'of

²⁷ For the Latin texts see *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi ou Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin* (ed. Meredith-Jones 1936, reprint 1972). For the French: *The Old French Johannes Translation of the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* (ed. Walpole 1976); *An Anonymous Old French translation of the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* (ed. Walpole 1979). For the Anglo-Norman see above n. 20. Translations of the Johannes text are my own.

the lineage of Goliath’. More generally there is in the literary tradition a very narrow dividing line between the larger-than-life hero and the monstrous giant, and the giant as monster is downplayed in the *Entrée* description of Ferragu²⁸. In the *Entrée* we are given a long and detailed portrait of Ferragu, illustrated by these lines:

Feragu s’arme en la sale voutie.
 N’oit plus biax home en tote Païenie,
 Ne mielz cortois ni plus sans villanie.
 Largeçe fu par lui manteneue e sanplie,
 Avarice destruite e de son cor bandie;
 [...]
 Jameis ne sofri tort an trestote sa vie;
 Cent fois s’acombati o l’espee forbie
 Por orfres e por veves, par gient a tort blesmie.
 Sajes fu ens escriz de la Mahomarie;
 [...]
 Vint anz avoit a point, l’estorie le nos crie;
 .xii. coubes fu long, ce est voir sans boisdie;
 La ganbe oit longe e grosse, la forqueüre lie;
 Anples fu en espales; bu ne li desdist mie;
 [...]
 Ceveleüre blonde et longe e trecelie;
 Gros fu e colloriez, n’a nulle or n’en rie;
 Gracias a tot homes. Ne sai qe plus vos die:
 Se pur deignast acroire el filz sante Marie,
 Au segle n’eüst pier de tote baronie.
 (*Entrée d’Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 830-834, 839-842, 844-47, 851-55, cf. ed. Thomas, ll. 830-834, 838- 841, 843-846, 851-855)

[Ferragu arms himself in the vaulted room | There is no more handsome man in the whole of pagandom | Nor one more courtly, nor more lacking in vulgarity. | He maintained and exemplified generosity | destroyed meanness and banished it from his heart | [...] | He never tolerated injustice in all his life | One hundred times he has fought with his polished sword | on behalf of orphans and widows [and] people wrongly accused. | He was learned in the writings of the religion of Mahomet [...] | He was just 20 years old, according to the tale; | He was 12 cubits in height, this is the truth without lies | his legs were long and muscular; he had a deep seat²⁹; | he was broad of shoulder, his chest was not at all disproportionate | His hair was blond and long and braided | he was well built and fresh complexioned; there is no one who would laugh at it | gracious to all men. I don’t know what more to tell you. | Had he deigned to believe in the son of Saint Mary | He would have had no peer among all noblemen].

What is striking in this depiction is not just that he is physically a worthy opponent: large and strong, nor indeed that he is handsome, though it is worth

²⁸ See Ailes 2012a.

²⁹ Literally: «he had a broad crotch»; this seems to refer to his seat on a horse.

considering that for a moment as external beauty was also often an indicator of inner virtue. Ferragu's «ceverleüre blonde» might even recall the 'blonde sarrasine' topos, the Saracen female, often destined for conversion, and constructed as a western beauty. Paul Bancourt saw an incongruity in the handsome Saracen who did not convert, with a lack of coherence between his or her external beauty and internal evil³⁰. This is not the case here, however, for Ferragu's handsome exterior matches inner virtue. He is courtly and generous, practicing *largesse*; he will not suffer injustice, and fights for widows and orphans, is educated in his own scriptures, and gracious to all men. Indeed, Claudia Boscolo categorises the first half of this description as «a complete moral portrait of a knight»³¹. The description ends with the kind of phrase familiar from the earliest *chansons de geste*, that he would be without peer if only he believed in the son of Mary. We first encounter the topos that «He would have been noble had he only been a Christian» in the *Chanson de Roland*, notably when Charlemagne is fighting with Baligant the Saracen overlord. But the attitude in the *Entrée* is actually very unlike that expressed towards Baligant in that earlier text. In the *Roland* Baligant is certainly a powerful warrior, but when first described at length (ll. 3155-64) the only abstract quality ascribed to him is *vassalage*; similarly, he is later described by the French as *vassals* (l. 3343): *vassalage* and *vassal* as concepts refer as much to fighting ability as to more abstract virtues. In this earlier – and heroic – text 'courtliness' would be irrelevant. The anonymous Paduan is writing about two centuries later and in a different part of Europe, in a time when crusading remained an ideal, but was no longer the lived experience of the twelfth century; it might be expected that the Paduan would praise different virtues from those of the *Chanson de Roland* which so much echoes crusading ideology. However, two points to be made here. First, Ferragu's virtues can be mapped closely onto virtues valued and articulated in the *chansons de geste* in the twelfth century as much as the fourteenth; indeed, they map specifically onto the virtues of a good king as articulated on three different occasions in the twelfth-century *Aspremont* where we are told that a good king will not suffer injustice and will support widows and orphans³². Secondly, I want to stress that these *are* virtues, not just the qualities of a good warrior³³. This noble Saracen contrasts with others in the *chanson de geste* tradition. Like Baligant, Ferragu would be without peer among the nobles if only he were Christian. Like Baligant he does not convert. However, unlike Baligant, where these virtues are latent and unrealised because he does not convert

³⁰ See Bancourt 1982: 62.

³¹ Boscolo 2017: 195.

³² See Ailes forthcoming.

³³ Boscolo, using the writings of St Bernard, suggests that Roland is the *miles Christi* and Ferragu the *miles saeculi*. This is helpful, although we need to be careful not to make too sharp a distinction between religious and secular in the medieval world. Boscolo 2017: 195.

but is killed³⁴, Feragu’s virtues in the *Entrée* are real, without conversion. In the *Pseudo-Turpin* we are told only that in those days both Christian and Saracen would respect a truce (ed. Short, p. 51, ll. 729-34; ed. Meredith Jones, p. 152 vi-x; p. 153, vi-xi), suggesting, by the way, that as early as the twelfth century there was a perceived equality and shared values. In the *Entrée* before the combat even begins, we have a sense of nobility in Feragu’s behaviour: when he encountered Girard de Roussillon in the forest. Gerard comes off worst, but Feragu refrains from killing him when he has him at his mercy (ll. 1301-8)³⁵. Elsewhere I have argued that the ‘Christians are right and pagans are wrong’ paradigm does not, even in the *Chanson de Roland*, translate into ‘Christians are good and Saracens are evil’³⁶, but there is here a major departure here from the tradition where the goodness of individual Saracens is never entirely realised; Feragu in the *Entrée* could be Chaucer’s «veray parfit gentle knight», without conversion³⁷.

Perhaps the best-known aspect of the exchange between Roland and Ferracutus/Feragu in the *Pseudo-Turpin* is the theological discussion, as Feragu/Ferracutus interrogates Roland about the Christian faith³⁸. There is here already in the pseudo-chronicle something akin to the dialogical as Ferracutus is given a voice to expound certain basics of Muslim belief³⁹:

MS A: Tunc Ferracutus: Nos credimus, inquit, quia creator celi et terrae unus est Deus, nec filium habuit, neque patrem. Sed sicut a nullo generatus est, ita neminen genuit. Ergo unus est Deus nec trinus (*Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. Meredith-Jones: 154).

Codex Calixtinus: Tunc Ferracutus: Nos credimus, inquit, quia creator celi et terrae unus Deus est, nec filium habuit, nec patrem. Sed sicut a nullo generatus est, ita neminen genuit. Ergo unus est Deus non trinus (*Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. Meredith-Jones: 155).

Anglo-Norman translation of William de Briane:

‘Nous creum’, fest li jeauns, ‘ke ly creator du ceel e de la tere est uns deus, e si cum il ne fust unkes engendré de nulhy, autresy ne engendra il nulhi ounkes’ (ed. Short: 52, ll. 756-758).

Johannes translation:

“Nos creons”, dist Fernaguz, “Que li crierres del ciel et de la terre est uns deus, ne nului n’engendra ne plus qu’il fu de nului engendrez et donc est il uns Deus, non trebles (ed. Walpole: 153, chapter XXXVII, ll. 5-8).

³⁴ See Ailes 2002a: 73-74.

³⁵ Boscolo 2017: 79, 199-200 discusses this as the first point at which Feragu is explicitly presented as like Achilles.

³⁶ Ailes 2002b.

³⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*: l. 72.

³⁸ See Limentani 1976: 350; he notes that the victory over Feragu is victory of reason and faith.

³⁹ Compare, Vallecalle 2006. In the *Pseudo-Turpin* the dialogue is a construct, and the illusion perhaps therefore all the greater in that actual Islamic belief is referenced.

[We believe, said Fernagu, that the creator of heaven and earth is one God; as he did not beget anyone so is he not begotten, and so he is one God, not three].

This is already remarkable and demonstrates some basic understanding of Islam with its emphasis on the unity of the one God. Indeed, as Bancourt acknowledged, the concerns expressed by Feragu/ Ferractus reflect the real objections to the Christian faith, and this is the case, already in the twelfth-century pseudo-chronicle. In the *Entrée*, furthermore, Feragu is given a voice which clearly articulates the idea of Mohamed as messenger of God:

Feragu dist qe il demostrera
Par vive force qe Damediex manda
Machon en tere [...]
(*Entrée d'Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 2440-2442, cf. ed. Thomas, ll. 2441-2443).

[Feragu said that he would show | through brute force that God sent | Mahomed to the earth].

Feragu dist: «Rollant, je sui ci por prover
«Que Machomet fu de Diex mesajer:
«Qui en lui croit puet sa arme salver.»
(*Entrée d'Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 4040-4042, cf. ed. Thomas, ll. 4040-4042)⁴⁰.

[Feragu said, 'Roland, I am here to prove | that Mahomet was the messenger of God; | He who believes in him can save his soul'].

We find in the *Entrée* developments of what is already in the *Pseudo-Turpin*. Bancourt, reading this in the context of actual Christian-Islam polemic, notes how the Paduan poet elaborates the discussion and stresses points of agreement between the two religions⁴¹:

La méthode du Pseudo-Turpin, celle surtout du poète de l'*Entrée d'Espagne*, où Roland fait d'abord état, à partir des Écritures, points de concordance entre les croyances et celle de Fernagu, est analogue à celle qui était historiquement en usage⁴².

There was an increased level of knowledge about Islam available two centuries after the *Chanson de Roland* and after the earliest redaction of the *Pseudo-Turpin* – but there is some knowledge expressed already in the pseudo-chronicle. Following Ferractus' declaration that there is only one God, Roland in the *Pseudo-Turpin* replies 'Verum dicis' [you speak truth] (Codex Calixtinus, ed. Meredith-Jones, p. 155). In the *Entrée* there is tension between the conventions of the *chansons de geste*, and the 'données' of the inherited narrative and the greater knowledge of Islam, but that knowledge is also taken in large part from his source.

⁴⁰ Discussed in Boscolo 2017: 171; see also Bancourt 1982: 383.

⁴¹ Bancourt 1982: 482.

⁴² Ivi: 492.

Despite the mutual respect demonstrated when Feragu refuses to convert there is no choice but death. In fact, Roland explicitly states this:

«Che Diex vos dunt grace avant la vespree
«De parvenir a la loi batiçee,
«O voirement a ceste moie spee
«Vos soit enchué l’arme dou cors sevre.»
(*Entrée d’Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 3489-3492, cf. Thomas, ll. 3489-3492)

[May God give you grace before nightfall | To come to the faith of baptism | Or truly, by this my sword | May your soul will be separated today from your body].

This differs from the *Pseudo-Turpin* in which Feragu simply states that the combat will determine which faith is true:

MS A: Tali igitur pacto, inquit Ferracutus, tecum pugnabo, quod si verax est haec fides quam asseris, ego victus sim, et si mendax est, quod tu victus sis (*Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. Meredith-Jones: 160, ll. i-iv).

MS Codex Calixtinus: Tali igitur pacto, inquit Ferracutus, tecum pugnabo, quod si verax est haec fides quam asseris, ego victus sim, et si mendax est, quod tu victus sis. Et sit genti victi iugiter opprobrium, victoris autem laus et decus in aevum (*Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. Meredith-Jones: 161, ll. xv-xviii).

Anglo-Norman translation of William de Briane:

‘Dount me combateray jo o toy’, fest Ferragu, ‘per teu covenaunt ke si la foy e la creaunce est voyre ke tu me me dys, je soye venqu, e si ele ne est, tu soys venqu (ed. Short: 54, ll. 823-825).

Johannes translation:

“Or nos ralons combatre”, dist Fernagu, “par tel covent que se cest foiz est veraie que tu afermes, que je soie veincuz, et se ele est fausse, que je veinque et au veincu soit reprochié toz jorz et a celui qui veintra soit loange et honor permenablement” (ed. Walpole: 155, chapter XL, ll.10-15).

[“Let us combat”, said Fernagu, under this agreement, “that if the faith which you affirm is true, that I shall be defeated, and if it is false, that I should vanquish you, and the vanquished will always be reproached, and to the winner may there be for ever praise and honour”].

Roland’s explicit threat in the *Entrée* could be seen as an admission of failure – he has not succeeded in converting Feragu, but, conversely, this also seems, as Boscolo suggests, to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of violence in «bringing together two opposing cultures»⁴³. Conversion is not to be brought about by

⁴³ Boscolo 2017: 32.

threats. In the second part of the text Roland will lead his opponents to conversion by very different means, through his own chivalric behaviour⁴⁴. Roland has, however, already exhibited considerable chivalry towards Feragu during their combat and utters his ultimatum in exasperation. Another factor here may be that there is a limit to the degree to which our poet can change the *donnés* of his source narrative. Feragu has to die, because his narrative is known⁴⁵. The religious difference is arguably emphasised, not lessened, by the humanity as Feragu's motivations parallel those of Roland. In the *Entrée* Roland acknowledges that Feragu is fighting for 'Machon' as he is for Jesus (l. 2129); Feragu goes to the Mosque before engaging with Roland (*Entrée* l. 2148), as a Christian would attend mass⁴⁶. The response of the poet certainly seems more nuanced later. Later in the text the Paduan is creating a narrative which can demonstrate a more nuanced attitude to the religious Other, when he is no longer responding to the *Pseudo-Turpin* but controlling his own narrative. It is not, however, that religion counts for nothing in the combat between Feragu and Roland, but that the Other is given a voice, building on the voice he has already been given in the *Pseudo-Turpin*. The Paduan takes a small point in his source and develops it in his own way.

3. Entrée d'Espagne / Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle / Fierabras

Our poet was well-versed in the *chanson de geste* tradition. Another *chanson de geste* known widely across Europe, including in Italy, is the *Chanson de Fierabras*, which also serves as a helpful intertext⁴⁷. To emphasise that we are talking about a whole network of intertexts, not just uni-directional influences, it is worth noting that *Fierabras* itself draws heavily on the *Pseudo-Turpin*, transforming Ferracutus into the chivalric 'bon sarrasin' Fierabras⁴⁸. As with his treatment of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, the Paduan does not just draw on motifs from this popular tale; he transforms them, and in doing so changes much of the ethos of his source. In *Fierabras*, as in the *Entrée*, there are tensions between Roland and Charlemagne⁴⁹. In both, Charlemagne goes so far as to strike his nephew. While

⁴⁴ See *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ See *Ibid.*; Boscolo notes a significant difference in the attitude of Roland to Saracen opponents in the second half of the *Entrée* to the first, characterising his attitude later in the text as 'wiser'. Compare the Italian *Spagne* where Feraù does convert: See *Spagna ferrarese*.

⁴⁶ See Bancourt 1982: 251. In the *Prise de Pampelune* Maozérís commends himself to Mahomet, as the Christian does to God (ll. 4687-4688).

⁴⁷ See Formisano 2003 and *Fierabbraccia*.

⁴⁸ See Ailes 1995.

⁴⁹ See Bradley-Cromeey 1993: 27-56.

in *Fierabras* Roland merely sulks Achilles-like in his tent, leaving his companion Oliver to take up the challenge thrown by Fierabras, the consequences are more dire in the *Entrée* where Roland rides off and ends up at a foreign, enemy, court. As Olivier in *Fierabras* claims to be the newly-knighted squire Garin, so in the *Entrée* Roland presents himself under the alias of the recently knighted Lionés, the son of a *fee* [fairy] and a ‘Saracen’ merchant. Such parallels echo across the centuries as the *Fierabras* narrative continues to be read, listened to and copied through the Middle Ages.

In both the *Entrée* and *Fierabras* we have a contrasting father-son pair, where a noble son is defeated and taken by the French and, in each case, the father resists conversion and is not to be trusted. Fierabras is converted, convicted of the rightness of the Christian cause by his defeat by Olivier, the male pattern of conversion of many a *chanson de geste*, one which our Paduan seems to reject because it is ineffective in practice⁵⁰. Sent by Charlemagne to strengthen positions at Pamplona, Roland finds himself, contrary to his mandate, in a full-blown battle in which Prince Isoré, son of King Malgeriz, is taken prisoner sent to Charlemagne, with the promise on Roland’s part, that he will be well treated (ll. 5500)⁵¹. Isoré is not forced to convert nor is there a simple assumption that he will do so. Rather, and more in keeping with actual practice, a prisoner exchange is arranged (ll. 6182-6205)⁵². The Christian Hestout, who has been taken prisoner, will be returned in exchange for Ysoré. Where in *Chanson de Fierabras* the innate nobility of Fierabras serves as a signal that he will convert, this is not the case here: Isoré does not convert in the *Entrée*, only in the sequel. In the *Entrée* Isoré may belong to the wrong side but can be trusted and is treated as a friend by Roland. Charlemagne himself trusts his prisoner sufficiently to allow him to be his own messenger and he returns to his father to arrange the release of Hestout. His father, Malgeriz, however, cannot be trusted and wants to keep his son without returning the Christian prisoner. Isoré is so honourable that he threatens to return to the Christians if his word is not kept, that is to voluntarily return to captivity⁵³. The situation is resolved by his mother, who intervenes with the customary good sense of mothers in *chansons de geste* (ll. 6390-6465), and

⁵⁰ On the rejection of violence as a route to conversion see Boscolo 2017: 32; the *Entrée* is not the only *chanson de geste* to cast some doubt on conversion as a result of being defeated in combat; this is already implied in the ‘conversion by the Holy Spirit’ of Otinel in the early thirteenth-century *Chanson d’Otinel*, itself a response to *Fierabras* – again we see a literary network in operation. This also demonstrates that it is not a simple matter of a different period – *Otinél* is only a little later than *Fierabras* – but rather of different writers responding in a particular way to the tradition; see Ailes 2015.

⁵¹ See Bancourt 1982: 321-322.

⁵² On prisoner exchange see Friedman 2021: 147-157.

⁵³ In real life King Jean II would do this during the Hundred Years. See Bancourt 1982: 323.

Malgeriz is persuaded to fulfil their side of the bargain. Isoré throughout behaves very correctly and chivalrously. If this shows, as Bancourt suggests, that both sides acknowledge the chivalry of the 'Other', then it is a very limited acknowledgement and Isoré and his mother are contrasted with his father⁵⁴.

Both texts demonstrate inter-generational tension with the younger knights showing up their elders in different ways, including, in *Fierabras*, the *senex amans topos*⁵⁵. In the *Entrée* the untrustworthy father who wants to keep his son and not release the prisoner, is paralleled by no less a character than Charlemagne, who determines to kill Ysoré when he has him in his power⁵⁶. This acknowledges the equal humanity of the Other, partly within the family dynamic with the Charlemagne-Roland pairing serving as the parallel to Maozérís-Ysoré: both Charlemagne and Maozérís want to execute their own prisoner while negotiating the freedom of the prisoner held by the other. In the *Entrée* both Ysoré's parents have what we would recognise as real parental affection for their son – something which was further developed in the *Prise de Pampelune*. This stands in contrast to both the *Chanson de Roland* and *Fierabras*. In the *Roland* Baligant's son, Malprimes, is killed, and there is some empathy for his loss; he is saddened, but there is no dwelling on it (ll. 3497-3506); its effect is to spur Baligant on to fight harder. In *Fierabras* there is little of the milk of human kindness in the relationship between Balan and his son. Balan's fear that Fierabras will convert when captured is human enough, but he expresses no fear that he will be killed. The closing scene of *Fierabras* explores the family dynamics: Balan is refusing baptism; while Fierabras pleads with him to convert, but eventually must concede that he will not and must be executed, his daughter Floripas urges Charlemagne to get on with executing him. The relationship between Ysoré and his father is very different. While the father has intentions to behave in an unworthy manner, his motivation is to keep his son with him. When his son is being held Maozeris fears for his safety

Dolant est de son fil que tient en seisine
 Carles l'empereor, que tant lui porte ahine;
 Crient q'il le fera pendre si cum le jor matine.
 (*Entrée d'Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 5595-5597, cf. ed. Thomas, ll. 5595-5597).

[He is sad on account of his son, whom Charles the emperor, who hates him very much, holds in captivity; they believe that he will have him hanged when morning comes].

Maozérís' fears are, as have seen, justifiable as Charlemagne does indeed intend to hang Ysoré. Ysoré's mother also suffers genuine fear and anxiety for her son (ll.

⁵⁴ See *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See Ailes 2002b.

⁵⁶ On this parallel see Bancourt 1982: 321.

5598 ff.). Her sorrow is expressed in rhetorical, emotive lines of direct speech, preceded by the physical expression of her sorrow as she wrings her hands and scratches her own face⁵⁷:

Sor tut maine grant duel sa fame la roïne;
 Ses blanches mains destort e sa façe gratine.
 «Fil Ysoré», ce dit la Saraçine,
 «Se m'estes mort, huei la mort me termine:
 «Par vos morai, mon planet le destine.
 (*Entrée d'Espagne*, ed. Modena, ll. 5598-5602, Thomas, ll. 5598-5602)

[His wife, the queen shows great sorrow, above all things. | She wrings her white hands and scratches her face | "Son Ysoré", said the Saracen woman | "If you are killed, today death finishes me; | on account of you I will die, my fate determines it"].

She goes on to blame Marsile and Feragu for this situation having developed. This awareness of suffering in the text is not limited to the main players – the *laisse* just quoted begins with a description of general mourning among the people, with specific reference to those orphaned and widowed (ll. 5589-5592). Yet, this opens with a characterisation of them as «la pute gient Paine» [the wicked pagan people] (l. 5589) – so the poet is holding together a rejection of the enemy, and a sympathy for, or at least awareness of, their human suffering. Indeed, contrary to the general characterisation of the *chanson de geste* as celebrating war and serving as propaganda for a crusading ideology, the poem not only highlights, as Boscolo states, the inefficacy of violence to bring about conversion, it also demonstrates the suffering of the vulnerable in times of war – on both sides.

The Paduan poet is able to really exploit and develop what he finds in the wider *chanson de geste* tradition, which includes depictions of a Charlemagne who is not always a model king. In Charlemagne's determination to kill Ysoré there are also echoes of *Renaut de Montauban*, where Charlemagne determines to hang Renaut's brother when he has him in his power, provoking division among his barons. In the *Entrée* Charlemagne's intentions towards Ysoré similarly divide the French, with Olivier pronouncing that «le roi fait vilanie» [the king is doing a wicked thing] (l. 5764). On the other hand, Roland in the *Entrée*, like the four brothers in *Renaut*, is urged to submit to the proper authority of Charlemagne⁵⁸. It takes the intervention of Ogier and Naymon to appease the emperor.

In the *Entrée* Roland is able to have genuine friendships with non-Christians, not just Ysoré, but also Baudor the merchant, and Samson, son of the Sultan of Persia. There is in particular ample evidence of mutual respect between Ysoré and

⁵⁷ On these physical expressions of sorrow see Burrow 2004: 39-42.

⁵⁸ Bradley-Cromeley 1983: 32 «celui a tort qui son droit cuntrelie» (l. 5777) – glossed by Bradley-Cromeley as «he who resists his rightful authority is in error».

Roland, where that respect has tangible evidence in the gift of a horse, sent from Ysoré to Roland⁵⁹.

Read intertextually with *Fierabras* the relationships between Christian and Saracen and between father and son are striking. *Fierabras* is an example of the intolerance of alterity with the Others either being assimilated, through conversion, or annihilated. In the *Entrée* both Ysoré and his father resist conversion and in this text, though not, as discussed below, in its sequel, are allowed to remain faithful to their own beliefs.

4. *The Prise de Pampelune – a continuation of the Entrée*

The characters of Ysoré and his father, Maozérís, are developed in its continuation, the *Prise de Pampleune*, from the characterisation already established in the *Entrée*, including Maozérís' ability to behave treacherously⁶⁰. In this sequel both agree to be baptised following the fall of Pamplona, though Maozérís initially demands that in return he is rewarded by being admitted to the fellowship of the twelve peers, presented as something like an Order of Chivalry. As this would require one of the peers leaving the 'order' (l. 547) they resist this demand. Bancourt points out that they do not resist because Maozérís is considered unworthy, despite the fact he has not been baptised; however, there is no thought in the text that he could become one of the peers before his baptism: entry into Christian society in any way does depend on the baptism which is supposed to take place. On the eve of the intended baptism, Charlemagne hosts a feast for his would-be converts. After the feast, the father and son retire to the same chamber. Here Maozérís finds himself unable to sleep, brooding on Roland's refusal to admit him as a 'compeignon' (l. 619), but also expressing a strong sense of guilt that he is betraying his gods and his own lord, faithfulness being a key secular and religious virtue in medieval narrative⁶¹:

Entra roi Maoçeris, qui maint suspir jetoit
 Pour ce que à compeignon Rolland le refusoit :
 Bien disoit entre soi que ancor se venjeroit [...]
 Ne cuidant qu'aucun home oïst ce qu'il disoit :
 'Ay las moi', fesoit il, 'ceitis e maleoit!
 Quant guerpi ay_me diés, l'en tuer me devoit.
 Si ay gerpi mien sire [...]'
 (*Prise de Pampelune*, ed. Di Ninni, ll. 618-619, 629-632; ed. Mussafia, same
 line numbers)

⁵⁹ On the gift see Bancourt 1982: 318.

⁶⁰ See Bancourt 1982: 285.

⁶¹ On renegade converts see Bancourt 1982: 301-302.

[King Maoçeris entered, sighing heavily, | Because Roland refused him as a companion: | he said to himself that he would yet take revenge [...] | not thinking that anyone heard what he said | 'Alas,' he said, ' I am wretched and accursed | when I gave up my gods, I should have been killed | Since I have given up my lord...'].

The narrator here focusses on the very human, but negative, desire for vengeance for hurt pride (not perhaps seen quite as negatively in the fourteenth century as in the twenty-first), but the monologue itself focusses on the way he is tormented at having abandoned first his God and secondly his lord; the rejection by Roland is only a small part of it. While pride is a factor it is not the only one and Bancourt's description of this scene as «le refus de conversion par orgueil», is less nuanced than the text itself⁶². Again, the not-converted Saracen is given a voice for us to hear his real emotional suffering.

Niccolò has models to draw on in his depiction of the Saracen refusing to convert, but what he does with it, demonstrating the agony of the would-be convert, is quite unique.

Maozérís in the end decides that he cannot go through with this conversion, but he is also aware that leaving his son Ysoré in the Christian camp could lead to very negative consequences for his own side. It is then that we see him really torn between his different loyalties and his affection for his son. As Bancourt has acknowledged, the poet is more interested in the *converti déloyal* than the one who goes through with conversion⁶³. There is more drama here in the torment of the father than in the conversion of the son. The 'Saracen' father is given a voice by the poet as the dilemma is articulated in monologue: Maozérís decides he must kill his own son, then turns away, unable to bring himself to do so, turning back again from the door to kill him, and then again turning away. In a passage apparently owing much to romance modes, the monologue is interspersed with description of the father's emotions as we are told that «le cuer li entendri» (l. 712 – his heart became tender towards him); he looks at his son with tears pouring down his face (l. 723). He prays that his son will follow him. After Maozérís leaves, the narrator uses negative terms to describe him, and later in the text he is castigated for having renounced both Mohamet and Jesus. There is a strong tension between competing loyalties.

The poet's attitude to the father in this scene and thereafter is not at all clear-cut. He is a loving father and a vassal with a genuine bond to his lord Marsile. Yet after his decision not to remain with the Christians he is called a «roi traïtour», one who has betrayed both his overlord and his God(s). In the strength of his familial bond and in his desire to be loyal he fulfils many of the ideals of a Christian knight – but having once made the decision to convert he then reneges and thus is doubly unfaithful.

⁶² Ivi: 547.

⁶³ Bancourt 1982: 556.

The attitude to Ysoré, who in this text converts, is, on the other hand, unambiguous. There is straightforward approval. One way of reading this is as a response to the *Entrée* where the ‘*bon sarrasin*’ remained unconverted. It is as though it is not appropriate for Ysoré to remain unconverted at the end of the first text⁶⁴. On the other hand the Christian Other remains human. This narrative of conversion strongly suggests that the humanising of the Other does not go with a diminution of the importance of religion in the later texts.

Conclusion

What we can say with certainty is that for these two authors there is nuance and complexity in their presentation of the religious (Saracen) Other, but these two Franco-Italian texts, as they have come down to us, are nevertheless very different. Both incorporate some elements of the literary tradition. In each case they respond to that tradition as well as to the cultural context of their creation. The *Entrée* retains much of its Old French and Latin sources, but also transforms them; additions to the description of Feragu, and the creation of the father-son duo, Maozeris-Ysoré, offer opportunities to emphasise that the religious Other is still in many ways like us. Nor is this awareness of the humanity of the enemy restricted to these male figures; one of the most moving figures is Ysoré’s mother, double ‘othered’ as both female and Saracen, yet suffering at the loss of her son, and also playing the same role in appeasing her husband as Ogier and Naimon play in relation to Charlemagne.

Both texts are relatively late in the *chanson de geste* tradition, and date and historical context certainly have some impact on the depiction of the ‘Saracen’ Other; there would have been what Boscolo calls «a different spirit permeating the age in which the poem was written», as well as, of course, considerably more information about the actual practices of Islam being available two centuries after the *Chanson de Roland*⁶⁵. It is not, however, a simple matter, as has been suggested in the past, of later texts acknowledging more the shared chivalry of each side and the religious division becoming less important⁶⁶. For Bancourt «les différences de religion ne comptent plus»⁶⁷. I would argue, rather, that religion, including conversion, remains a major focus in both texts. The outcome of the combat between Feragu and Roland in the *Entrée* explicitly confirms the truth of the

⁶⁴ One caveat here is that the extant text has substantial lacunae so we lack some of the narrative.

⁶⁵ Boscolo 2017: 155. Jones 2002: 637 writes of a «division moins nette entre les représentants des deux cultures», as the end point of a process of gradual development.

⁶⁶ Bancourt 1982: 324.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; see also p. IV: «nous avons essayé de définir [...] une évolution de l’image du Sarrasin épique».

Christian faith: it remains accepted that Christians are right and pagans are wrong, but Christians are not always good and the non-Christian may be exemplary.

I suggested earlier that the *Pseudo-Turpin* narrative determines the fate of Ferragu – he has to die, because in the known narrative he does die. It is, however, striking, on the other hand, that a number of the *chansons de geste* which have ‘*bon sarrasins*’, show evidence of drawing upon the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, whether *Fierabras* where the noble Other does convert, or the *Chevalerie Ogier* where Karaeus is defeated but permitted to continue to live⁶⁸. The *Pseudo-Turpin* offers later texts different models of interaction between Christian and non-Christian, which later texts enter into dialogue with. The *Pseudo-Turpin* is, thus, foundational to understanding our texts of two centuries later. At the same time our two Franco-Italian texts are able to dialogue with each other, or at least the *Prise* can offer a response to the *Entrée*, one which, though perhaps less willing to leave a noble ‘Saracen’ unconverted, still accepts the humanity of the religious Other.

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II. Texts

L'Entrée d'Espagne

(ed. Thomas)

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⁶⁸ The *Pseudo-Turpin* also features a Saracen, Agolandus, who in the end refuses conversion because he sees in the court of Charlemagne a lack of Christian charity – though like Ferragu, Agolandus in the end must die. See Ailes 2012b: 13.

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