Rebecca Anne Taylor

‘ES TU DE PAENISME U DE CRESTIËNTÉ?’: REPRESENTATIONS OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE EARLIEST *CHANSONS DE GESTE*

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

Central European University

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September 2017

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by

Rebecca Anne Taylor

(United States of America)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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External Reader

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I, the undersigned, **Rebecca Anne Taylor**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 30 September 2017

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the literary representations of religious difference between Christians and Muslims in the earliest twelfth-century Old French *chansons de geste*: *La Chanson de Roland*, *La Chanson de Guillaume*, and *Gormond et Isembart*. Scholarship has tended to focus on a single *chanson* or on the evolution of the representations, either in the genre at large or comparatively. Novel approaches favor postcolonial readings, tracing the medieval roots of racism, violence, and intolerance. This study maintains that the primary form of difference in these texts is religion. Accordingly, the first chapter considers alternative forms of difference (racial/physical and ethnic/cultural), ultimately showing that alterity is principally imagined and reinforced through religion. The second chapter turns to how the representations both correspond to and deviate from medieval Christian perceptions of Islam and Muslims. The final chapter examines how religious difference is intensified and legitimized through violence, holy war, conversion, and martyrdom. Though foremost an analysis of the representations of religious difference in the three earliest *chansons de geste*, the thesis situates these texts within the broader medieval dialogue between Christians and Muslims and against the backdrop of Crusader ideology.

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Above all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Marianne Sághy, who graciously provided supervision during her own sabbatical and after I postponed my thesis submission. I am particularly grateful for her patience, her positivity, and her support of my every decision. I am also grateful to Dr. Tivadar Palágyi of Eötvös Loránd University for his suggestions on research and feedback on my work and to Dr. Andreea Marculescu, my former French professor and undergraduate honors thesis supervisor, who is herself an alumna of the CEU Department of Medieval Studies and who encouraged me to come to CEU in the first place.

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Preliminary Note on Editions and Translations

All textual references in this thesis are to the Old French originals (i.e., not in modern French or English translation). For *Gormont et Isembart*, I have relied solely on the Old French. In the cases of *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Chanson de Guillaume*, I have used the bilingual, parallel-text critical editions with the modern French translations facing the Old French texts. This aided my initial comprehension, as my knowledge derives exclusively from independent studies in the language while at Central European University and, previously, at the University of California, Irvine. My interpretation of the texts in this thesis is based exclusively on the Old French versions, as I have found that the modern French translations hypostatize and politicize certain concepts, most notably "race" as "gent."

I have included English translations from the Old French for the accessibility of the texts to my readers. I am grateful to Dr. Tivadar Palágyi of Eötvös Loránd University for his corrections of my translations. All translations—and remaining mistakes—are my own.

Introduction

Christian-Muslim Relations and the *Chansons de Geste*

This thesis seeks to uncover the representations of the pagan Saracens and the logic of religious difference in the earliest *chansons de geste* through the lenses of the Christian Franks, whose side the poets of the *chansons de geste* favor.[1] In focusing on representations of religious difference, one may well ask why I have not preferred theological or historical texts, which are the more obvious starting points. But that is precisely the reason I have preferred literary texts. As Lynn Tarte Ramey writes, "In medieval French texts, many studies overlook a vast body of sources. Much work on medieval attitudes toward Islam neglects literary sources, preferring historical texts, ecclesiastical writing, and sermons." [2] As a medievalist and a literary comparatist by training, I think it is fruitful to examine texts outside the central theological or doctrinal debates between Christianity and Islam—that is, outside apologetic and polemical texts—and look at how and to what varying effects literature of the period handles these same issues.

Part of the value of medieval literature and its relevance in the field of Christian-Muslim relations is that it plays a dual role. On one hand, the representations of Christians and Muslims reflect historical interactions and can illuminate wider cultural preoccupations because these issues have reached the domain of fiction. On the other hand, protected by the sacred bond of fiction, one should not assume that the *chansons de geste* were responsible for the formation of Christian-Muslim antagonism. This is not to deny the widespread literary and cultural impact

[1] In the *chansons de geste*, Muslims are referred to as "pagans" (*paien*) and "Saracens" (*sarrazins*) interchangeably, but never as "Muslims" as such. The term "Christians (*chrestiens*) are equally referred to as "franceis" ("Franks"). I will discuss their interchangeability in greater detail in the first chapter.
[2] Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 4.

of the *chansons de geste*, but to isolate them from *longue durée* readings of the "backward" or "dark" Middle Ages and to read them instead in their own contexts.[3]

Given the delicate nature of this subject, I would like to emphasize that the representations of Christianity and Islam in the texts I deal with do not necessarily reflect my own beliefs, nor do I expect the same of my readers. In addition, it is important to remember that the representations of religion within the texts do not necessarily correspond to the religions as they are (or claim to be). Rather, part of the object of this study is to uncover the discrepancies between the literary representations and the religions themselves, considering whether these discrepancies arise from medieval misunderstandings or from the ambiguous border between history and fiction in the *chansons de geste*. Furthermore, in reopening the discussion of religion within the *chansons de geste*, I am not seeking to deepen or create new rifts on either side of the confessional divide, but on the contrary, to attempt a reasoned discussion of literary texts that escapes siding conclusively. This is an additional benefit of working with literature as opposed to theological texts.

In concentrating on Old French (and thereby pro-Christian) texts, it may be objected that I am favoring a side. To this I would give two answers: first, my literary and linguistic training so far only permits serious consideration of Western or Romance sources. Second, despite my rudimentary background in Arabic and proposed concentration on Old French texts, I have provided selective extratextual references to refutations and context from Islamic sources, both to enrich understanding of polemics and to show that these Christian texts did

[3] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2015), xiii: "My argument…[is] not that continuities between past and present do not exist, but that context and contingency can offer us a testing ground for our projections of the future into the past, helping us to become more critical of the continuities we create." See also ibid, 4-5: "Regardless of their different periodizations, all these quests for the origins of European intolerance have much in common. All take the long view, seeking to establish a continuity between the hatreds of long ago and those of the here and now. This focus on the *longue durée* means that events are read less within their local contexts than according to a teleology leading, more or less explicitly, to the Holocaust…. The refutation of this widespread notion that we can best understand intolerance by stressing the fundamental continuity between collective systems of thought across historical time, or in this case across one thousand years, is and overarching goal of the present work."

not exist in a vacuum, but were in fact part of a dialogue between the two religions. In addition, in examining representations of religion and doing so within the medium of literature, the aim is not to elevate or demonize either religion, but to show how they are (mis)represented in the texts, to show how that fits into the broader sphere of Christian-Muslim relations, and lastly to consider our own potential in contemporary interreligious dialogue in light of these fascinating, if problematic, medieval texts.

The Earliest *Chansons de geste*

This section will briefly familiarize the reader with the genre of the *chansons de geste*: their definition, form, and content. It will then turn to the corpus of this thesis: the three earliest *chansons de geste*, giving an essential overview of their manuscripts, plots, and historical models, and more importantly, showing why these three texts are particularly valuable in the consideration of religious difference between Christians and Muslims in the medieval French context.

Genre: Definition, Form, and Content

The definition, form, and content of the *chansons de geste* are uncontested in recent scholarship, but the acknowledgment of generic coherence remains fundamental to their interpretation. For this reason, I will situate my corpus within the wider framework of epic texts.[4] First, the *chansons de geste* are written in Old French, which is in fact a set of distinct dialects rather than a single language with regional variants as one might characterize the modern metropolitan French language.[5] Two of the *chansons de geste* examined herein (*La*

[4] Among the best and most succinct introductions to the genre are Michel Zink, "Les chansons de geste" in *Introduction à la littérature française du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1993), 29-44; Zink's chapter of the same title, "Les chansons de geste," in *Littérature française du Moyen Age* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), 71-99, and Finn E. Sinclair, "The *chanson de geste*," in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, eds. William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond, and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 28-37.

[5] William W. Kibler, *An Introduction to Old French* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1984), xxiii: "The language generally known today as Old French was in actuality a series of more or less distinct

Chanson de Roland and *La Chanson de Guillaume*) are written in Anglo-Norman, while the third (*Gormont et Isembart*) is written in a central dialect, perhaps of the Loire region.[6]

The *chansons de geste* ("songs of deeds") are named as such for their oral element; they did not begin as written texts, but as oral legends that were later expanded upon and canonized in written form.[7] "Geste," from the Latin *res gesta*, refers to the epic preoccupation with heroic deeds, which often finds expression in the conflict between the French (Christians) and Muslims, who are called "pagans" and "Saracens" in the texts for reasons which I will later examine.[8] The *chansons de geste* I will examine are anonymous.[9]

Concerning their poetic form, the verses of the *La Chanson de Roland* and of *La Chanson de Guillaume* are decasyllabic, while those of *Gormont et Isembart* are octosyllabic.[10] The verses of all three *chansons de geste* are then organized into stanzas called *laisses*, which are of varying lengths. This thesis will primarily analyze individual verses and their components (abbreviated v. for a single verse and vv. for two or more verses), but does refer the reader to entire *laisses* on occasion.

The medieval French poet Jean Bodel classified medieval literature into three *matières*; the first, *la matière de France*, corresponds to the *chansons de geste*.[11] The *chansons de geste*

stages of several highly differentiated dialects current from the ninth century until the late fifteenth century. It was referred to by contemporary writers as *romanz* or *lingua romana rustica* to distinguish it from the great cultural language of the Middle Ages, Latin or *lingua Latina*." See also Mireille Huchon, *Histoire de la langue française* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2002).

[6] Ian Short, ed. *La Chanson de Roland* (Paris: Librairie Generale Francaise and Le Livre de Poche, 1990), 9; François Suard, ed. *La Chanson de Guillaume* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française and Le Livre de Poche, 2008), 27; Andrea Ghidoni, "La lingua del poema," *Gormund et Isembart*, ed. Ghidoni (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2013), 133-44.

[7] Joseph J. Duggan, "La théorie de la composition orale des chansons de geste : les faits et les interprétations," *Olifant* 8, no. 3 (1981): 299-304; William Calin, "L'épopée dite vivante : Réflexions sur le prétendu caractère oral des chansons de geste," *Olifant* 8, no. 3 (1981): 227-237, and Theodore M. Andersson, "The Doctrine of Oral Tradition in the Chanson de Geste and Saga," *Scandinavian Studies* 34, no. 4 (1962): 219-36.

[8] "Geste," *Trésor de la langue française*; "gesta," *Database of Latin Dictionaries*; Sinclair, "The *chanson de geste*," 28.

[9] It is worth pointing out that not all the *chansons de geste* are anonymous, particularly in the case of the later texts.

[10] Catherine M. Jones, "Chansons de geste—Dates and Versification, *An Introduction to the Chansons de geste* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2014), 150-51.

[11] Jean Bodel divided medieval literature into three matters in his own *chanson de geste*, *La Chanson de Saisnes*: "Ne sont que .III. matieres a nul home antandant: De France e de Bretaigne e de Rome la grant": "There are but three matters: Of France and of Britain and of Rome the great." See "Jean Bodel," in Hasenohr and Zink, 748-51.

are further divided into epic cycles: *La Chanson de Roland* is from the *geste du roi*, concerning the deeds of the Emperor Charlemagne and his vassals. The saintly and heroic figure of Guillaume inspired an eponymous heroic cycle (*le cycle de Guillaume* or *la geste de Garin de Monglane*). However, *La Chanson de Guillaume* is not included in modern editions of *le cycle de Guillaume*, which are later texts based on *La Chanson de Guillaume*.[12] *Gormont et Isembart* is from the *cycle des vassaux révoltés* (also known as *la geste de Doon de Mayence*), which feature characters (such as Isembart) who rebel against Christianity and the Frankish kingdom.[13]

Corpus: The Earliest *Chansons de Geste*

My corpus consists of the three *chansons de geste* certainly composed before 1150. They are therefore the oldest of the genre.[14] The early date of these three texts is important for several reasons. As part of the *matière de France*, they are concerned with establishing Christian-Frankish collective identity, which is imagined by means of the alterity of the pagan-Saracens, as the first chapter will show. In addition, there is a generic difference between the *chansons de geste* and the *romans* in the representations of the pagan Saracens. The epic genre, the genre of the *chansons de geste*, facilitates the creation of religious Others and simultaneously imagines and reinforces Christian-Frankish identity. While the *chansons de geste* regularly feature battles for the defense of Christianity and a champion

[12] On the influence of *La Chanson de Guillaume* upon *Le Cycle de Guillaume*, see Dominque Boutet, "Près des origines: la Chanson de Guillaume," in "Introduction," *Le Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, ed. Boutet (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1996), 20-21. Boutet's edition of *Le Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* is comprised of the following individual *chansons*: *Les enfances Guillaume, Le Couronnement de Louis, Le Charroi de Nimes, La Prise d'Orange, Les Enfances Vivien, La chevalerie Vivien, Aliscans, La Bataille loquifer, Le moniage Rainouart*, and *Le Moniage Guillaume*, all of which are from the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

[13] Michel Zink, "Les chansons de geste," *Littérature française du moyen âge*, 78-82.

[14] Geneviève Hasenohr and Michel Zink, "Chansons de geste," in *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises : Le Moyen Age* (Paris: Fayard, 1964), 239: "On n'accorde qu'a trois textes (*Roland, Guillaume, Gormont et Isembart*) une date de composition surement antérieure à 1150 ; le *Roland* d'Oxford pourrait tout au plus remonter à la fin du XIe siècle. Or la bataille de Roncevaux a eu lieu en 778; Guillaume, qui reçut en 790 le comté de Toulouse, mourut à Gellone en 812; un débarquement normand en 881 a dû fournir le thème de *Gormont*."

who leads the Christian army against the pagans, the *romans* do not emphasize the superiority of Christianity and the stakes of its defense to such a degree.

I have concentrated exclusively on the earliest *chansons de geste* to have a close examination of some of the foundational texts of medieval French literature rather than to witness how the relationship between Christians and Muslims developed in this context or comparatively across time, space, and genre, both of which I think have been done satisfactorily.[15] In other words, it is unsurprising that later texts should take the relationship between Christians and Muslims as their subject matter; what is more interesting is to consider the context of the early texts, from which later representations evolved. Certainly, the early *chansons de geste* were not innovators of Christian-Muslim antagonism, but as I will emphasize throughout my thesis, they offer an important bridge between non-Romance and/or extraliterary Christian-Muslim theological debates and the adoption of these issues in vernacular literary texts, which in turn form part of the birth of a new linguistic, cultural, and later national tradition.

The earliest *chanson de geste* is *La Chanson de Roland*, whose oldest extant version is the Bodleian Library's MS Digby 23 from 1098, though the original transcribed epic was from the first half of the eleventh century.[16] *La Chanson de Guillaume* is "à peine plus récente que la *Chanson de Roland*," dating from circa 1140 and preserved in the British Library's MS Additional 38663 from the thirteenth century.[17] *Gormont et Isembart* survives in a fragment of the final 661 verses (MS II) in the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels. Scholars have reconstructed the rest of the plot of *Gormont et Isembart* due to its recording in the late

[15] Ramey's *Christian, Saracen, and Genre in Medieval French Literature* is a good starting point for an overview of the relationship between Christians and Saracens in medieval French literature and how the evolution of literary depictions corresponds both to generic differences and to cultural changes. For the *chansons de geste* specifically, see Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the* Chansons de geste (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1984).
[16] Zink, "Les chansons de geste," 71.
[17] Ibid, 81.

eleventh-century chronicle by Hariulf d'Ou, a monk of the Abbey of Saint-Riquier; a passage in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*; a summary in Philippe Mousket's *Chronique rimée,* and lastly to its translation and adaptation in the fifteenth-century German prose romance *Loher und Maller*.[18]

The *Chansons de Geste*: Historical Models

As previously noted, the *chansons de geste* glorify heroic battles and memorable victories. These battles are historical events, but are transformed from their historical models to battles between Christians and Saracens. *La Chanson de Roland* is based on the Battle of Roncevaux in 778, in which the Basque guerilla defeated the rearguard of the Emperor Charlemagne following his invasion of Spain. Among the historical sources for the Battle of Roncevaux are the *Annales regni Francorum* and the *Vita Karoli Magni* of Einhard; the Arab historian Ibn Al-Athir also later wrote of the battle in the thirteenth century, though his version differs.[19] In the written epic, however, the battle is between Charlemagne's army and the Saracens.

In his edition of *La Chanson de Guillaume*, François Suard writes that the *chanson* has two historical models: a battle in 793 and the death of the Count Vivien of Tours in 851 following a series of battles between Charles the Bald and the Bretons.[20] In addition, Guillaume himself is a historical figure: Saint William of Gellone (also known as Saint William of Orange), who was a relative of Charlemagne, the second duke of Toulouse, and the founder of the Abbaye-Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert.[21] The written epic most clearly follows the first

[18] Dominique Boutet, "Les chansons de geste et l'affermissement du pouvoir royal," *Annales. Histoires, Sciences Sociales* 37, no. 1 (1982): 6.
[19] Zink, quoted in Ian Short, "Introduction," *La Chanson de Roland*, 8.
[20] Suard, "Introduction," *La Chanson de Guillaume*, 21-3.
[21] The historical figure—i.e., Saint William—is the subject of his own hagiography, the *Vita Sancti Willelmi*. See Alice M. Colby-Hall's edition and translation: "*Vita Sancti Willelmi"*: *Fondateur de l'Abbaye de Gellone; Edition et traduction du texte médiéval d'après le manuscrit de l'Abbaye de Saint Guilhem-le-Désert* (Montpellier: Cahier d'arts et traditions rurales, 2014).

historical model in that it focuses on the battle between Guillaume and the Saracens who invade France under King Deramed.

The historical events that *Gormont et Isembart* commemorate are the Viking burning of the Abbaye-de-Saint-Riquier and the subsequent Battle of Saucourt between Louis III and the Vikings in 881.[22] Once again, in the written epic, the historical model is visible, but the enemy is transformed into pagans or Saracens.

In all three cases, the opponents to the Christians-Franks do not retain their communal, historical origins, but are transformed into "paien" or "sarrazin" and hail from numerous lands. As the first chapter will address, the problem is not that the historical subjects are lost; after all, the *chansons de geste* are fiction and need not correspond to their historical subjects. The problem is that a variety of foreigners—and more importantly of Muslims—are clustered as "paien" and "sarrazin."

A further reason for preferring the earliest *chansons de geste* is what I have called temporal displacement and its connection to generic difference. By this, I mean that the *chansons de geste*, though they began to be transcribed in the first half of the twelfth century, are based on the events of earlier centuries. Temporal displacement is not universally characteristic of all texts in the genre, notably the later *chansons de geste*, but is important in the case of the earlier texts in which there is a more unified portrayal of the Saracens. Generic difference is already well established in scholarship; however, I would like to stress that the representation of the Saracens differs between *the chansons de geste* and the *romans* and between the earlier and later *chansons de geste* as well.[23] But temporal displacement refers not only to the delay between the events they depict and the written versions; the texts are also

[22] Ghidoni, "Introduzione," *Gormund e Isembart*, 5-48.
[23] William Wistar Comfort, "The Essential Difference between a Chanson de Geste and a Roman d'Aventure." *PLMA* 19, no. 1 (1901): 64-74. Ramey's *Christian, Saracen, and Genre* offers a more recent examination of generic difference and its effect upon the literary representations of Christians and Saracens.

"chansons"; there was an oral element to them, just as with other epics. In that respect, temporal displacement is as much a problem of transmission as it is of genre.[24]

The problem of the origins of the chansons de geste and "le problème générale posé par les rapports entre l'histoire carolingienne et la matière épique" have been adequately addressed over the past century.[25] I am not reviving the issue or challenging the existing positions, simply bringing it to my reader's attention as it will have important ramifications later in the thesis.[26]

Methodology

The greatest methodological problem I face is giving balance to the three texts, not because of preference or aptitude, but because of the texts themselves. Though all three texts are written in dialects of Old French, date from the same period, and take as their subject battles between Christians and Saracens, all of which reasons permit the three to be considered together and comparatively, not all have the same focus on individual issues: for instance, holy war is most pronounced in *La Chanson de Roland*, while it is present but more subdued in *La Chanson de Guillaume* and *Gormont et Isembart*. In addition, there is a disparity in existing scholarship: *La Chanson de Roland* has been the subject of a wealth of discussion, from its canonization as the French national epic in the nineteenth century to more recent postcolonial, critical race theory, and feminist readings.[27] *La Chanson de Guillaume* and *Gormont et*

[24] The issue of temporal displacement will return in Chapter 3, wherein I will argue that in the case of the earliest *chansons de geste*, and especially in *La Chanson de Roland*, the temporal displacement between historical event, oral *chanson*, and transcribed *chanson* facilitates the poets' treatment of the idea of holy war, incorporating contemporary crusader ideology, whether purposefully or not, by placing it in a well-known and accepted legendary-historical context.

[25] Grace Frank, "Historical Elements in the Chansons de Geste," *Speculum* 14, no. 2 (1939): 209-14; Pierre Le Gentil, "Les Chansons de geste et le problème des origines," *Revue d'histoire litteraire de la France* 70, no. 5/6 (1970): 992-1006; Urban T. Holmes, Jr., "The Post-Bédier Theories on the Origins of the *Chansons de Geste*" *Speculum* 30, no. 1 (1955): 51-77; Dominique Boutet, "La politique et l'histoire dans les chansons de geste," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 31, no. 6 (1976): 1119-30.

[26] The issue of temporal displacement will be particularly relevant in the section on holy war and the possible influence of Crusader ideology: see Chapter 3, section 2.

[27] On the connection between the *chansons de geste* and nationalism, and in particular, the nineteenth-century canonization of *La Chanson de Roland* as the French national epic, see David Aberbach, "European National Poetry, Islam, and the Defeat of the Medieval Church," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 4 (2012): especially 604-8; Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in *La Chanson*

Isembart, by contrast, are more sparsely addressed in scholarship. At the same time, it would be amiss to examine religious difference in the *chansons de geste* without referring to *La Chanson de Roland*. Finally, as previously stated, *Gormont et Isembart* has the further problem of being a fragment; although scholars have reconstructed the plot, a reconstruction does not permit the same depth of analysis as a complete text.

For these reasons, the thesis will inevitably lean toward the *Chanson de Roland* in quantitative terms, but will make every effort to give as much representation as possible towards *La Chanson de Guillaume* and *Gormont et Isembart*, which I hold are not less important because of their lesser fame.

Thesis Structure

This thesis will differ from existing scholarship because of its selection of texts and its emphasis on religion as the primary form of difference. Though the three texts have been read together, they have not yet been read in isolation.[28] Studies have concentrated on a single *chanson* or on the evolution of the representations of Christians and Saracens, either in the genre at large or comparatively beyond medieval French literature. This thesis proposes not to trace the evolution, but to establish and to compare the centrality of religion in the three earliest texts, unveiling the construction of the Other on a religious basis.

In claiming that my thesis differs because of its emphasis on religion, I am not suggesting that the discussion of religion is absent in scholarship. Instead, the thesis marks a departure from recent, prevalent interpretations based on critical theory. Rather than insisting on biological differences that constitute a proto-version of racism or that the us-them opposition between the Christians and Saracens foreshadows the relationship between colonizer and

de Roland," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 79-111 and idem, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 2006), 15.

[28] Ramey's *Christian, Saracen, and Genre* is perhaps the closest in terms of texts represented (she discusses all three *chansons*), but as hers is a study of genre as much as it is an examination of the representations of Christians and Saracens, she focuses on additional texts, which is perfectly valid.

colonized, the thesis shows how religious difference is the principal form of difference in the medieval French context. The subtitle of this thesis ("Religious Difference") implies a normative deviation; hence, this thesis will focus on the representations of the pagan Saracens, though in order to do so and for the sake of context, it must equally compare those of the Christian Franks.

The first chapter will deal with the imagination of religious difference. Both the battle setting and the poems themselves create a binary, us-them opposition between the Christian Franks and the pagan Saracens. The opposition simultaneously equates the two sides and yet insists on the alterity of the latter, revealing that religion takes precedence over other forms of difference (including biological, racial, ethnic, and cultural) and that the binary opposition facilitates the imagination of the collective identity of the Christian Franks.

The second chapter provides a background on Christian-Muslim relations in the Western Middle Ages in order to set the stage for the *chansons de geste*, not to claim a direct link to Christian-Muslim polemics, but an ideological continuity to these debates and a wider cultural consciousness of religious difference. It then turns to specific textual examples of the (mis)representation of Islamic beliefs, considering the reasons for the substantial erroneous portrayals. Finally, it considers where the *chansons de geste* lie on the border between fiction and history, or to what extent the misconceptions of Islam and of Muslims correspond to medieval Christian perceptions of the same.

The third chapter explores the intensification of religious difference. It first dissociates the term "violence" from modern associations, then turns to how violence is perpetrated and legitimated in the Christian agenda against the Saracens. It addresses the stakes of the holy war and how it can be compared to and must be distinguished from the holy wars of the Crusades. It then explores the potential of crossing the otherwise insurmountable binary of Christian-Saracen through conversion. The chapter concludes with the ideal of martyrdom, both for

Christianity and for the France, or how Christian martyrdom fulfills Christian-Frankish identity, simultaneously at the expense and by means of the pagan Saracens.

Chapter 1—The Imagination of Religious Difference: Collective Identity, Mirror Images, and Alterity

In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, upon meeting an unknown vassal, Guillaume's uncle Bertram asks, "Chevaler, sire, [...] / Es tu de paenisme u de crestïenté ?"[29] The vassal's response is equally telling: "Jo crei tres ben en Dé."[30] As this greeting suggests, identity and differentiation between identities in the *chansons de geste* is based on religion; in other words, the way to distinguish "us" from "them" is fundamentally a matter of religious difference. This chapter will illustrate the importance of religion in the imagination of collective identity on both sides of the confessional divide.[31] The first part of the chapter will introduce the two religious groups, giving special attention to the pagans or Saracens, as they are variously called. The second part of the chapter will examine how identity is framed in terms of the religious Other, constructing a binary of the pagan Saracens and the Christian Franks that persists despite substantial similarities and shared values between the two. The third part of the chapter will demonstrate why other forms of alterity (including biological, racial, ethnic, and cultural), though legitimate categories of reading difference and present in nascent forms and to varying degrees in the texts, are ultimately subservient to the principal form of difference in the earliest *chansons de geste*: that of religion.

[29] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 3028 and v. 3031. "Sir knight, [...] are you of paganism or of Christianity?"
[30] Ibid, v. 3032. "I firmly believe in God."
[31] I have referred to the imagination of identity, I am referring to Benedict Anderson's point that communal identity is imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion," *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1993), 6. This is not to suggest that the communal identity of the "franceis" constitutes national consciousness, however. Furthermore, I am not the first to discuss the imagined element of the Christian Franks' identity; Sharon Kinoshita has done so in *Medieval Boundaries*, 29-30.

1.1 Collective Identities: Pagan Saracens and Christian Franks

In the *chansons de geste*, the two religious groups of the *chansons de geste* are the *paiens* or *sarrazins* and the *franceis* or *chrestiens*. Both names on either side are interchangeable in the *chansons de geste,* that is, *paien* with *Sarrazin* and *franceis* with *chrestïens*, though to very different effects.

"Franks" (*franceis)* and "Christians" (*chrestïens)* are used interchangeably throughout the texts, and this interchangeability reflects the importance of religion in the imagination of their identity: their identities are not simply tied to their homelands (*franceis*), but equally to their religion (*chrestïens*). On a philological level, the collective identity of the Franks is imagined and solidified through the formulation and repetition of "li franceis de dulce France."[32] The Saracens, while once referred to as "ces Sarazins de Saraguce tere," are otherwise depicted as hailing from numerous lands, as this chapter will later show.[33] In this respect, the general absence of a Saracen homeland strongly contrasts with "li franceis de dulce France," who are clearly of Frankish origin. It is telling that even the Saracens recognize that the France is the dwelling of the Franks: "Francs s'en irunt en France, la lur tere" and "'iceste fole gent de France.'"[34] Moreover, the war the Franks fight for the defense of France is equally portrayed as a war for the defense of Christianity itself, of which France is regarded as the protector.[35]

[32] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 2246: "the Franks of sweet France." The complete phrase that identifies the "franceis" as such and as of "dulce France" is otherwise shortened to "franceis" or "dulce France." "Franceis" is also known by its variants, "francs" or "francais" without any difference in meaning. Note that while I have translated the Old French "France" as "France," the France of the *chansons de geste* does not correspond to either the geographical boundaries or the political history of the modern hexagon. A less politically charged translation, though unnecessarily cumbersome, would be "Francia" or the "Frankish kingdom." Having made the reader aware of this sense of "France," however, I will continue to use "France" as an acceptable translation.

[33] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 1108: "the Saracens from Sargossa." For the discussion of Saracen origins, see Chapter 1, section 3.2.

[34] *La Chanson de Roland,* v. 50: "The Franks will go back to France, their land"; *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 79: "these wicked people of France."

[35] The idea of holy war will be expanded upon in Chapter 3, section 2, pages 57-62 of this thesis.

The connection between the Frankish kingdom and Christianity is strengthened by the divinely sanctioned leadership of the kings and the feudal relationship between king and vassal, which mirrors the relationship between God and man. It is significant that both *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Chanson de Guillaume* begin not with their eponymous heroes, but with the kings of France.[36] It is from the kingship of Charlemagne and of Louis that the political (France) and the religious (Christianity) spheres are united. In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, the politico-religious connection is established through a brief history of France, beginning with "Clodoveu, le premier empereur / Que en duce France creeit en Deu, nostre seignur."[37] Furthermore, because Charlemagne and Louis serve as simultaneous guardians of France and Christianity, the justice they enact is not simply earthly, but divine: "Carles ad dreit vers la gent paënisme. / Deus nus ad mis al plus verai juïse."[38]

In the *chansons de geste*, the group of Muslim Others, regardless of their real cultural and religious identities, are clustered together as *paien* and *Sarrazin*. In addition, *paien* and *Sarrazin*, which properly understood designate two mutually exclusive groups, are used interchangeably throughout the *chansons de geste*, though as this chapter (and this thesis more broadly) shows, this interchangeability is not as straightforward as it first appears in that it does not correspond to historical reality and instead does more to establish the identity and justify the agenda of the Christian Franks.

[36] The incipit of *La Chanson de Roland* is "Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes, / Set anz tuz pleins ad estét en Espaigne : / Tresqu'en la mer cunquist la tere altaigne" (vv. 1-3); "Charles the king, our great emperor…" The incipit of *La Chanson de Guillaume* is "Plaist vus oïr de granz batailles e de forz esturs, / De Deramed, uns reis sarazinurs, / Cun il prist guere vers Lowis, nostre empereür ?" (vv. 1-3). Recall that *Gormont et Isembart* is a fragment of which only the final 661 verses—and hence no incipit—survive.

[37] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 1262-3. "Clovis, the first emperor / Who in sweet France believed in God, our savior."

[38] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3377-8. Dominique Boutet argues that Charlemagne represents the archetypal biblical king, but more than that, he represents a "conducteur de son peuple contre l'Infidèle, soutenu par l'archange Gabriel et par les miracles divins, Charlemagne est semblable au souverain idéal de l'augustinisme." As Boutet shows, though the specifics of its presentation differ, the depiction of Louis is nevertheless in line with that of *La Chanson de Roland* in that Louis is elevated as a leader of the French whose capacity to lead and unite the collectivity of the French is undiminished by his individual flaws. See Boutet, "Les chansons de geste et l'affermissement du pouvoir royal": 5.

Though it is unlikely that the poets of the *chansons de geste* consulted dictionaries to ensure the accuracy of their representations, it is useful to see how "paien" and "Sarrazin" are defined in dictionaries to show how the literary representations correspond to these definitions. The first means of referring to Muslims in the *chansons de geste* is "paien," which is primarily defined as a "personne qui pratiquait une des religions polythéistes de l'Antiquité."[39] As we will see in Chapter 3, this conflation of Islam and polytheism becomes commonplace in Christian literature of the medieval West. John Tolan writes that "confronted by an expanding, dynamic Muslim civilization, they [Christians] needed to make sense of it,"[40] and they did so "in terms familiar to them,"[41] though he later clarifies that "the polemical construction of the Saracens started *before* the rise of Islam."[42] Norman Daniel goes further, suggesting that the word "pagan" links the non-Christian other of late Antiquity (i.e., "pagans," a designation that itself was problematic, referring to both polytheists and to non-Christian Hellenistic monotheists) and the non-Christian Other of the period during which the *chansons de geste* were written (i.e., chiefly Muslims).[43] As Tolan points out, "Medieval writers would stretch their old language to accommodate Islam, to squeeze it into pre-existing categories rather than rethinking these categories."[44] Furthermore, while even the earliest *chansons de geste* are not the origins of this conflation between late ancient paganism and medieval Islam, the

[39] "Paien," *Trésor de la langue française*.
[40] John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), xiv. Italics original.
[41] Ibid, 4.
[42] Ibid, xix.
[43] Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, 131: "[The word pagan's] attraction may have been a sort of historical congruity in minds of the poets, and many people, not only our poets, thought that the Muslims in some special way enjoyed a direct continuity with the pagans of the ancient world. If there was no other point of resemblance, they did inherit the position of the chief non-Christian community known to Christians, who remembered the early centuries of persecution, not only in the Roman martyrology, but also in the cult of local saints, of which France had many. This will have lent one small touch of plausibility, in the eyes of Western Christians, without inhibiting in any way the inventive freedom of the poets, who show almost as little knowledge of antiquity as of Islam."
[44] Tolan, *Saracens*, 19.

representations of the "paiens" in the *chansons de geste* were instrumental in shaping later medieval representations and did so across generic and linguistic boundaries.[45]

The other term used to refer to Muslims in the *chansons de geste* is "Sarrazin." "Sarrazin," from the Latin *Sarracenus*, refers to Muslims and is noted as a "nom donné, au Moyen Age, par les Occidentaux aux musulmans en général."[46] It is worth noting that the earliest recorded use of the word "Sarrazin" in Old French is found in the *chanson de geste* regarded as the first of the genre, namely *La Chanson de Roland*.[47] Lynn Tarte Ramey writes that "the linguistic fluidity of the word *Saracen* fits well with the variations in eponymous portraits." [48] As we will see, some Saracens are noble, valiant warriors who are indistinguishable from the Christians but for their religion, while others are seen as monstrous or satanic.

The word "paien" was used chiefly in reference to Muslims, but its interchangeability with "Sarrazin" "indicates that the attitude of the ancient poets was the same toward all adversaries of the Franks."[49] In the *chansons de geste*, the pagan Saracens, who are almost universally portrayed as the adversaries of the Christian Franks (with some exceptions I will later discuss), are variously depicted as harbingers of the apocalypse who aid the devil and the Antichrist, as warring barbarians, and as otherworldly monsters. At the same time, they are

[45] Though the immediate effects of the representations of Saracens are most visible in the later *chansons de geste* and in the *romans*, the *chansons de geste* were translated into other languages and were rewritten in both poetry and prose; see Paula Leverage, , "The Reception of the Chansons de Geste," *Olifant: A Publication of the Société Rencesvals North American Branch*, special issue: "The Legacy of the Chansons de Geste," *An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste*, ed. Anne Bethelot and Catherine M. Jones, 136.

[46] "Sarrazin," Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française du IXe siècle au XVe siècle*; "Sarrasin," *Trésor de la langue française*; "Sarrasin," *Dictionnaire Larousse*, and "Saraceni," *Blaise Medieval Latin Dictionary*. According to John Tolan, a form of the word "Saracen" was equally attested in Greek. In its late antique context, it "meant simply Arab," whereas after the rise of Islam and throughout the Middle Ages, "Saracen" could refer to Arabs, to Muslims, or to both. See Tolan, *Saracens*, 8.

[47] "Sarrasin," *Trésor de la langue française*.

[48] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 9.

[49] Mark Skidmore, *The Moral Traits of Christian and Saracen in the* Chanson de Geste (Colorado Springs: Dentan Printing Company, 1935), 27.

also depicted as "mirror images" of the Franks: however imperfectly, they replicate the feudal and moral values of the Franks, as the next section will show.[50]

1.2 Mirror Images and Alterity

Having examined the two groups individually, I will now turn to how they are seen together and *vis-à-vis* the other. *La Chanson de Roland* famously declares that pagans are wrong and Christians are right ("Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit"), constructing a binary between the two religious groups.[51] This section will illustrate how the binary is enforced through the alterity of the Saracens and how the Saracens are simultaneously viewed as "mirror images" of the Christians, both of which in turn reinforce Christian-Frankish identity.[52] Above all, it will emphasize that the binary that establishes the collective identities is framed in terms of religion.

The battle setting of the *chansons de geste* facilitates the creation of a binary opposition between the Christian Franks and the pagan Saracens; they are enemies not only on the battlefield, but on the pages of the *chansons de geste* as well. In *La Chanson de Roland*, Roland enacts the binary opposition of "us-them" in how he looks upon the two groups: "Vers Sarrazins reguardet fierement / E vers Franceis humles e dulcement."[53] Although the two appear to be irreconcilable given the opposition between "fierement" and "humles e dulcement," the repetition of "vers" and the parallel structure show how identity is reflexive: the "rightness" of the Franks is intensified by the "wrongness" of the Saracens and, inversely, the "wrongness" by the "rightness."

[50] The idea of "mirror images," though widely acknowledged in scholarship, is named as such in Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'" 80 and 83.
[51] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1015. "Pagans are wrong and Christians are right."
[52] Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right," 80 and 83.
[53] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1162-3. "Toward the Saracens he looked harshly, / And toward the Franks humbly and sweetly."

It has already been well established in scholarship that the pagan Saracens of the *chansons de geste* are represented as monstrous others. In an early study, Mark Skidmore argues that this monstrosity arises from a sense of moral distinction between the religious groups. Paul Bancourt updates Skidmore's work and examines the representations comprehensively, considering physical, moral, and cultural differences.[54] What is lacking in existing scholarship is a satisfactory account for the duplicity of the pagan Saracens. On one hand, they are represented as monstrous others.[55] On the other hand, they mirror the Christian Franks in their moral values and in their feudal institutions. To account for and reconcile these disparate facets of their representation, it is necessary to have a more gradated view of the binary opposition between the two groups—"the tendency to vacillate between the oppositional and the similar," as Lynn Tarte Ramey writes.[56]

Though numerous scholars have discussed the idea of replication—that the Saracens replicate the moral values and feudal institutions of the Franks—as Sharon Kinoshita effectively puts it, the Saracens are "mirror images" of the Franks.[57] In *La Chanson de Guillaume,* the pagans' imitation of the Christians is explicitly acknowledged: "Paene gent les mistrent en grant errur."[58] Note, however, the qualification: the pagans do not perfectly imitate the Christians, but do so erroneously; the Old French "errur" has not only the general sense of "error," but the specific sense of "false belief" as well.[59]

In general, the reflexivity of identity is achieved in two respects in the texts: first, on the literary or linguistic level in the repetition of phrases and of motifs. An example for this is

[54] Skidmore, *The Moral Traits of Christian and Saracen* and Paul Bancourt, *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982).
[55] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 3: "The Saracen is often (though not always) seen as the complete opposite of the Christian, Western, French self: to say 'Saracen' is in essence to say 'evil.' Saracens lose all ability to function as individuals. Their actions are pre-programmed by their 'saracenness.' In these texts, while the Christian is valiant and white as snow, for example, the Saracen will be cowardly and black as coal."
[56] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 9.
[57] Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'" 80 and 83.
[58] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 470. "Pagans mirror them in great error."
[59] "Errur," *Anglo-Norman Dictionary.*

"Par mi Franceis s'en sunt passez" and "Par mi paiens s'en sunt passez"; the parallelism between the phrases mirrors the opposition between the "Franceis" and the "paiens" in the two phrases.[60] Repetition also functions through motifs, perhaps the most famous of which is the ensign of Charlemagne, "munjoie," which serves as an identity marker for the Franks and as a rallying battle-cry.[61] What is more interesting is that the pagans recognize the power of "munjoie" and imitate the Franks, creating an ensign of their own: "Par sun orgoill li ad un num truvét : / Par la Carlun, dunt il oït parler. / [La süe fist Precïuse apeler ;] / Ço ert l'enseigne en bataille campel ; / Ses cevaliers en ad fait escrïer."[62] Another important example is that both Charlemagne and the Saracen emir Baligant are described as having a white beard: "La seit li reis ki dulce France tient. / Blanche ad la barbe e tut flurit le chef."[63] The description of Baligant is nearly identical: "Li amiralz ben resemblet barun, / Blanche ad la barbe ensement cume flure."[64] Note that although he is favorably compared to Charlemagne, the emir is not described as a baron himself, but as one who resembles a baron ("ben resemblet barun").

Second, the reflexivity of identity occurs on the level of characterization; though not all Saracens correspond to it, some can be termed "preux chevalier."[65] More importantly, the mirror images between the sides persist despite religious difference. The description of the emir of Balaguez in *La Chanson de Roland* is an exemplary case: "Uns amurafles i ad de Balaguez

[60] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 518: "The Franks passed through" and v. 522: "The pagans passed through."
[61] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1233-4: "Ferez i, Francs, kar tresben les veintrum!' Munjoie escrïet, c'est l'enseigne Carlun": "Strike, Franks, so that we will utterly defeat them!" (Note that "car" in this sense serves as a reinforcement of the imperative "ferez." See also *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 440: "Crie : 'Munjoie', ço est l'enseigne de noz": "[Girard] cries out, 'Munjoie,' that is our ensign"; v. 447: "Crie : 'Munjoie !' l'enseigne Ferebrace": "[Girard] cries, 'Munjoie!' [that is] the ensign of Fierbrace [note: "Ferebrace" or "Fierebras," meaning "proud arm" in Old French, was a frequent epithet for Guillaume]; v. 1102: "Cil crient : 'Muntjoie !', si vont od els juster": "Those [fifteen thousand Franks ; see vv. 1099-1100] , 'Munjoie!,' thus they are going to attack."
[62] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3144-8: "In his pride Baligant gave it a name: because of Charlemagne's sword he had heard about / [he called his own Precieuse;] / that will be his ensign on the battlefield; / He makes his chevaliers cry it." Note that Precieuse is both the name of the sword and the ensign, while Charlemagne's sword and ensign have different names: "Joyeuse" and "munjoie," respectively. See also *laisse* 258.
[63] Ibid, vv. 116-7: "there sits the king who holds sweet France. / He has a white beard and hair flowering."
[64] Ibid, vv. 3172-5: "The emir truly resembles a baron, / He has a white beard just as a flower." Interestingly, in *La Chanson de Guillaume*, it is Guillaume and not the King and Emperor Louis who is described with a white beard: see vv. 1007-10.
[65] Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, 38-46.

/ Cors ad mult gent e le vis fier e cler ; / Puls quë il est sur sun cheval muntét / Mult se fait fiers de ses armes porter. / De vasselage est il ben alosez : / Fust chrestïens, asez oüt barnét."[66] If the last line were omitted, the emir would be indistinguishable from a Christian character, but the last line itself reminds that however complete his other qualities, he lacks the Christian faith and consequently can never be equal to the Christians until he converts. The "barbe blanche" of Charlemagne and of Baligant also functions in this sense: it is not a trivial or accidental similarity, but a symbol of the broader similarities between the two: both kings are wise, pious, and ideal leaders of the Christians and Saracens, respectively. What separates the two is their religion.

Ramey observes that the *chansons de geste* "can involve both denigration and exaltation of the Other."[67] In other words, there are not simply black-and-white representations of the Saracens: the noble, valiant warriors on the one hand and the monstrous others on the other, but Saracens who fall into a grey area. For example, the worthiness of Gormond, "li Arabis,"[68] as a warrior king, which admittedly rests upon the condition of his conversion ("Li meudre rei e le plus franc / qui unques fust el munde vivant, / se il creust Deu le poant"), is later juxtaposed with his association with the Antichrist ("aveez veü de l'Antecri")[69] and with Satan: "la u jut mort li Satenas."[70] In another example, the Saracen Alderufe is described as a great warrior, but loses everything on account of his ill-placed faith: "fu hardiz e prouz, / Chevaler bon, si out fere vertuz, / Mais Deu nen aint, par tant il tut perdu, / Ainz creit le glut Pilate e Belzebu, E Antecrist, Bagot, e Tartarin, / E d'enfern le veil Astarut."[71]

[66] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 894-9: "An emir is there from Balaguer, / he is a great man with a proud and fair face; / whenever he is mounted upon his horse, / he proudly bears arms / he is praised for his vassalage: were he Christian, he would be a great baron."
[67] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 3.
[68] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 186: "the Arab."
[69] *Gormont et Isembart*, vv. 29-31: "The best and the noblest king, / who has ever lived in the world, / if only he believed in God the powerful"; *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 204: "you have seen the Antichrist."
[70] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 507: "there where the Satan lies dead."
[71] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 2134-9: "He was bold and wise, / A good warrior, he was equally virtuous / But he does not love God; because of this he has lost everything, / instead he believed in the scoundrel Pilate and Bezelbu, / And Antichrist, Bagot and Tartarin, and the old Astarut from hell."

Not all scholars are convinced of the centrality of religious difference; Jo Ann Hoeppner Moran Cruz, for example, argues that "the Saracens show numerous negative traits besides being non-Christian."[72] I would counter that the negative traits of the Saracens are in fact by virtue of their being non-Christian. If the Saracens are equal to the Christians in feudal and moral values, among which are prowess, wisdom, and loyalty, as this chapter shows, the ultimate means of distinguishing them is their religious difference. It is for this reason that they are collectively and principally "paien" and "Sarrazin."

On the most basic level, then, the pagan Saracens constitute the enemy of the Christian Franks and the antagonists of the *chansons de geste.* This relationship is perhaps most succinctly enacted in a binary opposition in *La Chanson de Roland*: "Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit."[73] This reduction of what is in fact a plurality of enemies (the Basques, the Bretons, and the Vikings, respectively) to the pagan Saracens cluster is curious. From a literary perspective, perhaps it is easier to villainize a single enemy and to justify the agenda of the protagonists. In any case, by stripping the incredibly diverse cast of enemies that appear in the *chansons de geste* of some of their defining characteristics, the Franks have a convenient foil. It is not enough to say that pagans are wrong ("paien unt tort"); the poet of *La Chanson de Roland* insists that Christians are right ("chrestiens unt dreit"), denying the possibility and desirability of any other way of life.

On one hand and to some extent, the Saracens are reduced to a blackened caricature of the upright Franks. This idea of caricature or replication is essential in the *chansons de geste*. Despite their villainy and monstrosity, the Saracens nevertheless function as "mirror images" of the Franks, as Sharon Kinoshita writes.[74]

[72] Jo Ann Hoeppner Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes Toward Islam in Medieval Europe," in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perceptions of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 56.
[73] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1015. "Pagans are wrong and Christians are right."
[74] Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'" 80 and 83.

On the other hand, the interchangeability and misrepresentation do not mask all the distinguishing features of the Saracens. This leads to several points. First, the Saracens hail from a wealth of lands, as previously shown. Second, not all Saracens are created equally in the *chansons de geste*.[75] Instead, it is on the level of distortion of religion that the Saracens receive their collective identity and are most misrepresented, which will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

Ramey writes that "early chansons de geste like *Gormont et Isembart* and the *Chanson de Roland* portray a Saracen enemy who is not without admirable traits. Nonetheless, the final goal is total destruction of the Other, with attempts at integration being non-existent."[76] Here I would disagree with Ramey on two points. As Ramey herself earlier points out, the portrayals of Saracens in medieval French texts are more multifaceted than one might imagine, and I would extend that to the early *chansons de geste*. It is true that there are some Saracen characters who conform to the "admirable enemy" portrayal that Ramey argues is characteristic of the early *chansons de geste*, but in fact are equaled, if not outnumbered, by the throngs of apocalyptic, satanic, monstrous, or otherwise negatively characterized Saracens. I am unconvinced that "attempts at integration [are] non-existent." On the contrary, as the section on conversion in the third chapter will show, conversion functions as a means of integration, if imperfectly and problematically so. This is not to deny that the literary depiction did not evolve; as I have previously underlined, the earliest *chansons de geste* had a vast influence upon later texts.[77]

Though it is uncontested that simultaneous mirror images and alterity are compatible, if perplexing, scholars differ in their interpretations of alterity, as we will see in the next section:

[75] In the third chapter, we will see some notable, if limited, examples of deviation: that not all Christians were unified in the cause against the Saracens, as the characters of Ganelon (*La Chanson de Roland*) and Isembart (*Gormont et Isembart*) show.
[76] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 5.
[77] Discussed in the Introduction. See also Leverage, "The Reception of the Chansons de Geste," 136-48.

notably, whether the awareness of physical difference constitutes (proto-)racism and whether the insistence on the foreignness of the Other constitutes xenophobia or ethnocentrism.

1.3 Forms of Difference

In this section, I will discuss three specific forms of alterity of the pagan Saracens: racial-physical, ethnic-cultural, and religious, ultimately showing that it is the third of these categories of difference that informs and shapes the other two.

The alterity of the Saracens has led some scholars, notably Lynn Tarte Ramey, to draw upon postcolonialism and draw the line between the "Self" and Other," effectively the medieval precursors of the colonizer and colonized.[78] Postcolonial medievalists tend to argue that while the categories themselves may differ, the emphasis upon a set of polar oppositions is comparable. Rather than rely upon an anachronistic label applied to medieval texts, I prefer to use the texts as starting points, building an interpretation from there.

1.3.1 Physical and Racial Others

This chapter and this section more particularly represent a departure from recent directions in scholarship which read the texts in light of postcolonial medievalism: that is, through the lenses of the modern discourses of racism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and so on. There are a number of proposed terms for the physical difference of the Saracens; Gerald Brault, for example, maintains that the *chansons de geste* exhibit a "préjugé racial," while Jean Charles Payen prefers "le racisme religieux."[79] This direction in scholarship is

[78] For postcolonial readings of the *chansons de geste* specifically, see Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 2-3. For broader postcolonial studies of the Middle Ages, see Jeffrey Jeromy Cohen, "Introduction," *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Cohen (New York: St Martin's, 2000), 1-17, Lisa Lampert-Weissig, "The Future of the Past," in *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010), 1-30; Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds. *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Suzanne Conklin-Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell UP, 2009).

[79] Gerald Brault, quoted in Paul Bancourt, "Les chansons de geste sont-elles 'racistes'?" (Barcelona: Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona, 1990): 21; Jean Charles Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux: devoir de violence et plaisir de tuer dans la Chanson de Roland," *Olifant* 6, nos. 3&4 (1979): 233.

reflected even on the level of the critical editions. The editions I am using are primarily bilingual editions, with a modern French translation facing the Old French original. The most notable example is the mistranslation of the Old French "gent" into modern French "race," found both in *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Chanson de Guillaume*. It is worth noting that the word "race" as such does not enter the French language until Middle French, which began to emerge nearly two centuries after the *chansons de geste* examined here.[80] What is invariably translated as "race" in modern French and English translations of the *chansons de geste* is the Old French "gent."[81] However, the Old French *gent* lacks the socio-political and historical connotations of the modern French and English words "race." The anachronism has not prevented scholars from imbuing "gent" with a sense of racialized difference; to take a prominent example, the Old French philologist Godefroy in his monumental dictionary of the language defines *gent* equally in the senses of "race" and "people"[82]; nevertheless, I maintain that the sense of "gent" is different from the modern "race" and ought not to be defined as such.[83] There is a world of difference between the two words. For this reason, I thoroughly reject the politicization of translation—the imposition of a modern concept on a medieval text. That said, I am perfectly willing to entertain the possibility of "gent" as a prefiguration of racial difference, but what I wish to show is that it is not necessarily so. As Sharon Kinoshita writes of *La Chanson de Roland*, "disengaging its representation of the pagans from modern racialist and Orientalist paradigms reveals how strongly it exemplifies a concept of alterity markedly

[80] "Race," *Trésor de la langue française*. The earliest attested use of "race" in French is circa 1480, though it was not until the mid-sixteenth century that the word began to be widely used.

[81] As I stated in the preliminary note on editions and translations, found in page v of this thesis, the bilingual, parallel-text critical editions of *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Chanson de Guillaume* translate "gent" as "race." This is then carried over to English and subsequent foreign-language translations of the epics, with the comparatively innocuous sense of the original "gent" lost. For two prominent instances of this hypostatization and politicization of translation regarding race/gent, see La Chanson de Roland v. 1086 "cele gent estrange" which Ian Short translates as "cette race étrangère" and *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 609, wherein François Suard translates "Ne seit coverte de put gent adverse" as "car elle est couverte de ce race odieuse."

[82] Frederic Godefroy, "gent," in *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* (1881).

[83] I am not alone in doing so; the Old French philologist William Kibler defines "gent" as "people, lineage." See "gent" in Kibler, "Glossary," *An Introduction to Old French*.

different from our own."[84] On one hand, difference is created in the texts themselves. On the other hand, there is the modern readers' consciousness of racialized discourse and our proclivity to interpret polemical representations as having some element of racial difference. The two must be distinguished.

There is textual evidence that "gent" is not exclusively pejorative. In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, Girard, the cousin of Vivien, tells Guillaume to prepare his men against the advances of the Saracen king Deramed: "Pense, Willame, de secure ta gent!"[85] In *La Chanson de Roland*, the vassals of Charlemagne are referred to as "cele gent barbee."[86] Thus, "gent" is insufficiently strong to stand alone as a value term; it needs a qualifying adjective to elevate or lower it. Such adjectives include *paien, sarrazin, franceis, maudit*, all of which are employed to modify "gent" in the *chansons de geste*.

Regardless of the neutrality of the term "gent," some of the Saracens are depicted as black or monstrous others. In *La Chanson de Roland*, the uncle of Marsile is described as "l'algalifes / Ki tint Kartagene, Alferne, Garmalie / E Ethïope, une tere maldite. / La neire gent en ad en sa baillie ; / Granz unt les nés e les oreilles / E sunt ensemble plus de cinquante mile."[87] In this passage, "gent" is explicitly tied to color difference ("la neire gent") and is magnified in the monstrous appearance of the people whom the caliph leads ("Granz unt les nés e les oreilles"). However, it does not follow that awareness of the people's blackness necessarily constitutes racism. Of course, racism is not limited to discrimination based on physical appearance, nor am I defending it in any circumstance.

What I would like to underline is that even if there is a nascent sense of color or racialized difference, one should neither label it as racism or assume that it must form part of

[84] Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'"79.
[85] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 968: "Think, Guillaume, of aiding your own people!
[86] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 3392: "this bearded people."
[87] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1914-8: "the caliph, / Who holds Carthage, Alferne, and Garmalie, / And Ethiopia, an accursed land. He has command over the black people; their noses are large and their ears are thick, / And are in total more than fifty thousand."

the medieval roots of modern racism.[88] While there are certainly some Saracens that befit those descriptions, there are equally those who are physically and morally indistinguishable from the *franceis-chrestïens*, as we have seen. For example, the insistence upon the medieval Christian recognition of Saracen blackness is undermined by the "whiteness" of the emir in *La Chanson de Roland*.[89] There are two additional considerations. first, the *chansons de geste* are not the originators of depicting the Other as black or monstrous, but follow in Western tradition of descriptions of the Other since classical antiquity.[90] Second, though he is writing of illustrated representations of medieval color difference, Robert Bartlett makes a relevant point that the purpose of the awareness of color in the medieval context was "not to register a social reality but to make a theological point, about the universal mission of the Church."[91] Thus, while there is some sense of difference based on color, it is not the primary category of difference that separates the *paiens-Sarrazins* from the *franceis-crestiens.*

In addition to some awareness of color difference, the *chansons de geste* describe some of the Saracens as monstrous or animalistic: "Lunges les denz, si est velu un urse ; / Ne porte arme fors le bec e les ungles."[92] Even as some of the Saracens are described as monstrous in a physical sense, there is often a strong tie to spiritual monstrosity, which is manifested in the satanic or devilish character of the Saracens: "Li paiens chet cuntreval a un quat; / L'anme de

[88] For the issue of race and color difference in medieval literature and the necessity of distinguishing "gentes" from modern racialized discourse, see Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, eds. *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), particularly Robert Bartlett's chapter, "Illustrating Ethnicity in the Middle Ages, 132-156. See also Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 6 (2001): 39-56 and Thomas Hahn, "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 1-38.

[89] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3172-7: "Li amiralz ben resemblet barun; / Blanche ad la barbe ensement cume flur, / E de sa lei mult par est saives hom, / E en bataille est fiers e orgoillus. / Ses filz Malprimes mult est chevalerus, / Granz e forz e trait as anceisurs"; "The emir closely resembles a baron / similarly his white beard like a flower, / and he is a very learned man of great faith, / And in battle is fierce and proud, / His son Malprimes is a great knight, / strong and tall like his ancestors."

[90] Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right," 82.

[91] Bartlett, "Illustrating Ethnicity in the Middle Ages," 136-7.

[92] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 3173: "he has long teeth, he is hairy like a bear. He bears no weapons on him except his beak and his claws."

lui en portet Sathanas"[93] and "Franceis escrient: 'Finement est venu, / U Antecrist u Bagot u Tartarun / U d'enfern le veillard Belbebun !"[94] It is important to remember that the Saracens are "really (if perhaps unwittingly) in alliance with the devil, not God."[95] The Christian identification of the Saracens with the satanic is particularly visible in the apocalyptic expectations that the battles with the Saracens revive ("'Finement est venu'"). As Tolan explains, the word "Antichrist" has two senses for medieval Christians: the Antichrist singular, and Antichrist in the general sense of heretics, though the apocalyptic associations were particularly tied to Muslims.[96]

1.3.2 Ethnic and Cultural Others

Another framing of alterity is ethnic and cultural difference. In *Gormont et Isembart*, the poet writes that "vindrent paiens de tutes parz."[97] The "tutes parz" is an effective summary; it is common in the *chansons de geste* to have an enumeration of various origins of the *paiens*-

[93] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1267-8. "The pagan crashes downward to the ground, / His soul is carried away by Satan."
[94] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 3218-20. "The end of the world has come, / or the Antichrist, or Bagot or Tartaron, / or the old Beelzebub from hell!'"
[95] Tolan, *Saracens*, 44.
[96] Ibid, 8-9: "Antichrist could be applied to various enemies of the church—particularly heretics: had not John said, after all: 'Such is the Antichrist: the person who denies the Father and the Son'? To later Christians, Muslims, who reject the Trinity and deny that Jesus was God, seem to fit this definition perfectly." See also Tolan, ed. *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York and London: Garden Publishing, 1996), xiii: "Various apocalyptic traditions had long predicted mass conversions to a 'false' Judaism or Christianity, a sect of error with the outward appearance of piety; just as Jews had used these traditions to explain the successes of Christianity, now both Christians and Jews employ them to explain those of Islam. Muhammad (or Islam) is a manifestation of Antichrist." In addition, the eighth-century Syriac *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* was particularly influential in shaping medieval Christian views of Islam; see Sidney H. Griffith, "Apocalypse and the Arabs: The First Christian Responses to the Rise of Islam" in *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2008), 23-44. Apocalyptic associations of Islam and of the Prophet Muhammad and/or of Muslims in general would later climax in the Pope Innocent III's encyclical, *Quia Maior* (1213), which proclaimed the Fifth Crusade (1213-1221): "A certain son of perdition, Muhammad the pseudo-prophet, arose. Through worldly enticements and carnal delights he seduced many people away from the truth. His perfidy has prospered to this day. Yet we trust in God, Who has already given us a good omen that the end of this beast is drawing near. The number [of the beast], according to the Apocalypse of John, is 666, of which already almost six hundred years have been completed." Quoted and discussed in Tolan, *Saracens*, 194-213. At the same time, this association was not exclusively tied to the Crusades; writing of John of Damascus and the Armenian bishop Sebeos, Siddiqui notes that Daniel's vision of the four beasts was extended to Muslims as early in the seventh century in "God as One," 61. A discussion of apocalyptic associations will return in Chapter 3, section 2 of this thesis.
[97] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 508. "Pagans came from all parts."

Sarrazins: "d'Oriente,"[98] "Hungre,"[99] "li paien de Surie, / Cil de Palerne e cil de Tabarie,"[100] "un Ireis,"[101] and "Turz e Persanz e Arabiz."[102] In short, there is an extensive catalogue of places that would have been familiar to the twelfth-century poets by way of early Christian geographies and ethnographies.[103] Though there are many other origins listed apart from those I have listed, an exhaustive list would serve little purpose; in the end, these ethnic-cultural markers convey nothing further about the identities of the characters that they represent.[104]

What is problematic is that these groups of foreigners are grouped together and portrayed as both *paien* and *sarrazin*. It is improbable that a diverse group could all be pagans, polytheists, or Muslims, as they are represented in the *chansons de geste*. Bearing in mind that the *chansons de geste* deal with a literary—and hence fictional, if legendary—world, it is still worth considering where this devotion to geographical cataloguing stems from, especially given the otherwise inattentive attitude toward accuracy in the representations, as we will see in the next section of the chapter on the pagan Saracens as religious Others. As Tolan writes, the medieval author's reliance on "respected *auctores*" is more than a matter of *mimesis*; it indicates the "fundamental division between a unified Christianity and a disunified cacophony of pagans, heretics, and Jews."[105] That said, it is impossible to determine based solely on textual evidence why the poets were inattentive to the likely significant differences among these people.

[98] *Gormont et Isembart*, vv. 69 and 78. In this latter example, the word is spelled "Oriante," but this orthographical difference is not a semantic one; French spelling did not begin to be regularized until the advent of printing and was not formally codified in grammars until the seventeenth century. For an accessible introduction to the history of the French language, see Huchon, *Histoire de la langue française*.
[99] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 638 and 645… "Hungarian[s]."
[100] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 2583-4. "the pagans of Syria, those of Palermo and those of Tiberias."
[101] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 100. "an Irishman."
[102] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 433. "Turks and Persians and Arabs."
[103] Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae sive Origines*, which itself was based partly on Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia*, was perhaps the most prominent such encyclopedia in the Middle Ages; as Tolan writes in *Saracens*, "Isidore not only compiles florilegia of earlier authorities but also becomes an authority who will be quoted throughout the Middle Ages," 4. His *Chronica maiora* was also influential. For a discussion of the influence of Isidore's influence upon medieval perceptions of Muslims, see Tolan, *Saracens*, 4-16.
[104] The second chapter will discuss a similar catalogue regarding the enumeration of Saracen gods, showing that having a list of the Saracen gods does not permit the reader to draw closer to the poets' understanding of Islam.
[105] Tolan, *Saracens*, 18-19.

Apart from the elaboration of ethnic or cultural origins, the Saracens are also referred to as "paien de ultre mer"[106] and as "estrange gent."[107] In *La Chanson de Guillaume,* the Franks refer twice to the "estrange cuntree" in which they fight.[108] The ethnic and cultural difference extends to language; to address the pagans directly, Guillaume must speak in various languages in a scene that reflects the linguistic plurality and incomprehensible cacophony of the biblical Tower of Babel in contrast to the singular "latin" (i.e., a dialect of Old French descended from Latin): "Muat sa veie e changat sun latin, / Salamoneis parlat, tieis e barbarin, / Grezeis, alemandeis, aleis, hermin / E les langages que li bers out ainz apris: ' Culverz paiens, Mahun vus seit faille!'"[109]

According to some scholars, this insistence on the foreignness of the Saracens would seem to recommend that the Christians harbor a sense of xenophobia or ethnocentrism, which I reject.[110] As was the case with racism in the previous section, my aim is not to ignore the consciousness of ethnic or cultural difference altogether, but to show that xenophobia and ethnocentrism cannot be deployed in the same manner as in modern contexts, precisely because in the earliest *chansons de geste* they are imagined secondarily to religious difference.

While the Franks are bound together as the Franks of France and with the exception of "ces Sarazins de Saraguce tere," the Saracens are not graced with a singular such origin.[111] Moreover, the enumeration of the many Saracen origins comes at the expense of Saracen collective identity. By this, I do not mean that Saracens lack a collective identity. Rather,

[106] *La Chanson de Guillaume,* v. 3372 and v. 3396. "Pagans from across the sea." Another expression of *outremer* is found in *Gormont et Isembart,* v. 636-9: "'e ! Jal me dist un Sarrazin, / ultre la mer, qui en sorti, / si jeo veineie en cest païs / que je serraire u mort u pris." "Alas, I have called myself a Saracen, / across the sea, which has predicted: if I came into this country, I would be either dead or captured."
[107] *La Chanson de Guillaume,* v. 76, "foreign people"; in *La Chanson de Roland,* v. 1087: "cele gent estrange" : "those foreign people."
[108] *La Chanson de Guillaume,* v. 682 and v. 1002: "foreign country."
[109] *La Chanson de Guillaume,* vv. 2169-73. "He modified his route and changed his Latin, / speaking Hebrew, Flamand and Berber, Greek, German, Gaulish and Armenian, and all the languages that he valiantly could master, Vile pagans, may Muhammad abandon you!" For the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel, see Genesis 11:1-9.
[110] See Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux" and Bancourt, "Les chansons de geste sont-elles 'racistes'?"
[111] *La Chanson de* Guillaume, v. 1108: "the Saracens from Saragossa."

because they come from numerous lands, their primary identity marker is not their ethnic or cultural backgrounds, but their religion. It is for this reason that they are known collectively and primarily as "Sarrazins" or "paien."

1.3.3 Religious Others

If physical and ethnic differences do not fully account for the binary opposition of the pagan Saracens and the Christian Franks, it would seem that religion is the heart of difference. As Sharon Kinoshita writes, "Similar in language and custom, the two sides arguably differ in religion and nothing more."[112] In *La Chanson de Guillaume,* it is indeed the lack of belief that separates the *paien*: "Fium nus en Deu, le tut poant, / Car il est mieldre que tut li mescreant."[113] The opposition contained herein between faith in God ("fium...Deu") and nonbelief ("miscreant") reveals that it is more than simply a lack of belief in the correct God, but the substitution of a false one; etymologically, "miscreant" refers not simply to a lack of belief and incredulity expressed accordingly, but also to adherents to false religions.[114]

As established at the beginning of the chapter, it is problematic that "paien" and "Sarrazin" are used synonymously and interchangeably in the *chansons de geste*; they do not retain sufficient individual features as to distinguish them. What matters is that they are neither Christians nor Franks. The issue becomes more complex in *La Chanson de Roland*, wherein the pagans refer to themselves as pagans: "'Ferez, paien, pur la presse derumpe!'" and "'Ferez, paien, car res ben les veintrum!'"[115] It is worth noting that they never refer to themselves as Muslims as such (i.e., using any variant of the words "Muslim" or "Islam"), nor do the Christians refer to them as Muslims or as followers of Islam, precisely because this is a pro-

[112] Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries,* 26.
[113] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 249-50. "Let us trust in God, the all-powerful, / For he is superior to ALL THE nonbelievers."
[114] "Mescreant" is defined as "celui qui est incrédule, incroyant ou qui croit à une religion considérée comme fausse" in the *Dictionnaire Etymologique de l'Ancien Français*.
[115] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1500: "'Strike, pagans, to break the thick of the fight!'" and ibid, v. 1535. "'Strike, pagans, for we shall surely vanquish them!'"

Christian text, likely intended for a Christian audience. They are simply "paiens" and "Sarrazins." This imbalance may stem from a reluctance to acknowledge Islam as a fully-fledged—and hence competitive—religion.[116]

Having established that religion is the principal form of difference in the *chansons de geste*, the next chapter will situate the *chansons de geste* in the historical context of medieval Christian perceptions of Islam and Muslims, examine specific textual examples of the misrepresentations, and consider whether the misrepresentations are historical, fictional, or ambiguous.

[116] For Islam as a rival culture, religion and civilization to Christianity, see Blanks and Frassetto, "Introduction": "Southern's observation that Islam was Europe's greatest problem is a valuable one because it recognizes not only the threat of Islam but also the more serious question of definition and understanding. During the Middle Ages, Islamic civilization was far ahead of its Christian rival, offering enticing advances in architecture, law, literature, philosophy, and indeed, in most areas of cultural activity. It was therefore from a position of military, and perhaps more importantly, cultural weakness that Christian Europe developed negative images, some of which survive to the present day. In part, this hostility was a result of continued political and military conflict, but it likewise ensued from a Western sense of cultural inferiority," 3. Blanks and Frassetto are here referring to R.W. Southern's claim that "the existence of Islam was the most far-reaching problem in medieval Christendom," *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1962), 3. See also Tolan, *Saracens*, xix-xx: "Throughout this period, we find a wide variety of Christian responses to Islam: from friendly to hostile, from condescending to fearful, from calls for crusade to plans for alliance. There is no unified Christian response to Islam, no universally accepted explanation of the role of Islam in the divine plan. Both as a rival religion and as a rival civilization, Islam was tremendously successful."[116]

Chapter 2—The (Mis)representation of Religious Difference: The Context of Medieval Christian-Muslim Relations and the *Chansons de Geste*

The previous chapter showed that religion takes precedence over other forms of difference (biological, racial, ethnic, cultural) and that identity is principally based on the religious difference between the Christian Franks and the pagan Saracens. This chapter will provide historical background and context of medieval Christian perceptions of Islam and Muslims. It will then examine the specific misrepresentations of Islamic belief in the texts in order to reveal how the literary depictions in the *chansons de geste* respond to, deviate from, or nuance contemporaneous medieval Christian attitudes towards Islam.

Before beginning my argument, I would like to begin with a caveat regarding religious difference and polar oppositions. In examining the binary opposition between the *franceis-chrestïens*, this chapter seeks to serve neither as an apology for nor as a condemnation of Christianity or of Islam. Bearing in mind that the *chansons de geste* are works of literature and by concentrating on these textual examples, it is a literary analysis rather than a theological debate. The aim is not to elevate or to demonize either religion, but primarily to see how the Christian Franks and pagan Saracens are represented in the literary world of the *chansons de geste*, and secondarily to consider how these representations reflect, differ from, or nuance contemporaneous interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Accordingly, I have sought to present the polemic as it is on the level of the texts as much as possible, though as we will later see, the *chansons de geste* are decidedly pro-Christian and tend to be replete with black-and-white oppositions between the two religious groups.

John Tolan draws a helpful distinction between apologetics and polemics, that is, between a defense of Christianity and an offense against Islam.[117] Both are present to varying degrees in the *chansons de geste*, although the literary genre means that the focus is not so much on the theological debate as it is the broader conflict between the sides. The defense of Christianity will be discussed further in the third chapter, which will show that the defense of Christianity is not so much apologetic in the theological sense as it is a means of legitimization, elevating the battle against the pagan Saracens from a conflict of territorial expansion to a holy war with the survival of Christianity at stake. Similarly, polemics in the *chansons de geste* are primarily literary rather than theological, though as this thesis shows, by means of and simultaneously despite the misrepresentations of Muslim beliefs, religious difference is what separates the pagan Saracens from the Christian Franks.

1. Writing Christian-Muslim Encounters and the *Chansons de Geste*

There is a broader significance to the representations of the pagans in the *chansons de geste*; they are not texts written in a vacuum. First, they continue in the vein of early Christian polemics against pagans, who regardless of their religious beliefs are considered polytheists and often idolaters as well. Second, they form part of an emerging body of Christian-Muslim relations in medieval literature, reflecting a broader cultural preoccupation of defending Christian societies, institutions, and values amidst the flourishing of Islam. Third, the representations of pagans in these texts had a literary influence upon the representations of Saracens in later medieval literature: both in later *chansons de geste*, in the *romans*, and beyond medieval French literature.

[117] Tolan, *Saracens*, 17.

1.1 Historical Background on Medieval Western Christian Perceptions of Islam

This section will venture outside the *chansons de geste*, providing a concise background on Christian-Muslim encounters, apologetics, and polemics to contextualize the environment prior to and in which the *chansons de geste* were composed.

Richard Southern notoriously writes that Islam was Europe's greatest problem in the Middle Ages.[118] While this claim may be excessive, it is important to recognize not only the religious impact of Islam, but its cultural impact as well. John Tolan points out that Islam was not initially regarded as a religious threat, but as a political and military one:

> The first generations of Christians to face Muslim invasions see Muslims as a formidable political and military force, but know and care little about their religious beliefs. It is only in the following generations, as the Christian majority assimilate to Arabic culture and convert in large numbers to Islam, that Islam becomes a religious threat; then and only then do Christians feel a need to confront the religious challenge of Islam, to fit it into the context of divine history, and to refute it through polemic.[119]

The cultural flourishing of Islam was not confined to the spheres of religion and politics. David Blanks and Michael Frassetto underline the success of Islam as a civilization, arguing that it was "far ahead of its Christian rival" on virtually all fronts of "cultural activity."[120] According to Blanks and Frassetto, the flourishing of Islamic civilization resulted in a sense of Western cultural inferiority, which in turn served as motivation for negative portrayals of Islam and of Muslims. Even as the spread and success of Islam developed into a religious concern, the political and military threats remained, as evidenced in the *chansons de geste*. Moreover,

[118] Cited in Blanks and Frassetto, *Western Views of Islam*, 3; cf. Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 3.
[119] Tolan, *Saracens*, xii.
[120] David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds. *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perceptions of Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 3. Among the cultural advances of Islamic civilization listed by Blanks and Frassetto are architecture, law, literature, and philosophy, in addition to military advances.

the recognition of Islamic religious beliefs did not necessitate that they were accurately portrayed, as we will see realized later in the chapter.[121]

As shown in the previous chapter, the Saracens in the *chansons de geste* function as mirror images of the Christians, but this mirror is a "photographic negative," in the words of Blanks and Frassetto.[122] It is precisely the religious difference between Saracens and Christians, the former being "wrong" and the latter "right" as *La Chanson de Roland* would have it, that enables Christian self-definition.[123] Moreover, the opportunity for Christian-self-definition is not confined to the *chansons de geste*, but was broadly applicable throughout medieval Europe against—and because of—the rise of Islam.[124]

That said, it is important to recognize that there was no uniform view of Islam in medieval Europe: they varied according to many factors, including (but not limited to) region, religion, and education. As Moran Cruz writes, "In fact, they mixed popular and learned views, intermingled the realistic with the marvelous and the legendary, modulated over time and ran the gamut from the murderous to the empathetic," which she notes expressly contradicts "uniformity" views, such as those of Edward Said.[125] Moreover, even with similar factors at play, the representations of Muslims were not uniform, though there are recurring images: Islam as a polytheistic religion, the Prophet Muhammad as an anti-Christ, if not the Antichrist,

[121] Benjamin Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 87, qtd. in Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes Toward Islam," Blanks and Frassetto, *Western Views of Islam*, 64-5: "…confrontation with relatively accurate information did not necessarily lead to its absorption. Time and again, the new data failed to modify the writers' preconceptions; on the contrary, the preconceptions dictated the extent to which the data were absorbed. Nor did the availability of correct information guarantee its acceptance by all the learned, to say nothing of the learned, of that time." Although it is outside the scope of this thesis, it may–and has been objected by Moran Cruz and Norman Daniel–that some medieval Christian writers, notably John of Damascus and Peter the Venerable, were not entirely concerned with accurate depiction of Qur'anic teachings in their efforts to refute them, despite linguistic and cultural familiarity with the Arabic world. At the very least, some of these writers' foremost concern seemed to have been the refutation of these beliefs and/or the apologetics of/correct beliefs according to Christianity, and secondarily, if at all, occupying himself with nobly conveying an accurate representation of Islam.

[122] Ibid.

[123] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1015: "Paien unt tort e chrestīens unt dreit": "Pagans are right and Christians are wrong."

[124] Blanks and Frassetto signal the importance of Christian self-definition as a result of the success of Islamic civilization and the comparative weakness of Western civilization in *Western Views of Islam*, 3.

[125] Moran Cruz, "Popular Views of Islam in the Middle Ages," in Blanks and Frassetto, 56.

Islamic paradise (جنّة) as a garden of hedonist indulgence, Islam as an idolatrous religion, among others.[126] We will see some of these recurring images in the *chansons de geste* in the next two sections.

In dealing with the interactions between Christians and Muslims, one should avoid the assumption that one can trace modern misconceptions of Islam to the views of the backwards Middle Ages, or conversely, that the modern recognition of the values of respectful dialogue and tolerance should be applied to the Middle Ages in a revisionist fashion. On one hand, medieval Christian views of Islam reinforce the antecedent belief of many present-day Western views of Islam as an apocalyptic cult and religious, political, and cultural threat. On the other hand, as Mona Siddiqui suggests, they also illuminate the possibility to foster mutually enriching interreligious dialogue, as the next section will show.[127]

1.2. The Place of the *Chansons de geste* in Christian-Muslim Relations

It may be objected that as literary texts, the *chansons de geste* are less instrumental than theological and historical texts in Christian-Muslim relations. However, as I have maintained throughout the thesis, they remain instrumental precisely by virtue of their literary nature in

[126] Norman Daniel has one of the most systematic studies of Western images of Islam and of Muslims in *Islam and the West*. Not all of these images of Muslims are present in my corpus. Returning to the issue of generic difference raised in the Introduction, as a general rule, the images of excess (the hedonism of Islamic paradise; Muslim men as base polygamists) tend to be found primarily in the later *chansons de geste* and the *romans*, while the earlier *chansons de geste* tend deal with even more fundamental beliefs (monotheism, the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad)—which, of course, is not to dismiss the importance of Islamic views on paradise, marriage, etc or to claim that the central theological issues are confined to the earlier texts.

[127] "These early discussions are fundamentally about points of doctrine in which Christians and Muslims explored how best to defend the notion of God's oneness. They did this ingeniously by observing both form and logic in their arguments to the extent that all kinds of apologetics on both sides appear theologically convincing. Interreligious dialogue today very rarely explores doctrines in the same way, often viewing the discussion of creeds and dogma as obstacles to better relations…. Such writings can be used today in the area of interreligious dialogue to show how believers can share a passion about their own beliefs but also be passionate about making these beliefs comprehensible to others. For in fact, similar conversations have the potential to enrich the encounter between Muslims and Christians rather than diminish good relations." Mona Siddiqui, "God as One: Early Debates," *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013), 96.

that they are indicative of the extent to which Islam had entered—and remained in—the medieval Christian cultural mindset. I am not devaluing non-literary texts or suggesting that literature ought to supplant them, but arguing that literature can be an illuminative tool of comparison.

At the same time, it may seem obvious, but it is worth remembering that the *chansons de geste* are not *necessarily* indicative of contemporaneous attitudes toward Islam. As much as evidence allows, it is possible to ascertain to what extent the perceptions correspond to real perceptions and are not simply literary exaggerations, but it would be unwise to draw conclusions about perceptions based solely on the *chansons de geste* or other literature. Furthermore, the point is not to settle the "paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit" matter conclusively or to employ it in demonstrations of the backwardness of the Middle Ages, but to examine the logic of why pagans are wrong and Christians are right in the *chansons de geste*. While the *chansons de geste* may—and do—reflect broader cultural concerns of religious coexistence and/or intolerance and accordingly contemporary readers may well find them problematic, it is not particularly fruitful to take sides.

2. (Mis)representations of Religious Difference

This section will provide specific textual examples of (mis)representations of religious difference between Islam and Christianity, examining how the former is distorted as a hybrid religion between Islam and polytheism. On the one hand, the *chansons de geste* acknowledge, though misinterpret, such Islamic beliefs such as the importance of the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, they portray Islam as a polytheistic religion, or continuing in the vein of the early and medieval Christian vocabulary, a pagan religion. As this section will show, both sides of the hybrid religion are expressly contrary to Islamic belief.

2.1 Misrepresentations of Islamic Beliefs

As discussed in the first chapter, the Muslims of the *chansons de geste* are never referred to by any variant of "Muslim," but as "paien" and "Sarrazin." Likewise, their religion is not "Islam," but "la sarazine lei."[128]

The most fundamental belief in Islam is that of the oneness of God (توحيد), which is affirmed in the first part of the Islamic creed or the witness to faith (الشهادة), the first and most important of the Five Pillars of Islam.[129] The first part of the *shahada* reads as follows: "There is no god but God" (لا إله إلا الله).[130] Contrary to this fundamental declaration of Islamic monotheism, in the *chansons de geste*, both the Christian Franks and the pagan Saracens refer to a plurality of gods on the side of the latter. In *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Chanson de Guillaume*, the polytheism is articulated as an unholy Trinity of Muhammad, Tervagant, and Apollon: "'Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet ; Mahumet sert e Apollin recleimet" and "Mahomet… / E Appolin E Tervagant le veil."[131] This unholy Trinity is expressly antithetical to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which holds that God is one in three hypostases or persons.[132] In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, both Vivien and Guillaume invoke the Trinity in

[128] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 981a. "The Saracen faith."
[129] For the shahada as creed, see John L. Esposito, "Religious Life: Belief and Practice," in *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 85 and David Waines, "There is no god but Allah…," in *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 7-32; for the shahada as the first of the Five Pillars of Islam and the principle of *tawhid*, see Esposito, "Religious Life: Belief and Practice," 106. On both points, see Tolan, *Saracens*, 22.
[130] For medieval Christian understandings of Islamic monotheism, see Norman Daniel, "Christian Understanding of Islamic Belief," in *Islam and the West*, 35-66, but especially section 5, "The content of revelation: one God," 60-66. For further discussion of Islamic monotheism, see Sidney H. Griffith, "Confessing Monotheism in Arabic (*at-Tawḥid*): The One God of Abraham and his Apologists," in *Oxford Handbooks Online: Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*, eds. Adam J. Silverstein, Guy G. Stroumsa, and Moshe Blidstein, 315-331. Looking particularly at ninth-century Baghdad, Griffith shows that even as apologists and polemicists of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism wrote to affirm the monotheism of their own religions, they tried to make sense of the expression of monotheism in the other two Abrahamic traditions.
[131] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 7-8, qtd in Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 9: "King Marsilie, who does not love God, holds it [Saragossa]; he serves Muhammad and calls on Apollin," trans. Ramey. *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 3253-4: "Muhammad… / And Apollin and the old Tervagant."
[132] The ὁμοούσιος [homoousios] of the Trinity, though already observed in belief, was promulgated as doctrine at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 and codified in the Council's formation of the Nicene Creed. My familiarity with this and with many other references in this thesis to early Christian beliefs, practices, and institutions was greatly increased in Early Christianity, a course taught by György Geréby and Volker Menze at the Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University in Winter 2017.

prayer, perhaps explicitly to reaffirm the doctrine against the misbelief of the Saracens: "'Deus, rei de glorie, qui me fesis né, / E de la sainte virgne, sire, fustes né, / En treis persones fud tun cors comandé'"[133] and "'E, Deus, fait il, qui mains en trinité….'"[134]

Apart from *La Chanson de Roland*, the unholy Trinity is expanded into a Saracen pantheon in the *chansons de geste*.[135] "Li Sarazin Alderufe fu hardiz e prouz, / Chevaler bon, si out fere vertuz, / Mais Dey nen aint, partant est il tut perdu, / Ainz creist le glut Pilate e Belzebu, / E Antecrist, Bagot e Tartarin, / E d'enfern le veil Astarut"[136] and "'Des ore devon Mahomet aorer, / E Apolin e Bagot e Macabeu!'"[137] are two of many possible examples of the enumeration of Saracen gods. Nevertheless, as Y. Pellat and Charles Pellat rightly observe, having a more complete pantheon in no way clarifies the poets' representation of Islam and ultimately does little more than serve literary purpose.[138]

But what is even more interesting is that the Saracens represent themselves as polytheistic: "Paien escrïent: 'Aie nos, Mahum ! / Li nostre deu, vengez nos de Carlun !'"[139] The self-identification of the Saracens as polytheistic, while contrary to and thereby objectionable from an Islamic point of view, is perhaps a permeation of the poet's Christian background: as a Christian himself or at the very least heavily exposed and sympathetic to Christianity, he has nothing to lose by making his Saracen characters distortions of real

[133] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 800-2: "'God, king of glory, who gave me life, / and who was born, sire, of the holy virgin, / in three persons….'" Vivien's prayer continues with a reference to the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, both of which are equally beliefs rejected in Islam.
[134] Ibid, v. 2079: "'God, who dwells in the Trinity…."
[135] Apart from the unholy Trinity as presented in *La Chanson de Roland*, the other *chansons de geste* extend the Saracen pantheon. Y. Pellat and Charles Pellat have noted that the names of the Saracen gods "expliquent par la mythologie (Jupiter, Baratron, etc.), par la Bible (Cahu = Caïn, Belzebu, etc.) ou par l'histoire des persecutions subies par les Chretiens (Noiron=Néron)," Y. Pellat and Charles Pellat, "L'idée de Dieu chez les 'Sarrasins' dans Chansons de geste," *Studia Islamica* no. 22 (1965), 28.
[136] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 2134-9. "The Saracen Alderufe is brave and full of prowess, / A good knight, full of virtue. / But he does not love God; for this reason he is completely lost, / he believes in the greedy Pilate and Beelzebub, And the Antichrist, Bagot and Tartarin, and the old Astarut from hell."
[137] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, 2282-3. "Let us give thanks to Muhammad, / And Apollo and Bagot and Macabeu!"
[138] Pellat and Pellat, "L'idée de dieu," 32: "Toute cette théogonie n'offre en fait qu'un intérêt de curiosité et n'apporte rien à l'idée de dieu, car les divinités énumérées, même quand leurs idoles sont décrites, ne possèdent aucune individualité et ne sont pas finalement que des noms exploités à des fins littéraires."
[139] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1906-7: "The pagans cry: 'Help us, Muhammad / O our gods, avenge us against Charles!"

Muslims. As Tolan writes, to approach Islam "on its own terms" would be to "take the first step toward being seduced by their error."[140]

In *La Chanson de Roland*, the sense of the poet's pervasive Christianity is reinforced by the fact that the Saracens believe in a trio of gods, Muhammed, Tervagant, and Apollo, a perversion of the Christian Trinity as we have seen. Although the Saracens in the *chansons de geste* may seem unrecognizably far from being devout Muslims, the dissimilarity is in fact a medieval commonplace, both in the quantitative and rhetorical senses. Hardly confined to the *chansons de geste*, the misrepresentation of Islam as a polytheistic religion is a common feature of Western medieval Christian literature and continues in the vein of the early Christian conflation between paganism and polytheism.[141]

Furthermore, part of the misrepresentation of Islam as a polytheistic religion simultaneously views the Prophet Muhammad as one of the gods in the unholy Trinity or as the Muslim equivalent of Christ, having both divine and human natures. This misconception was equally common in the Middle Ages and, I would venture to add, remains a common misconception of Islam today.[142] We have seen that the first part of the *shahada* affirms the oneness of God; the second part declares, "And Muhammad is the messenger of God" (Arabic: و أشهد أن محمد رسول الله).[143] The second part is important because it illustrates that Muhammed is

[140] Tolan, *Saracens*, 20.
[141] On these points, see Chapter 1, section 1.
[142] Tolan, "'Saracen' as a Synonym for 'Pagan,'" *Saracens*, 126-127: "Many medieval authors refer to pagans idols by the name of Muhammad, in various corrupted forms (Mahomet, Mahon, Mahoum, Mawmet). In the *Chansons de Geste*, he is invoked as a god or described as an idol hundreds of times. Yet this is not merely a convention of the French epic poets; many author authors refer to Muhammad in the same terms."
[143] The *shahada* (الشهادة) derives from the Qu'ran: see, for example, 37:35: "Truly, when it was said to them: '*Lā ilāha illalāh* (none has the right to be worshipped but Allāh),' they puffed themselves up with pride (i.e. denied it)" and 48:29: "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh. And those who are with him are severe against disbelievers, and merciful among themselves. You will see them bowing and falling down prostrate (in prayer), seeking Bounty from Allāh and (His) Good Pleasure. The mark of them is on their faces (foreheads) from the traces of protrsation (during prayers). This is their description in the Taruāt (Torah). But their description in the InjIl (Gospel) is like a (sown) seed which sends forth its shoot, then makes it strong, and becomes thick and it stands straight on its stem, delighting the sowers, that He may enrage the disbelievers with them. Allāh has promised those among them who believe (i.e. all those who follow Islamic Monotheism, the religion of Prophet Muhammad till the Day of Resurrection) and do righteous deeds, forgiveness and a mighty reward (i.e. Paradise)," in Muhammad Taqi-ud Din Al-Hilâli and Muhummad Muhsin Khan, eds. and trans., *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English language summarized in one volume* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1998).

considered a prophet in Islam, and not a person of God as is Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity in trinitarian Christianity, or another god altogether as the *chansons de geste* would have it.[144]

Another fundamental misconception is that of the authorship of the Quran. I am indebted to Lynn Tarte Ramey for bringing this passage to my attention: "'Marsilies fait porter un livre avant : / La lei i fut Mahum e Tevagan.' [Marsilie had a book brought forth, in it was the law of Muhammad and Tervagant]."[145] As Ramey explains, "When the Saracens swear an oath to do their best to kill Roland, they do so on their holy book, mistaking Muhammad and Tervagant as the authors of, presumably, the Koran, whereas Islam holds the book to be the literal word of God." This misconception, while unique to *La Chanon de Roland* among the texts in my corpus, is no less serious from an Islamic perspective, for it distorts the central holy book of Islam.[146]

For an overview of its formula, history, and theology, see Andrew Rippin, "Witness to Faith," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. Norman Daniel writes that the shahada was well known to medieval Christian writers, if not from direct contact with Muslims, then in the medieval Latinized form "Non est deus nisi Deus, Mahomad est nuncius Dei" and variations thereof; see Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 232-233.

[144] For medieval Christian conceptions of Muhammad as a prophet, see Norman Daniel, "Revelation: Christian Understanding of Islamic Belief," in *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* Oxford: Oneworld, 1993, 35-66, but especially section 1, "Muhammad as Prophet," 36-40 and idem, "Revelation: The Christian Attack upon 'Psuedoprophecy,'" particularly section 3, "The Prophethood of Muhammad," 88-93, in *Islam and the West.* In addition, it is worth noting that one of the chroniclers of the First Crusade, Guibert of Nogent (c. 1055-1124), who would have been roughly a contemporary of the earliest *chansons de geste* poets, does recognize the monotheism of Islam and the prophethood of Muhammad; see John Tolan, "Muslim as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusades," in David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds. *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perceptions of Other*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1998, 99. Tolan states that Guibert is alone in his accurate depiction of Islamic monotheism and the prophethood of Muhammad in the twelfth century. Jo Ann Moran Cruz names other twelfth-century writers who do so: William of Malesbury, Humbert of Romans, and Jacobus de Voragine in his *Legenda aurea*; see Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes Toward Islam in Medieval Europe," in David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds. *Western Views of Islam*, 55-81. According to Robert Levine in his translated edition, Guibert was the best-known historian of the First Crusade, despite not being widely received in the Middle Ages; see Robert Levine, "Introduction," *Gesta Dei per Francos*, ed. and trans. Levine, Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1997, 1-17.

[145] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 610-11, qtd. and trans. in Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 9.

[146] Nonetheless, misunderstandings of the Qur'an were widespread in medieval Christendom. See Norman Daniel, *Islam and the* West, 53-60 and 67-88 and Sidney Griffith, "The Qur'an in Arab Christian Texts–The Development of an Apologetic Argument," *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (1999): 203-33. For a primary source medieval Christian reading of the Qur'an, though postdating the *chansons de geste*, see the fourteenth-century anonymous "Letter from the People of Cyprus, as well as the eponymous article by David Thomas, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600–1500*.

Apart from polytheism, the most prominent misrepresentation is that of Muslims as idolaters.[147] In *La Chanson de Roland*, the pagan king Marsile assembles his army at Saragossa and erects an idol there: "Mahumet levent en la plus halte tur : / N'i ad paien ne l' prit e ne l'aort."[148] The emir Baligant invokes the unholy trinity, revealing that he had the idols made of pure gold.[149] In stark contrast to this misrepresentation of Muslims as idolaters, John Tolan writes that historically, according to Islam, "Idols must be eliminated, and Muslim troops often destroyed them and their temples. Arab tribes who converted to Islam were asked to destroy their own idols as proof of their clear break with the past."[150] Returning to *La Chanson de Roland*'s idolatry, the same Saracens in the previous example become iconoclasts, though not out of a Pauline conversion to Christianity or even out of a newfound adoption of their own religious values. Instead, because they are now on the losing side, they forsake the idols to which they had entrusted their safety and victory:

> Ad Apolin curent en une crute,
> Tencent a lui, laidement le despersunent :
> 'E ! malvais deus, porquei nus fais tel hunte ?'
> Cest nostre rei porquei lessas cunfundre ?
> Ki mult te sert, malvais lüer l'en dunes !'
> Puis si li tolent sun sceptre e sa curune,
> Par mains le pendent desur une culumbe,
> Entre lur piez a tere le tresturnent,
> A granz bastuns le batent e defruisent,
> E Tervagan tolent son erscarbuncle,
> E Mahumet enz en un fossét butent,
> E porc e chen le mordent e defulent.[151]

[147] Jamal J. Elias considers whether Muslim iconoclasm existed in parallel to Byzantine iconoclasm, though he is careful to point out that Christian condemnation of idolatry existed long before the rise of Islam. See "Iconoclasm, Iconophobia, and Islam" in *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), 84-99. See also Norman Daniel, Appendix A: "The imputation of idolatry to Islam" in *Islam and the West*, 338-43.

[148] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 853-4. "They erect [a statue of] Muhammad on the highest tower: / there is no pagan who does not pray to or adore it."

[149] Ibid., vv. 3490-3: "Li amiralz recleimet Apolin / E Tervagan e Mahum altresi: / 'Mi damnedeu, jo vos ai mult servit, / E boz ymagenes referai tut d'or fin." "The emir invokes Apolin / And Tervagant and Muhammad also: 'My lord gods, I have served you well, / And all your statues, I have made of pure gold."

[150] Tolan, *Saracens*, 33.

[151] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 2581-91: "They run to Apollo in a crypt, / revolting against him, they insult him slanderously: / 'O evil god, why do you cause us such shame? / This god of ours, why have you led us astray? Whomever serves you well will merit a poor reward.' Then they take away his scepter and his crown, / hang him by his hands upon a column, / cast him to the ground at their feet / and beat and shatter him with large sticks. They

It is important that the Saracens do not simply verbally renounce their belief in the unholy Trinity, but actively and violently destroy their idols ("a granz bastuns le batent e defruisent"). In a scene of equal meticulousness, the Christians also destroy the pagan idols.[152] Here, however, the destruction of pagan idols is less striking as it is inherently part of the Christian agenda.[153] By contrast, in the case of the Saracens, the destruction contradicts their belief in the unholy Trinity of Muhammad, Tervagant, and Apollo and, in doing so, effectively nullifies their religion. At the same time, the recognition of the futility of their gods and the destruction of their idols do not make the Saracens more aware of the Christians' efficacious supplication to their singular God or particularly more receptive to conversion to Christianity.[154] As Lynn Tarte Ramey points out, "This scene reflects perhaps the ultimate sacrilege to the Christian community, which believed quite strongly in icons, but it makes no sense in Islam as images and pictorial representations were and are not permitted."[155] It is possible that the concurrence of the Crusades had some impact upon the written versions of the earliest *chansons de geste*, though I maintain that it would be purely speculative to assign influences of contemporary crusader ideology without substantial evidence.[156]

take Tervagent from his escarbuncle, / And push Muhammad into a ditch, / where both pigs and dogs bite and trample on him."

[152] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3660-5. "Li emperere ad Sarraguce prise, / A mil franceis fait ben cercer la vile, / Les sinagoges e les mahumeries ; / A mailz de fer e cuignees qu'il tindrent / Fruissent Mahum e trestutes les ydeles / N'i remeidrat ne sorz ne falserie": "The emperor has taken Saragossa, / a thousand Franks search the city, The synagogues and the mosques; / With mauls of iron and hatchets that they hold / they destroy Muhammad and all the idols. / Neither sorcery nor falsehood will remain."

[153] Writing specifically of this laisse, Suzanne Conklin Akbari underlines, "It is important to note that this is not simply a scene of idolatry, but of iconoclasm… This parallelism suggests the extent in which medieval Christians used their own theology to imagine Islam," *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell UP, 2009), 207.

[154] After destroying the idols, some of the Saracens begin to recognize their wrongness: "Li amiralz alques s'en aperceit / Que il ad tort e Carlemagnes dreit," though they are no closer to conversion to Christianity; see *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3553-4: "The emir begins to recognize / That he is wrong and Charlemagne is right." Chapter 3 of this thesis will further examine the motif of conversion and consider why the majority of Saracens have no interest in converting to Christianity.

[155] Ramey, *Christians, Saracens, and Genre*, 9.

[156] I will return to the discussion of the influence of the Crusades in Chapter 3, section 2. It is worth noting that in his introduction to *La Chanson de Guillaume*, 37, François Suard writes that the text is "imprégnée de l'idéal de la croisade," but I do not think he substantiates this claim. John Tolan's chapter "Muslim as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusades," in Blanks and Frassetto, eds. *Western Views of Islam*, 97-118, shows that by the time of the Crusades, the identification of Muslin as idolaters was common practice. Further research would be needed to establish the genesis and evolution of the misconception of Muslims as idolaters, which is beyond

It is unsurprising that the Christian poets of the *chansons de geste* do not go to great lengths to represent Islam accurately, but "even the basic elements of the religion are lacking."[157] Beyond their fundamental distortion of Islam, the representations of Islam with an unholy Trinity and as idolatrous in the *chansons de geste* are especially perplexing given that the doctrine of the Trinity and the practice of idolatry were two grounds on which Islam clearly distinguished itself from idol-worshipping polytheists and from Christianity, respectively.[158]

2.2 The Polemics of the *Chansons de geste*: Fiction and History

The extent of the misrepresentation of Islam and of Muslims in the *chansons de geste* raises the questions: for what reason are Islam and Muslims so distorted? To what extent do the misrepresentations in the literary texts correspond to historical misrepresentations? What might have been the poets' motives for the misrepresentation? The purpose is not to assign definitive explanations, which would be speculative at best, but to examine the possibilities in conjunction with historical explanations for the misrepresentation of Islam in the Middle Ages.

the scope of this thesis. However, I suspect that it derives at least in part from a persistence–though not necessarily a direct continuity–of late antique Christian perceptions of "pagans," which early Christians equally characterized "pagans" (effectively referring to anyone outside of the Judaeo-Christian tradition) as polytheistic and idolatrous. On the early Christian view of paganism, see Eric Robertson Dodds, "The Dialogue of Christianity with Paganism," in *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 102-138.

[157] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, 9.

[158] It is interesting that from an Islamic perspective, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is evidence of polytheism. On this point, see Jamal J. Elias, "Iconoclasm, Iconophobia, and Islam," 87 and David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era," *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001, 78-98. For primary sources, see 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir (Provo, UT: Bingham Young UP, 2010), especially lines 26-28: "if it is said: 'Their statement that God is three hypostases and one substance is like the statement of Muslims, 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Benevolent' and like their statement about God, 'He is Living, Omnipotent, Knowing,' one should reply: This is an error of the Christians. Their statement about monotheism has nothing in common with that of Muslims. Only one who seeks to mislead and too flee from a disgraceful statement would say this." Ibn Taymiyyah, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity,* ed. and trans. Thomas F. Michel (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), particularly 256: "In the expression 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' these terms do not indicate what they describe by them in the language of any one of the prophets that he asserted by these terms what they have claimed to be their meanings, by use of which they have even tried to prove what they have claimed concerning the trinity and its formulation. This expression is something which they have invented for which there is no proof, neither religious nor rational," though Ibn Taymiyyah's whole refutation of the Trinity ("Trinitarian Questions," 255-325) is relevant.

In the first place, we might consider the poets innocent: is it possible that the distortion arises from the poets' ignorance of Islamic beliefs and of Muslims? John Tolan suggests that the misrepresentation stems from a lack of contact with Muslims.[159] However, given the extent to which Islam had become a cultural concern, particularly by the time of the written transmission of the earliest *chansons de geste* and against the backdrop of the Crusades, it is unlikely that the poets would have been ignorant altogether.

If the poets do have some knowledge of Islam, then, is the misrepresentation deliberate? Scholars are divided on the question; for instance, Norman Daniel holds that the misrepresentation is literary convention,[160] while Tolan counters that this is a mistake.[161] As we have previously seen, in the medieval Western Christian context, knowledge of Islam does not necessarily imply or guarantee accuracy of representation.[162] On this point, it is necessary to return to an argument begun in the last section: if Islam is indeed regarded as a religious threat and a rival civilization, the Christian poets would have no incentive to ensure that it is represented accurately—and moreover, may knowingly misrepresent it.[163] This is not to accuse

[159] Tolan, *Saracens*, 133-4: "While the image of the pagan Saracen lives on in the *Chansons de geste*, liturgical drama, and saints lives until the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, assuring the Christian readers of the truth of their own religion, it dies quickly among those who have had contact with Islam. Among the chronicles of the Crusades, only those dealing with the first Crusade portray Saracens as idolaters. Spanish Christians from the eighth century on had known enough of Islam not to present it as idolatry; other Western writers, using knowledge of Islam gleaned from Spanish and Eastern sources, will increasingly portray it as a variant, heretical version of Christianity."

[160] Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, 9. Briefly, Daniel holds that if the poets are indeed ignorance, the literary portrayals must be realistic; otherwise, if the poets do have some familiarity with Islam and with Muslims (as Daniel holds), the literary portrayals of the Saracens are freely fictitious.

[161] Tolan, *Saracens*, 126: "Some modern scholars (notably Norman Daniel) have dismissed this portrayal of Saracen idolatry as mere literary convention: no one believed this of the Muslims; they were only creating a caricatural "bad guy" as a foil for the epics' forthright Christian knight. While Daniel is certainly right to point out the element of playful exaggeration in some of these texts, he is wrong in asserting that the writers and readers of the epics knew better. Some writers, indeed, did know better; many, however, did not. Many writers, in Latin as well as the vernacular, in chronicles, legal treatises, plays, and other texts, continued to portray Saracens as pagan devotees of Apollo, Jupiter, Mahomet, and other 'demons.'"

[162] Peter the Venerable, discussed in Pellat and Pellat, "L'idée de Dieu," 10-12.

[163] I think this raises a broader point on Christian-Muslim apologetics and polemics and one that would extend to present-day interreligious dialogue. If the apologist-polemicist deliberately misrepresents the other religion or takes no particular care in representing it accurately, the work ceases to be respectful and beneficial, and apart from possessing a possible remote semblance of literary or historical value, does little more than to incite religious fundamentalists and lead to further misunderstandings of and unnecessary divisions between the two Abrahamic religions.

the poets of deliberate falsification of Islam, but even if the poets were aware of Islam and their motives were innocent, the sources of their knowledge may well have been anxious to dismiss it or even ignorant themselves. As Daniel rightly points out, "We might more plausibly argue that these writers lacked the power to discriminate between the truly authentic and the apparently so, but to say this to beg the question. The real question is why they did not prefer Islamic authorities on Islamic subjects to Christian ones, whenever there was any conflict as to matters of fact."[164] The chief problem with any misconception of religion is that it may be passed on as authentic; once written down, the likelihood of its being transmitted as authoritative in the future rises. Such misrepresentations are particularly likely given the culturally widespread "angoisse de la Chrétienté devant les progrès et la séduction de l'Islam," as Pellat and Pellat write.[165]

Scholars are divided regarding the line between history and fiction in the *chansons de geste*. Some hold that it is ambiguous but that the texts maintain a sense of history or reality, while others argue that the borderline is ambiguous—and purposefully so. The former position is held by Moran Cruz, who writes that "Specifically, [this chapter] has suggested that the chansons de geste do not necessarily project either ignorance or complete and deliberate fiction; rather, there is a base of reality behind the epics"[166] and by Pellat and Pellat, who hold that the representations "se caractérise par de vagues réminiscences historiques." [167] Ramey represents the latter position in arguing that the "line between history and fiction was intentionally blurred."[168] For my own part, I would be wary to concur with Ramey on the intentionality of the blurred line between history and fiction in the *chansons de geste*; to

[164] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 271. The rest of chapter VII, section 4, "The Motives of Misrepresentation," 271-6, is worth reading.
[165] Pellat and Pellat, "L'idée de Dieu," 9.
[166] Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes Toward Islam in Medieval Europe," in Blanks and Frassetto, *Western Views of Islam*, 71.
[167] Pellat and Pellat, "L'idée de Dieu," 9.
[168] Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 6.

describe anything in the Middle Ages as "intentional" is strong and would warrant ample textual evidence. In addition, I am less concerned with establishing a precise line between history and fiction—which, once again, I would hold cannot be done in the case of the *chansons de geste*—as I am with recognizing that there is a line—and a grey one—in the first place.

In *La Chanson de Roland*, the wrongness of the Saracens extends to the afterlife: "Li paiens chet cuntreval a un quat ; / L'anme de lui en portet Sathanas."[169] It is worth noting that the poet-narrator is privy to the judgment of souls; as we will see in the next chapter, he is equally aware of the salvation of the Christian Franks, who by virtue of their deaths for "seinte Chrestïentét" and "dulce France" merit eternal life in paradise.[170] In that sense, the battle itself is neutral ground, by which I mean that the infliction of violence neither condemns nor absolves its participants. Instead, it is the underlying philosophy that determines their eternal fate; because "paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit," it follows that the pagan Saracens will go to hell and the Christian Franks will go to heaven. [171]

Is there any possibility for the pagan Saracens to overcome their "wrongness"? In the next chapter, I will discuss the possibility of conversion as a means of crossing the binary, together with the legitimization of violence, the concept of holy war, and the ideal of martyrdom, showing that while the Saracens are offered the privilege of conversion at a considerable cost to themselves, their refusal legitimizes the violence perpetrated against them, and elevates the deaths of the Franks to a secular and yet holy martyrdom for "dulce France."

[169] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1267-8. "The pagan crashes downward to the ground, / His soul is carried away by Satan."
[170] For the Christians' confession, see *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1132-5: "'Clamez vos culpes, si preiez Deu mercit! / Asoldrai vos pur voz anmes guarir ; / Se vos murez, esterez seinz martirs : / Sieges avrez el greignor pareïs'": "'Confess your sins, pray to God for his mercy! / I will absolve you to save your souls; / if you die, you will be holy martyrs / And you will have great seats in paradise.'" Martyrdom will be explored further in the next chapter, section 4.
[171] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1015. "Pagans are wrong and Christians are right."

Chapter 3—The Extremities of Religious Difference: Violence, Holy War, Conversion, and Martyrdom

Having established that the primary category of difference in the earliest *chansons de geste* is religion, I will now turn to how religious difference is employed to the extreme. This chapter will first dissociate the term "violence" from modern discourse, showing that violence in the context of the *chansons de geste* cannot be understood in the same manner. Despite the lack of an appropriate designation that is compatible with medieval perceptions, the *chansons de geste* are replete with bloodshed and gore allegedly in the defense of religion and with divine sanction. How then can the reader understand these concepts and their illustrations in the *chansons de geste*? Focusing on the legitimation of violence, this chapter will then turn individually to three manifestations of violence: holy war, conversion, and martyrdom.[172] In addition, it may seem odd at first to associate holy war, conversion, and martyrdom, perhaps the latter two especially, with violence. However, as this chapter will show, they constitute the underpinnings of the legitimation of violence and ultimately serve as the fulfillment of Christian-Frankish identity at the expense of the pagan Saracens.

3.1 Rethinking Violence

The intersection of religion and violence is an exceedingly vast subject that could be approached from a variety of perspectives (such as philosophical, theological, political, and sociological). Here, I am focusing on the literary intersections of religion and violence in the *chansons de geste*. My interest is on the internal structures and whether they reflect external structures rather than imposing a rigid external history upon literary texts.

[172] Norman Daniel has already discussed all three; while his study is excellent and comprehensive, I have preferred to concentrate on the individual texts of my corpus rather than the *chansons de geste* at large. See Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, particularly the chapter "Violence: Hatred, Suffering and War," 94-118.

The epic genre of the *chansons de geste* has led some scholars to overestimate the violence present in the texts or, conversely, to reduce the texts to a medium of intolerance and violence. Consider, for example, Jean Charles Payen's claim that "L'épopée est par définition apologie de la violence. Plus encore, elle est violence elle-même, parce qu'elle prend parti, au nom d'un groupe, contre un autre group quelle condamne et voue à l'extermination."[173] Such readings rightly signal the role of violence in the *chansons de geste*, but mistakenly assume that the extensive presence of violence is synonymous with its valorization or that it serves as evidence of Christian intolerance.

For this reason and before embarking upon a consideration of the manifestations and meanings of violence in the texts, it is important to consider what is meant by "violence" in the first place. It is not self-evident; I will begin by considering the term "violence" and its meanings in the *chansons de geste*. First, it is necessary to qualify the term "violence" in the context of the Middle Ages. Peter Haidu rightly underlines the problematic nature of discussing the term "violence" in an Old French context and cautions against imposing our modern sensibilities of the term:

> Violence must not be hypostasized. It is a relational concept, not a thing…Our modern language constitutes an impediment to understanding its earlier formers. There is no single equivalent to 'violence' in Old French, even though the term itself derives from Old French violer, meaning the use of force in general, as well its particular use meaning 'rape.' One source lists a total of forty-five Old French equivalents for the modern French violence. Not all of the words listed bear the moral disapproval inherent in the modern term. The rough, injurious, or unjust use of force did not invariably bear coded, moral disapproval, however much individuals may have suffered from it. Our term 'violence' perforce bears a seme of disapproval, of condemnation: our culture assumes peace as the desired and desirable norm, and negativizes its opposite. In other cultures, such as the nomadic and the early feudal, the use and display of force were positively coded, at least in a particular class, as sources of profit, honor, social rank, and release from various servitudes. To some degree, and from some perspectives, the use of force in forms we consider violent was a social norm in medieval society: society was unimaginable without its presence.[174]

[173] Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux": 226.
[174] Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993), 3.

One can begin by qualifying the term "violence" etymologically. As discussed in the introduction, the *chansons de geste* are written in various dialects of the then-nonintegrated Old French language.[175] More importantly, as Haidu points out, Old French does not have a single equivalent of the word "violence." The first attestation of the word in the French language was not until 1694, though the word does have earlier roots in the Latin *violentia* or *violare*.[176] Because the Old French language lacks an umbrella term such as "violence" to refer to acts of violence, it follows that acts of violence would not be understood in the same way as "violence" in the contemporary world. Thus, there is an important distinction between the acts of violence themselves and the hypostatization of violence in this context.

It is often assumed in popular readings that violence fueled the Middle Ages, though popular culture is not alone, as Payen's claim shows. Read from a teleological perspective, the *chansons de geste* represent a visible point on along the continuum of Christian intolerance toward Muslims, and intolerance easily gives way to violence. However, this assumption undermines both the complexity of violence in medieval society and the complexity of Christian-Muslim relations.[177] Beyond giving credence to popular stereotypes of the Middle Ages as dark, brutal, and backward, reducing the *chansons de geste* to an apology of violence fails to take into account the feudal value system.[178] The point is not to deny the existence of awareness of violence and the moral questions its uses bring, but to point out how markedly different it is from the modern notion and that the *chansons de geste* cannot simply be read along a straight line of Christian-Muslim antagonism from the Middle Ages to the present. Certainly, the lack of a designation does not mean that violent acts did not take place or that its

[175] See Introduction, 3-4.
[176] "Violence," *Trésor de la langue française;* "Violence," *Dictionnaire Larousse.* "Violer" is defined: "user de violence," *Le Dictionnaire de l'ancien français*. However, I find this definition circular, as it relies on an anachronism. As previously discussed, the first attestation of the word in the French language does not occur for centuries, though the French word does have Latin roots.
[177] On the latter, see Chapter 2 of this thesis,
[178] On feudalism and the *chansons de geste*, see Chapter 1, section 1.

perpetrators are thereby excused. It does mean that the reader needs to think differently about violence in this context.

Before turning to the legitimation of violence, I would like to consider textual examples of gore and brutality that make up the "éthique et esthétique de la violence," as Payen refers to it.[179] Sometimes the brutality is muted, such as when Roland vanquishes Saracens on the battlefield: "Des Sarrazins lur fait mult grant damage."[180] But often it is by no means hidden or muted, as the following passage illustrates:

> E fiert un paen sur sa doble targe,
> Tute li fent de l'un ur desqu'a l'altre,
> E trenchat le braz qui li sist en l'enarme,
> Colpe le piz e trenchad lui la coraille,
> Parmi l'eschine sun grant espeé li passe,
> Tut estendu l'abat mort en la place.
> Crie : ' Munjoie ! ', ço fu l'enseigne Charle.[181]

Likewise, in *Gormont et Isembart,* the poet does not hesitate to describe the bloodshed: "tut fut sanglant e enoché, / de Sarrazins envermeillié."[182] On one hand, it is significant that the poets do not go to great lengths to detail the brutal deaths of the *francei*s, although the poets write that both sides suffer equal losses. On the other, the poets' seemingly painstaking fascination with Saracen bloodshed reinforces Payen's claim. It does not completely justify it, however.

Gore is particularly illustrated in the killing of the twelve Saracen peers in *La Chanson de Roland*, which is enumerated over multiple *laisses*: "L'osberc li rumpt entresquë a la charn, / Sun bon espiét enz el cors li enbat."[183] The gore escalates over the following *laisses*,

[179] Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux," 229.
[180] *La Chanson de Roland,* v. 1340. "He causes the Saracens such great harm."
[181] *La Chanson de Guillaume,* vv. 321-327. "And [Vivien] strikes a pagan on his double shield, / and splits it from one side to the other, / and cuts through his arm sitting in the *enarmes* [the handles or straps of a shield], / hacks his chest and pierces his heart, his [i.e., Vivien's] sword passes through the spine, / and strikes him dead on the spot. He [Vivien] cries, 'Munjoie!,' that is the ensign of Charlemagne."
[182] *Gormont et Isembart,* vv. 339-340. "Everything was bloody and cut up, / reddened by the blood of Saracens."
[183] *La Chanson de Roland,* vv. 1265-6. His hauberk splits through the flesh, / he drives his good lance into the body." For the most complete picture of the gore that permeates the death of the Saracen peers, see *laisse* 96 and following.

culminating in the declaration that "Des duze pers li dis en sunt ocis."[184] It is telling that awareness of the brutality of the Franks is not confined to the present-day reader with modern sensibilities, but the Saracens also recognize it: "Ço dist Marsilie : 'Carles li emperere / Mort m'ad mes homes, ma tere deguastee, / E mes citez fraites e vïolees…."[185] The Saracens recognize that the stake of the battle is death, as Isembart's warning to the Saracens indicates: "'Defendez vus, dolenz, issi / com pur vos vies garantir.'"[186]

But if the concept of violence as such is postmedieval, what is one then to make of the gore and brutality that seem to recommend that the *chanson de geste* is an "apologie de la violence"? There are a number of possible explanations: apocalyptic and millennial expectations as motivation, the militant character of Christianity, or violence enacted because of intolerance. All of these proposed solutions have some validity. However, I believe the strongest answer lies in the legitimation through holy war, which I will return to after looking at the alternative and corollary explanations.

The first proposed argument is that apocalyptic or millennial expectations served as motivation for violence, which later culminated in the First Crusade of 1095-1100.[187] Though the written versions postdate the First Crusade, it is possible that millennial expectations shaped the oral versions, but there is of course no evidence of the oral contents. However, there are certainly apocalyptic pervasions in the *chansons de geste*. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Saracens in the *chansons de geste* are occasionally described as followers of the Antichrist, but the

[184] Ibid, v. 1308. "Of the twelve peers, ten were killed."
[185] Ibid, vv. 2755-7. "Marsile answers them: The emperor Charles / killed my men, ravaged my lands, / and destroyed and sacked my cities."
[186] *Gormont et Isembart*, 597-8. "Defend yourselves, wretched, in such a way / as to save your lives."
[187] On the connection between millennial expectations and the First Crusade, see Philippe Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 9-10. See also Jamel Velji, "Apocalyptic Religion and Violence," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, eds. Michael Jerryson, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Margo Kitts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 250-9 and Luis Greisiger, "Apocalypticism, Millenarianism, and Messianism," *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*, eds. Adam J. Silverstein and Guy G. Stroumsa, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 272-314. Furthermore, despite the millennial association, apocalyptic expectations persisted in the subsequent Crusades: see Tolan, *Saracens*, 194-213.

eschatological discourse is also extended to the battlefield as the locus of a literary Last Judgment, particularly in *La Chanson de Roland*:

> En France en ad mult merveillus turment :
> Orez i ad de tuneire e de vent,
> Pluie e gresilz desmesurëement ;
> Chiedent i fuildres e menut e suvent,
> E terremoete ço i ad veirement :
> […] Cuntre midi tenebres i ad granz :
> N'i ad claret se li ceils nen i fent.
> Hume ne l' veit ki mult ne s'epoënt ;
> Dïent plusor : 'Cest li definement,
> La fin del secle ki nus en present.'[188]

In this passage, the natural phenomena (the earthquake; the thunderstorm; the darkening of the sky) give rise to the apocalyptic fear that it is the end of the world ("Cest li definement / La fin del secle ki nus en present"). Shortly thereafter, the archbishop guarantees that though death is imminent, the Christians will merit paradise: "Ultre cest jurn ne serum plus vivant ; / Mais d'une chose vos soi jen ben guarant : / Seint pareïs vos est abandunant; / As Innoncenz vos en serez sëant."[189]

A second explanation concerns the history of Christianity and violence, ultimately deriving from the presumption "that an essentially pacifist early Christian ethos was perverted by outside forces."[190] In other words, the bellicosity of the Christians in the *chansons de geste* was not a medieval invention, but was a development of centuries of Christian resistance to, ambivalence toward, and lastly participation in war.

The third proposed explanation—that difference is the motivator or that violence stems from intolerance of the Other—is the shakiest explanation yet. As I have discussed in the first

[188] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1423-7 and 1431-6. "In France there is a great tempest / a storm with thunder and with wind, / Rain and hail in excess; / lightning strikes again and again, / truly, it is an earthquake. […] / At midday the darkness is great: / no light shines except through a crack in the sky / No one who saw it was not frightened; / Many said: 'This is the end of the world, / we have come now to the end times.'" I have discussed the apocalyptic associations of Muslims in the first chapter; see especially 28.

[189] Ibid, vv. 1477-80. "We will not live beyond this day; / But there is one thing I can assure you: / Holy paradise will be open for you; / you will be seated among the Innocents."

[190] Buc, "Some Thoughts on the Christian Theology of Violence," 9. Among the "outside forces" are the Roman religion and the Julian imperial agenda, both of which are also discussed in Harold Drake, "Intolerance, Religious Violence, and Political Legitimacy."

chapter, despite the "He who is not with me is against me" outlook, I agree with David Nirenberg's argument that there was a "fundamental interdependence" of tolerance and intolerance. [191] According to Harold Drake, the traditional view in historiography, which emanates from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, is that Christian violence results from intolerance.[192] Drake does not deny that intolerance was a factor, but argues that the traditional model does not suffice to explain everything: "When scholars decry religious intolerance, more often than not what really is at issue is the violence that intolerance seemingly produces."[193] He is correct to emphasize that religion alone does not necessarily explain violence or intolerance, while Nirenberg emphasizes that "the majority of altercations took place within religious communities, not across them."[194]

Thus, the term violence must be nuanced in the context of the *chansons de geste* and it must not be assumed that there is an inherent connection between violence and religion. For these reasons, I reject claims such as that of Payen: "La violence épique est au service d'une idéologie sommaire qui procède par xénophobie. L'adversaire est l'autre, l'étranger, l'ethnie ou la culture concurrentes, dont on accuse les différences jusqu'à la monstruosité."[195] But if violence in the *chansons de geste* is part of the underlying ideology and is distinct from modern sensibilities of violence, it does not necessarily follow that it results from xenophobia or intolerance.

[191] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 7-8, 19, 32. See also Kinoshita, *Medieval Difference*, 7.
[192] Harold A. Drake, "Intolerance, Religious Violence, and Political legitimacy in Late Antiquity," 193 and 195.
[193] Ibid, 197.
[194] Ibid. "But if there is one thing the outburst of religious violence has taught us, it is the peril of using religion alone to explain such situations. Acts performed in the name of a religion have a religious component; but is religion itself the cause, or a means of expressing other grievances?" See also ibid, 218: "Intolerance is hardly a monopoly of Christianity, or any other religion. Every community identifies behaviors that it believes cannot and should not be tolerated, and this is especially true with regard to behaviors that appear to threaten the security of that community. Because religion plays a role in shaping community identity, religious values frequently become the means of defining such boundaries. In this sense, and in this sense only, can intolerance serve as a useful diagnostic tool, albeit one that should not be limited just to Christianity, or to monotheistic religions more generally. In every other sense, intolerance impedes our ability to understand the process by which militants take control of a community, because that process is basically social and political." Lastly, see Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 32.
[195] Jean Charles Payen, "Une Poétique du génocide joyeux," 227.

Furthermore, while this is not the place to enter into theological details or to make overarching claims about Christianity itself, as argued throughout the thesis, the *chansons de geste* constitute only a representation of Christianity and are necessarily subjective. Accordingly, even if the *chansons de geste* inculcate violence—which I maintain they do not—it does not mean that they serve as evidence of a necessary connection between Christianity and violence.

If the gore and brutality that make up the *chansons de geste* do not constitute an apology of violence, the key to understanding violence is its legitimization. The justification to fight arises not from the bellicose character of the Christians, but from the politico-religious sphere: "'Ferez, baron, si ne vos targez mie! / Carles ad dreit vers la gent paënisme. / Deus nus ad mis al plus verai juïse."[196] As discussed in the first chapter, Charlemagne, Louis, and to a lesser extent, Gormond, are the earthly representatives of God and, as such, the defenders both of France and of Christianity. Accordingly, the battles they fight are legitimate. The legitimacy is not based on the personal agendas of individuals, but in the interest of the collectivity of the Franks and with divine sanction.

In *La Chanson de Roland*, the archbishop Turpin commands the Christians to strike to receive their penance ("Par penitence les cumandet a ferir").[197] Of this passage, Payen writes that "Le massacre est pour lui comme pour ses compagnons une obligation chrétienne, et le fanatisme suicidaire un martyre immédiatement rédempteur (sous réserve d'une confession générale à Dieu même, sous forme de Confiteor)."[198] While his analysis is generally sound, I reject his argument that the massacre is a Christian obligation, which I find both excessive and misconstruing. There is insufficient textual evidence to warrant that the injunction to fight—and even less so to kill—is a Christian obligation. The object of the archbishop's command—

[196] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3366-3368. "Strike, barons, do not delay! Charles has the right over the pagan people. God has appointed us to bring his true justice."
[197] See also *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1138.
[198] Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux," 230.

and of similar commands throughout the *chansons de geste* to strike ("ferez")—is not to incite a mass murder of the pagans, but to defend Christianity and France. In addition, it is worth noting that the pagans have the same injunction: "'Ferez, paien, pur la presse derumpe!'" and "'Ferez, paien, car res ben les veintrum!'"[199] By Payen's logic, the pagans should equally have a pagan obligation to massacre, but his argument does not touch on the pagans. Given these passages and the lack of an explicit command to obliterate the Saracens, I maintain that the injunction is not to kill per se but to fight, an inevitable—and perhaps objectionable—consequence of which is death.

In modern theories of violence, an important distinction is between perpetrator and victim. In the *chansons de geste*, however, both sides inflict violence and suffer equal losses on the battlefield: "Franc e paien merveilus colps i redent, / Fierent li un, li alter se defendant."[200] It is in death that the two sides are marked apart: Saracen deaths are in vain; the futility of their deaths results from dying without their having converted to Christianity, while Christian deaths are regarded as martyrdom, as we will see in the following three sections.

3.2 "Chrestïentét aidez a sustenir!": Holy War

Recalling that the "chrestïens" and "sarrazins" are Christians and Muslims, both religions claim to embrace peace and both often label the other as bellicose. Nevertheless, in exploring the concept of violence as played out in these *chansons de geste*, this thesis seeks to avoid any black-and-white representations of the bellicose or pacifist character of both religions. Though the concept of holy war may seem expressly at odds with the valorization of peace, the aim as ever is first to uncover the religions as they are presented in the texts, and

[199] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1500: "'Strike, pagans, to break the thick of the fight!'" and ibid, v. 1535. "'Strike, pagans, for we shall surely vanquish them!'"
[200] Ibid, vv. 1397-8. "The one strikes, the other defends. So many lances broken and bloody." See also ibid, v. 3561: "Franc e paien i fierent des espees" [Franks and pagans strike with their swords."]

second to examine whether and how these literary representations diverge from "ideal" religion or doctrine.

Although it is necessary to bear in mind the Christian background of the *chansons de geste* authors, two points must equally be kept in mind. First, attacks against Islam as a religious and political threat and against Muslims as heretics and as harbingers of the apocalypse were not confined to the domain of poetic fiction, but were found in letters, theological treatises, and other forms of writing. The fact that the concern spread to fiction reveals the extent to which the ideological defense of Christianity had entered the cultural mindset. Furthermore, the attack is not confined to polemics; ideological defense is realized and expanded in physical or military defense: hence, the concept of holy war. Again, the holy wars are not purely fiction, but had historical parallels leading up to and culminating in the Crusades.

David Aberbach does well to highlight the significance of war in the feudal-crusader context: "Poems sung and recited by generations of crusaders rejected the Christian belief that war was futile—'all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword' (Matthew 26:54); rather, holy war was essential to Christianity."[201] However, Aberbach's claim that war was essential to Christianity is a strong one. It is undeniable that holy war shaped the history of Christianity in part, but to claim its essentialness is excessive. Conversely, I would instead argue that while holy war shaped Christianity, Christianity also transformed holy war.

In the first place, holy war is by no means exclusive to Christianity, nor does it originate in Christianity. Most scholars attribute the concept of holy war (alternatively just war or divinely sanctioned war) in the Christian context to Saint Augustine of Hippo.[202] The concept

[201] Aberbach, "European National Poetry, Islam and the Defeat of the Medieval Church," 606.

[202] Though he was not the only early Christian to consider justice and morality in war, Saint Augustine was by far the most influential upon subsequent discussions. The so-called just war theory takes its origin in Augustine's *City of God* (*De civitate Dei contra paganos*). For a philosophical discussion of just war theory, see "War" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, particularly sections 3 and 4. Also Augustinian, but from a theological perspective, see the just war doctrine of the Catholic Church, detailed in paragraph 2309 the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

of the divine sanction of war indeed permeates the *chansons de geste*—though occasionally with a twist, for the outcome depends on manpower ("tant as homes") as well as divine aid ("solunc la merci Deu"): "Se tant as homes que tu i puisses fiër, / Chevalche encuntre, si va od els juster : / Ben les veintrun solunc la merci Deu !"[203] However, even before Saint Augustine and the medieval Christian context, holy war has early Christian Roman and, earlier still, biblical precedents. For early Christian Romans, participation in the military, though not uncontroversial, became a means of serving God.[204] Earlier still, as Philippe Buc recognizes, the notion of holy war has biblical paradigms or models, especially for "lapsed brethren."[205]

Thus having precedents in centuries of literature and thought, holy war was not so much an essential feature of Christianity as it was a recurring one that was transformed in the Christian context. From the time of the battles of *chansons de geste* and extending to the period of the Crusades, the concept of holy war had developed fully from a biblical justification of warfare to a war fought, at least in part, in the name of religion.

This distinction between the battles of the *chansons de geste* and the Crusades is crucial, although both can be regarded as instances of holy war. There are indeed parallels to holy war in the epoch of the Crusades, particularly visible in the central conflicts between Christians and Muslims that occupy both the *chansons de geste* and crusader literature. Occasionally, the texts

[203] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 173-175. "As many men as you can rely on, / go assemble the troops and charge against them: / we will surely vanquish them!"

[204] On Christian participation in the Roman military and early Christian examples of serving God through war, see John F. Shean, "Christian Attitudes towards the Roman State, War, and Military Service," *Soldiering for God: Christianity and the Roman Army* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 71-103. Shean argues that a shift occurred post-Constantine which resulted in a new attitude toward Christian participation war: that it was part of God's plan for humanity and as such, was not only sometimes necessary, but also justifiable. The effects of this shift were not only visible in the military; Christian life itself began to be described in military terms, with Christ as the military commander. For early Christian perspectives on the ethics of violence and the ideal of peace in a turbulent world, see Louis J. Swift, "Early Christian Views on Violence, War, and Peace," in Kurt A. Raaflaub, ed. *War and Peace in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 279-296. Swift has an excellent balance on the conflict between Christian participation in war and the ideal of peace: he shows that even as war was acknowledged as part of salvation history, not all Christians were convinced of its justification, resulting in a tension between morality and the practical need for the defense of the state.

[205] Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 21. Buc provides the examples of Moses and Phineas from the Old Testament and Judas from the New Testament. He recognizes Judas as the ultimate proto- and archetype of the lapsed brother," particularly referencing the verse "It would have been better if he had never been born" (Mark 14:21, Matthew 26:24).

become even more eerily similar: compare, for example, Pope Urban II's speech at the Council of Clermont in 1095 with the famous justification "Deus volt" and the battle-cry "Dieu avec nous" of the *chansons de geste*.[206] Despite the parallels, one should be careful not to hastily label the epic battles and the Crusades as holy war in the same sense for three reasons.

First, as discussed in the introduction, the earliest *chansons de geste* are temporally displaced: the events upon which the *chansons de geste* are based occurred several hundred years before the Crusades, yet the authors of the written versions lived at the time of the Crusades. Of course, this point is valid only for the earliest *chansons de geste*, as later *chansons de gestes*, including an entire epic cycle devoted to the Crusades called the *chansons de croisades*—among which the most famous is the so-called *Chanson de la croisade albigeoise*—explicitly take up the subject of the Crusades.[207]

Second, an additional distinction between early medieval holy war and the holy war of the Crusades lies in a difference of participation in that the Crusades were seen as a matter for all the faithful, or the entire Church militant, not simply the warriors.[208] The *chansons de geste*, meanwhile, remain in the earlier medieval feudal spirit of lords and vassals in battle against other warriors, with very little to no insight to the faithful or the world beyond the battlefield.

Third, the earliest *chansons de geste* do not involve a quest to defend or reclaim the Holy Land for Christianity. While the battles do engage Muslims (variously "sarrazins" or "paien" as we have seen), they take place on Frankish soil or on lands adjacent to and claimed by the Frankish kingdom (e.g., Saragossa in *La Chanson de Roland*). The difference between the holy wars of the earliest *chansons de geste* and of the Crusades is more striking when we

[206] Quoted in Peter Partner, *God of Battles: Holy Wars of Christianity and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), 75. Among the main sources for the Council of Clermont are the *Gesta Francorum* (c. 1100) and the *Chronicles* of Fulcher of Chartres (early-mid twelfth century). For scholarship on the Council of Clermont and the speech of Pope Urban II in particular, see Georg Stack, "The Sermon of Urban II and the Tradition of Papal Oratory," *Medieval Sermon Studies* vol. 56 (2012): 30-45. See also Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux," 228.
[207] *La Chanson de la Croisade albigeoise* is an Old Occitan *chanson de geste*, 1208-1219; there is no title in the original manuscript; hence I have written "so called." Among the best-known *chansons de croisades* are *La Chanson d'Antioche*, *La Chanson de Jérusalem*, and *Les Chétifs*.
[208] Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 25.

compare later *chansons de geste*, which entail quests of Charlemagne and his vassals to the Holy Land.[209]

If these three conditions are valid, we remember that while the *chansons de geste* here under examination take as their subjects early medieval holy war, they are written down after the events of the First Crusade (1096-1099), though would have existed for some time before that in oral form.[210] What this means is that the poets' transcribed versions could well have some parallels to crusader ideology, but the oral epics themselves would have predated the Crusades proper. Moreover, the very term "holy war," while fittingly applied *postfacto* to the Crusades, was not used contemporaneously as such in the *chansons de geste* here examined.[211]

Having established the wider narrative of holy war and the distinction from the holy war of the Crusades, how do the battles of the *chansons de geste* constitute holy war—what is the textual evidence for holy war? We recall the previously discussed invocation "Dieu avec nous" visible in the *chansons de geste*.[212] *La Chanson de Guillaume* directly equates faith and sucess on the battlefield: "'Fium nus en Deu, le tut poant, / Car il est mieldre que tut li mescreant. Cumbatun nus, si veintrun ben le champ.'"[213] In *La Chanson de Roland*, the battle is waged not simply for the territorial protection of "dulce France," but also for the defense of Christianity: "Chrestïentét aidez a sustenir."[214]

The holy wars of the *chansons de geste* are both defensive and offensive: the Christians defend "dulce France," "seinte Chrestïentét," and themselves as representatives of the true

[209] *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* (also known as *Le Voyage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*, but also the previously mentioned whole epic cycle of the *chansons de croisade*.
[210] On the orality of the *chansons de geste*, see the Introduction, 4 and the works referenced there.
[211] Though it is outside the scope of this thesis, it would be worth investigating whether there are explicit attestations of "holy war" ("bellum sanctum," "guerre sainte," and its forms in other languages) in chronicles and other literature of the Crusades. In other words, did the Crusaders claim to fight a holy war, or is the term equally applied *postfacto* as in the case of the *chansons de geste*? It would be equally interesting to treat the Saracens' notion of holy war from an Islamic perspective, but this also is outside my focus in this thesis.
[212] Payen, "Une poétique du génocide joyeux," 228.
[213] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, vv. 249-251. "Let us put our faith in God, the omnipotent, / For he is better than all the heathens. Let us fight against them, so that we should surely vanquish the field!"
[214] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1129. "Help us to sustain Christianity!"

religion, but they also attack the Saracens who not only persist in religious error, or in "wrongness" in the language of the chansons, but also will attack reciprocally on behalf of their collectivity of gods. If the Saracens are not victorious on the battlefield, the only means for them to survive is through conversion to Christianity.

3.3 Crossing the Confessional Divide: Conversion

Beginning with the conversion of Saint Augustine as related in his *Confessions*, conversion became a widespread preoccupation and literary trope of late antique and medieval Christian literature. In the *chansons de geste*, conversion is more than a trope; it is a catalyst: if "paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit"[215] as the *Chanson de Roland* would have it, it would seem that for the Saracens, the only means of overcoming their "wrongness" would be to convert to Christianity. As this section will show, very few Saracens do cross the confessional divide; moreover, their rejection of conversion continues the "he who is not with me is against me" mentality and legitimates holy war against them.[216]

The most frequent examples of conversion in the *chansons de geste* are that of Saracens to Christianity, which is unsurprising given the Christian backgrounds of the texts. However, even these conversions are not as simple as they might first appear: they can be active or passive, voluntary or forced, active or passive, spiritually and/or politically motivated, genuine or false, and of varying durations. The distinction between active and passive conversions is the most fundamental and is overarching of the others. By active conversion, I am referring to those who initiate or express interest in their own conversions; while passive conversion refers to a conversion that is initiated or pursued by someone other than the convert in question or that there is some external pressure on the prospective convert. These types on either side overlap: the active conversions tend to be voluntary, spiritually motivated, and generally

[215] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1015. "Pagans are wrong and Christians are right."
[216] Matthew 15:30; also Luke 11:23. Buc refers to these verses in *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 11.

permanent, while the passive conversions tend to be forced, politically motivated, and often of temporary duration. Thus, I will not enter into detail on all the possible framings of genuine and feigned conversions as they tend to speak for themselves, but I would like to contrast between these two types of conversions.

In the first place, we have the active, voluntary, spiritually motivated conversions, which are perhaps the least remarkable in that they consist of a "complete change" of one's religious beliefs, corresponding to the Latin origin of the word.[217] In *La Chanson de Guillaume* and *La Chanson de Roland*, the conversion of the Saracen wives (Guiburc and Bramimonde, respectively) serve as the closest examples of the ideal conversion. Guiburc speaks to Guillaume and reveals that her conversion was not of human instrumentation, but through the divine intervention: "Par Deu de glorie, qui convertir me fist."[218] Turning to the Saracen queen Bramimonde, the text relates that after remaining in the court of Charlemagne, she was drawn to Christianity: "'Tant ad oït e sermuns e essamples, / Creire voelt Deu, chrestïentét demandet. / Baptizez la, pur quei Deus en ait l'anme!'"[219] Even in the case of Bramimonde, however, it is questionable how genuine her conversion was; the news of her expressed desire to convert comes by way of Charlemagne, not through her own voice.[220] On the other hand, voluntary conversions such as that of Bramimonde are noteworthy for the same reason they are unremarkable: scarce in the pages of the *chansons de geste*, they represent the ideal conversion

[217] "Conversio," *Database of Latin Dictionaries*. *Lewis and Short* defines *conversio* as "a turning round, reviving, revolution" and Blaise Patristic as a "movement circulaire" or "retour." The medieval Latin dictionaries (Blaise Medieval and Du Cange) focus on conversion in the Christian sense.
[218] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 1422. "'By the God of glory, who caused me to convert."
[219] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3979-3981. "She has heard so many sermons and examples, / That she wishes to believe in God and seeks Christianity. / Baptize her, so that God might have her soul!'"
[220] Bramimonde's conversion is a subject of its own; after vehemently denouncing Christianity, she is taken captive because Charlemagne wishes her to convert out of love–in other words, voluntarily ("per amur cunvertisset," *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 3674). For further analysis of her conversion, see John A. Strange, "The Significance of Bramimonde's Conversion in La Chanson de Roland," *Romance Notes* 18, no. 1 (1974): 190-196 and Hans. E. Keller, "La conversion de Bramimonde," *Olifant* 1, no. 1 (1973): 3-22. More recent discussions of Bramimonde's conversion incorporating the question of gender and feminist criticism are in Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen, and Genre*, 43, 63; Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, 27 and 34-41 and idem, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'" 89-104.

or the acceptance of the Christian faith without regard to coercion, personal gain, or other externally motivated factors.

At best, invitations to conversion seem innocuous and are perhaps even motivated by a genuine desire to evangelize: "Fust chrestïens, asez oust barnét"[221] and "E icele mieldre que eustes chrestienté !"[222] In that sense, conversion functions as a means of integration. In the *chansons de geste*, however, the majority of conversions are not innocuous, but unjust and murderous. *La Chanson de Roland* features some of the starkest examples of forced conversions, such as when Ganelon visits the Saracen king Marsile to relay Charlemagne's command:

> 'Içe vus mandet Carlemagnes li ber
> Que recevrez seinte chrestïentét ;
> Demi Espaigne vos voelt en fiu duner.
> Se cest' acorde otrïer ne vulez,
> Pris e lïez serez par poëstéd,
> Al siege ad Ais en serez amenét,
> Par jugement serez iloec finét:
> La murrez vus a hunte e a viltét.'[223]

In this passage, conversion is clearly forced ("mandet") and the alternative to rejection of conversion is death ("Se cest' acorde…La murrez vus a hunte e a viltét"). But conversions are not only forced upon the individual or the leader as upon Marsile; they are forced upon the entire community and, if rejected, result in a massacre: "En la cité, nen ad remés paien / Ne seit ocis u devient chrestïen."[224] The choice of the verb "devenir" in this second passage is painfully ironic: it suggests that the "paien" have some sense of volition in the matter, when the only alternative to conversion is death ("ne seit ocis").

[221] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 899. "Were he a Christian, he would be a great baron."
[222] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 947. "And that much better [the hour] that you become Christian!"
[223] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 430-437. "This is what the valiant Charlemagne commands you: that you accept holy Christianity; / He wishes to give you half of Spain in fief. / If you do not wish to consent to this agreement, / you will be taken and bound by force, you will be brought to the [imperial] seat at Aix, / you will be sentenced to death, / There you will die with shame and with degradation."
[224] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv 101-102. "In the city, there remains no pagan / Who has not been killed or become Christian."

A third example of a mass forced conversion—and a massacre—of the pagans which takes place toward the end of the *Chanson de Roland* is equally haunting:

> Li emperere ad Sarrague prise,
> A mil Franceis fait ben cercer la vile,
> Les sinagoges e les mahumeries ;
> A mailz de fer e cuignees qu'il tindrent
> Fruissent Mahum e trestutes les ydeles ;
> N'i remeindrat ne sorz ne falserie.
> Li reis creit Deu, faire voelt sun servise,
> E si evesque les eves beneïssent,
> Meinent paiens entresqu'al baptistirie.
> S'or i ad cel qui Carle cuntredie,
> Il le fait prendre o ardeir ou ocire.
> Baptizét sunt asez plus de cent milie,
> Veir chrestïen…[225]

In this passage, the pagans are brought to the baptistry; note the word "meinent" in verse 3668. As before, there is no viable alternative to conversion: the alternatives are "prendre o ardeir ou ocire." It is interesting that in this case, those who are imprisoned or put to death are punished implicitly for their rejection of conversion to Christianity, but explicitly "s'or i ad cel qui Carle cuntredie," reinforcing Charlemagne's role as the earthly protector of Christianity. In addition, the reader is not given a number of those who reject conversion as with the converts ("plus de cent milie"). The vast number of converts—perhaps more accurately described as pagans who convert in name only to save their own lives—are nonetheless named "veir chrestïens." The triumph of Christianity in this passage is clouded by the forced nature of the conversions and by the massacre of those who reject conversion.

Though it may be tempting to ascribe such horrors to the domain of literary fiction, it is important to recognize that forced conversions were a historical reality.[226] As ever, the

[225] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 3660-3672. "The emperor has taken Saragossa, / He makes a thousand Franks search the city, / The synagogues and the mosques; / With mauls of iron and hatchets that they hold / they destroy Muhammad and all the idols. / Neither sorcery nor falsehood will remain. / The king believes in God and wishes to serve him, / and his bishops bless the waters, / they bring the pagans into the baptistry. / If there is any who resists Charles, he will have him imprisoned or burned or killed. / More than one hundred thousand are thus baptized, / True Christians…"

[226] For forced conversions under Charlemagne, see the Massacre of Verden in 782 attested in *Annales regni Francorum*, a chronicle of the late eighth or early ninth centuries, as well as the legal *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*.

acknowledgment of problematic representatives of the religion who act in the name of that religion is not an attack upon the religion itself. The historical reality of forced conversions aside, not all conversions in the *chansons de geste* are forced, as the counter-example of Bramimonde in the *Chanson de Roland* as previously discussed illustrates.

Turning to another dimension of conversions, that of religious and political conversions, it is once again in the latter case that we come upon something complex and troubling. Returning to the example of Marsile in the *Chanson de Roland*, we have a telling example of the political dimension of conversion. Within the first *laisse* of *La Chanson de Roland*, Marsile holds Saragossa and thereby hinders Charlemagne's conquest, but his political and religious defeat is already foreshadowed.[227] When Charlemagne commands that Marsile convert, he also promises a share of the conquered land of Spain.[228]

Of the political dimension of conversion, Sharon Kinoshita argues that "in besieging Saragossa, Charlemagne seeks less to win new converts to his faith than to extend the territorial limits of Latin Christendom."[229] Though I would hesitate to dismiss Charlemagne's good intentions altogether, it is true that Charlemagne stands to profit from the conversion of his new subjects, and that in place of catechism is evangelization of the sword: those who reject the spiritual and political advantages of accepting Christianity have the alternative of death.

Though rare in the *chansons de geste*, there are also conversions of Christians to Islam, most notably that of Isembart.[230] Given the Christian position of the texts, it is hardly surprising; to acknowledge the growing number of Christians converting to Islam would be, on one hand, to accept the flourishing of Islam, and on the other, to raise the possibility for others

[227] See *La Chanson de Roland*, *laisse* 1: "Tresqu'en la mer cunquist la tere altaigne, / N'i ad castel ki devant lui remaigne ; / Mur ne cité n'i est remés a fraindre / Fors Sarraguce, k'est en une muntaigne. / Li reis Marsilie la tient, / ki Deu nen aimet ; / Mahumet sert e Apollin recleimet : / Ne s' poet guarder que mals ne l'i ateignet," vv. 3-9.
[228] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 472 : "Demi Espaigne vus durat il en fiét": "He will give you half of Spain in fief" (i.e., as a feudal obligation). See "fiét," *The Anglo-Norman Dictionary*.
[229] Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'" 87.
[230] As Isembart's conversion takes place in the beginning of *Gormont et Isembart*, of which only the final 661 survives, it is only known from the reconstructed plot.

to follow likewise. In the relatively common medieval Christian spirit of denial in matters of Islam, the earliest *chansons de geste* authors effectively ignore the existence of apostates.[231]

Having examined conversions between Christianity and Islam in the *chansons de geste*, are there differences between conversion of Saracens to Christianity and of Christians to Islam? From the Christian-Frankish perspective and the Christian position of the poets, there are certainly differences. Again, the apostates to Islam are chiefly regarded as being unworthy of mention, while converts to Christianity, most of whom are forced converts as we have seen, are lauded for having been baptized into the true faith.

Although unsurprising given the Christian background of the texts, it is worth noting that the pagans do not have a similar program of conversion, either positive or negative. It is likely that the absence stems from the Christian reluctance to acknowledge Islam, as discussed in the second chapter. In that sense, we are left to imagine how the pagans might evangelize. Tolan sheds light on this issue, writing that both Christians and Jews "are to be left free either to stay in their religious traditions or to embrace Islam; there should be no compulsion for them. If the errors of Christians and Jews do not justify forcible conversion, they do justify wars of conquest."[232] It is interesting to compare this vision of Islamic conversion and holy war, the former of which is at least in theory free from coercion, with the Christian visions of conversion and holy war we have seen in the *chansons de geste*.

Furthermore, conversion of the Saracens to Christianity and of Christians to Islam are not the only models of conversion in the *chansons de geste*; there is also the exemplary case of the reversion of Isembart to Christianity on his deathbed: his double conversion—from

[231] I am indebted to Dr. Tivadar Palágyi for pointing out that at least one *chanson*—the twelfth-century *Chanson de Jérusalem* (also known as *La Conquête de Jérusalem*)—depicts a feigned conversion; in v. 7125, Pierre l'Hermite feigns adoration of the Muslim idols: "Ët Pieres le rencine / mais tot ço tient a mal," but is aware of the sin he has committed and later confesses it: v. 7812, "De çou quért renoiés a se coupe clamee." As discussed in the second chapter, because Islam was perceived as a cultural and later a religious threat, some medieval Christian writers ignored its existence. See Chapter 2, section 1.
[232] Tolan, *Saracens*, 35. See also the Qur'an, 9:29-35.

Christianity to Islam and ultimately back to Christianity—serves as a model of Christian deathbed conversion: the belief that it is possible—and indeed encouraged—for the dying to confess their sins, express contrition for them, and to merit salvation.[233] In expressing his desire to return to Christianity and to repent, Isembart confesses his sins ("culpe bati").[234] Thus absolved of his sins, it is as if he never left Christianity. Given the facility of Isembart's conversion, it is worth considering whether a Saracen would be afforded the same literary salvation as the Christians in the texts.[235]

In addition, two corollary points must be made. First, not all the Saracens are personally encouraged to convert to Christianity as is Marsile, though presumably the vassals would have equal devotion to their religion and equal hostility to Christianity as their lords. Second, not all those Saracens who are offered conversion are willing to convert to Christianity; they are content to practice their religion, fail to be tempted by the promise of new lands, or are otherwise disinterested in Christianity. Though it is not treated explicitly in the *chansons de geste*, does the coercion of conversion result from a fear of Islam or does rejection of conversion exacerbate that fear? Whatever their reasons for rejecting conversion, the Saracens remain in the "wrong" and their rejection thereby entails the legitimation of violence and the enactment of holy war against them. Further, it means that the Christians who die in the midst of battle against the Saracens are elevated as martyrs.

[233] This popular belief has its earliest known example in Jesus' words to one of the two other men who were crucified with him: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
[234] *Gormont et Isembart*, v. 660: "confesses his sins."
[235] There are sparse textual examples of a Saracen (who was never Christian) converting upon his deathbed and meriting salvation; I am grateful to Dr. Tivadar Palágyi for underlining the example of Sorgales in *Les Chétifs* (vv. 1129-35). In my corpus, we can compare the conversions of Bramimonde and of Isembart, both of which were previously discussed. We also do have the case of Ganelon. Unlike Isembart, Ganelon never repents. According to Charlemagne, Ganelon has committed treason ("ki traïsun ad faite"), to which Ganelon argues that he has enacted vengeance, but not committed treason ("Vengét m'en sui, mais n'i ad traïsun"). After the trial and ensuing duel between supporters and opponents of Ganelon, he is put to death as a traitor ("turnet est Guenes a perdicïun grant"). See *La Chanson de Roland*, *laisses* 271-289.

3.4 The Ideal of Martyrdom

This section situates the "martirie" (martyrdom) of the *chansons de geste* within Christian tradition of martyrdom and explores the distinction between active and passive martyrdom, its connection to other forms of violence, and how Christian martyrdom is simultaneously the ultimate expression of identity as both *chrestien* and *franceis*.

To begin with, the *chansons de geste*, though not themselves primarily martyrologies or hagiographies, nonetheless follow in the longstanding Christian tradition of the veneration of martyrs. Nearly from the beginnings of early Christianity in an age of intolerance and persecution, there was a fundamental connection between the valorization of martyrdom and Christian self-definition.[236] In particular, as a result of the Julian imperial agenda, martyrdom both broadened in definition and transformed from passivity to activity: "The role of the martyr as essentially a passive sufferer for the name of Christ expanded to include more aggressive warriors who took the battle to the enemy, and it made Christians who suffered at imperial hands candidates for martyrdom even if their punishment was due to civil rather than religious disobedience."[237] This distinction between activity and passivity and the connection between martyrdom and Christian identity are fundamental for understanding in what sense the deaths in the *chansons de geste* can qualify as martyrdom—and more importantly, how they are understood as such in the texts.

As we have previously seen in the sections on holy war and conversion, the holy wars of the *chansons de geste* portray battles in which Christianity itself is regarded to be at stake.

[236] On the development of martyrdom in early Christianity and how martyrdom shaped Christianity, see Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). In early Christianity, martyrdom not simply an acknowledgment of private belief, but a forceful expression manifesting allegiance to a group. For the connection between the valorization of martyrdom and Christian self-definition and identity in late antiquity, see Harold A. Drake, "Intolerance, Religious Violence, and Political Legitimacy in Late Antiquity" (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no 1, 2011, 193-235), especially 199-203. Drake argues that the efforts of the emperor Julian to suppress Christianity without recourse to persecution contributed to a redefinition of martyrdom, which in turn effected a reimagination of Christian identity.

[237] Drake, "Intolerance, Religious Violence, and Political Legitimacy in Late Antiquity," 209.

The holy war setting means that there are active warriors who fight in defense of Christianity, but also that they die in defense of Christianity. This is not exclusive to the *chansons de geste*; as Philippe Buc writes, "Christian martyrdom...was often bellicose and active."[238]Accordingly, having rejected conversion to Christianity, the Saracens are not only failed candidates of Christian evangelization who persist in the "wrongness" of their religion, but are active religious opponents who will kill or be killed. For the Christians, the holy war affords the opportunity of martyrdom: to die as a witness for God in the defense of Christianity, what Buc refers to as the "coexistence of martyrdom and killing for God."[239]

Although martyrdom is often and perhaps even primarily associated with religion, it is not always so. It is worth noting that the Greek *martys* (μάρτυς), from which the English "martyr" is derived, simply means "witness."[240] In the *chansons de geste,* I argue that the religious-political sphere I previously discussed extends to martyrdom: those who die are both political and religious martyrs. Their identity is fulfilled through martyrdom; they have made the ultimate sacrifice (that of their own lives) not in a passive sense, but actively in battle, for the dual defense and glory of the political and the religious. In other words, the Christians who die do so both for "dulce France" and for "seinte chrestïentét," as the archbishop's pre-battle speech to the Franks illustrates: "'Clamez vos culpes, si preiez Deu mercit! / A soldrai vos pur voz anmes guarir ; / Se vos murez, esterez seinz martirs : Sieges avrez el greignor pareïs.'"[241]

Given the present-day discourse of martyrdom within radical Islamic fundamentalism, is there martyrdom on the side of the Saracens? The most explicit textual reference is "Cist paien vont grant martirie querant," indicating that the Saracens actively seek martyrdom.[242]

[238] Philippe Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror: Christianity, Violence, and the West* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2015), 23.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Henry Lidell and Robert Scott, "μάρτυς," *A Greek-English Lexicon*. *Perseus Digital Library*.
[241] *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 1132-1135: "'Confess your sins, pray to God for his mercy! / I will absolve you to save your souls; / if you die, you will be holy martyrs / And you will have great seats in paradise.'"
[242] *La Chanson de Roland*, v. 1166. "These pagans will seek noble martyrdom."

The use of the verb "aler" and the gerundive ("vont…querant") gives a sense of immediacy to their deaths, while "martirie" suggests that Saracens are not simply casualties in battle, but die for their faith. In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, Renouart tells the pagans, "'Fiz a puteins, malveis martire avez!'"[243] "Malveis martire" could indicate both the futility of their martyrdom and the suffering they must undergo in death. On the opposite side, Gormund has a speech to the same effect: "'tut serrunt mort de mal martire.'"[244] In this passage, Gormund suggests that the Christians' deaths are not only in vain, but the misery of their deaths will be prolonged ("tut serrunt mort de mal martire"). What I would like to emphasize is that in these passages, the poets do not use the ordinary word for death ("mort"), but "martirie," implying suffering and death because of faith.

While the possible martyrdoms of the Saracens remain clouded by the Christian perspective of the texts, the deaths of the Christians unquestionably qualify as martyrdom. In particular, the death of Roland is an exemplary case of the spiritual and political dimensions of martyrdom and of the ideal expression of Christian-Frankish identity. Though all the Christians are offered the possibility of martyrdom for Christianity through the holy war, it is Roland who becomes the model of martyrdom. While the rest of the Christians confess their sins through the archbishop who stands *in persona Christi*, Roland confesses his sins directly to God.[245]

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[243] *La Chanson de Guillaume*, v. 3078. "Sons of whores, may you suffer a poor martyrdom!"

[244] *Gormont et Isembart,* v. 159. "All will die in bad suffering.'" It would be interesting to contrast this with Islamic perspectives of the figure of the martyr (شهيد) meaning "witness; martyr," and the act of martyrdom (استشهاد). Does it differ from Christian martyrdom and to what effect? Norman Daniel briefly undertakes a comparison between Christian and Islamic martyrdom, arguing that considering one killed in the midst of war a "martyr" was an adoption of the Islamic notion of holy war, or *jihad*: see Appendix B, "Martyrs and Killers," *Islam and the West*, 344-348. For Islamic understandings of martyrdom, see David Cook, "Martyrdom in Islam," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, eds. Michael Jerryson, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Margo Kitts (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013): 226-249. Finally, for a comparative analysis of martyrdom in the three Abrahamic religions, see Hüseyin Cicek, "Martyrdom in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Analogies and Differences," *The Way* 48, no. 4 (2009): 95-106.

[245] For the general confession through the archbishop *in persona* Christi, see *La Chanson de* Roland, vv. 1132-1135: "'Clamez vos culpes, si preiez Deu mercit! / A soldrai vos pur voz anmes guarir ; / Se vos murez, esterez seinz martirs : Sieges avrez el greignor pareïs'": "'Confess your sins, pray to God for his mercy! / I will absolve you to save your souls; / if you die, you will be holy martyrs / And you will have great seats in paradise.'" For the confession of Roland directly to God, see *La Chanson de Roland*, vv. 2383-2388: "Clemet sa culpe, si prïet Deu mercit : / 'Veire Paterne, ki unkez ne mentis, / Seint Lazaron de mort resurrexis / E Danïel des lëons guaresis, / Guaris de mei l'anme de tuz perilz. / Pur les pecchez quë en ma vie fils !'": He confesses his sins, he prays to God

While we are only given the archbishop's promise that the Christians who are martyred in the midst of holy war will merit salvation, Roland is the exception and is received into paradise by an angelic throng in the text: "Deus li tramist sun angle Cherubin, / E seint Michel de la Mer del Peril; / Ensembl'od els seint Gabriel i vint ; / L'anme del cunte portent en pareïs," endowing the Franks with a new kind of relic: the heroic legend of a martyr for Christianity and of a martyr for the collectivity of "dulce France."[246] Through his martyrdom, Roland serves as the ultimate expression of what it means to be a Christian and a Frank, or what it means to "be right" against the Saracens even in death.

for his mercy: 'True Fahter, who has never lied, / who resurrected Saint Lazarus from death, / And saved Daniel from the lions, / Protect my soul from all evils, / and from the sins that I have committed in my life."

[246] Ibid, vv. 2393-6. "God sent his Cherubim angel, / And Saint Michael of the Danger of the Sea, / and in the ensemble came Saint Gabriel, / they bore the soul of the count to paradise."

Conclusion

This thesis argued that religion is the primary form of difference between Muslims and Christians in the earliest *chansons de geste*. While the themes addressed herein have been examined previously in scholarship, there is no single study emphasizing religion or treating the three texts regarded as the oldest of the genre. On a similar note, *La Chanson de Guillaume* and *Gormont et Isembart* tend to be overlooked compared to the monumental and widely discussed *La Chanson de Roland*. This thesis also marks a departure from current directions in scholarship to read medieval literature through the lenses of postcolonialism and critical theory. I maintained that while both have their place, neither is appropriate in the medieval context of the *chansons de geste*.

Though I have acknowledged that there is some awareness of other forms of alterity present to varying degrees in the texts, my analysis emphasized the centrality of religious difference in the imagination and reinforcement of collective identity. Given their similar feudal values and occasionally physical appearances as well, I demonstrated that what separates the pagan Saracens and Christian Franks in these earliest texts is religion. I showed how the misrepresentations of Islam and of Muslims in the *chansons de geste* are not obscure medieval fantasies or the roots of modern unfavorable portrayals, but belong to the broader context of Western Christian perceptions of Islam in the Middle Ages. Lastly, I analyzed how religious difference is employed to the extreme, arguing that the violence of the *chansons de geste* must be dissociated from modern understandings of the term and beliefs in the bellicose and intolerant history of Christianity. I showed that holy war parallels but is not clearly tied to contemporaneous Crusader ideology, that conversion in the *chansons de geste* is both political and spiritual, and that martyrdom—which is only available to the Franks—is the ultimate means of reinforcing the binary between the "wrong" pagans and the "right" Christians. In

doing so, I have established why the interchangeability of "pagan" and "Saracen" is both logical—at least according to the logic of the *chansons de geste*—and problematic in its misrepresentation at the expense of Islam and for the benefit of Christianity.

Any one of my chapters could be expanded in future research, either developing the analysis of religious difference I have begun or expanding it to additional *chansons*. In both cases, I think it is fundamental to read the texts in their own contexts without assuming that nascent forms of alterity necessarily prefigure postcolonial discourses.

An avenue I think would be particularly fruitful to explore is the connection between "pagans" and "Saracens." Scholars have acknowledged—though often in passing—that the Christian misrepresentation of Islam as polytheistic and idolatrous in the *chansons de geste* might be a continuity of early Christian perceptions of pagans as polytheists and idolaters, but there is no analysis of textual sources developing this claim.[247] It would be beneficial to compare Christian texts from before and after the rise of Islam which conflate pagans (and Muslims) with polytheists and idolaters.

Although mine is a concentrated analysis on a set of texts from the same period and the same literary and linguistic traditions, I believe future research would also benefit from increased comparisons between medieval European literary traditions and Islamic sources. Both, of course, have been studied individually, but the few existing comparative studies tend to privilege theological texts rather than literary ones.

Above all, scholarship on Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle Ages would benefit from increased focus on literary sources, not to supplant theological texts but to view the debates between the religions from a different angle.

[247] See Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, 131 and Tolan, *Saracens*, xiv-4.

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