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Origins of the Old Swedish epic *Hertig Fredrik af Normandie*: a Middle Dutch link?

The shadowy background of the 14th-century epic *Hertig Fredrik af Normandie* is one of the great unsolved puzzles in Old Swedish literature. The opening words of this epic—*Eth aventyr thet byrias bar*¹—are an apt prefiguration for what has proved to be a lengthy and difficult philological ‘adventure’ to assemble all of its pieces into a coherent and satisfactory whole. The challenge with *Hertig Fredrik* (*HF*) is not codicological—the text is quite secure, being extant in seven paper manuscripts dating from the 15th and 16th century—but rather conceptual in nature. Because *HF* is an Old Swedish translation of an otherwise unknown medieval German epic, we are not sure how the surviving text relates to its vanished predecessor; to continue the metaphor, there is no image on the puzzle box to guide us in our reconstruction.

According to an epilog in the *HF* manuscripts, the text was translated into Old Swedish in the first years of the 14th century at the Oslo court of Queen Eufemia of Norway (d. 1312), who is credited as the epic’s patroness and benefactor. Eufemia herself was not of

* I wish to thank Frits van Oostrom and Wim van Anrooij, University of Leiden, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ The critical edition of *Hertig Fredrik* is Noreen 1927, quoted here v. 1. Further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text. A 19th-century edition of the text (Ahlstrand 1853) does not meet more rigorous modern standards.

Scandinavian birth. She was born into a noble family in northern Germany and probably grew up in Stralsund, a Hanseatic city on the Baltic coast. Eufemia's powerful and well-connected family seemed to embrace literary pursuits—her elder brother was Witzlaw III of Rügen, a Low German poet of some renown—and her own literary interests encompassed more than *HF* alone. Eufemia is also known as the patroness of *Herr Ivan Lejonriddaren*, an Old Swedish reworking of Chretien's *Yvain* (with some additional material drawn from a Norwegian manuscript of *Ívens saga*), and the epic *Flores och Blanzeflor*, translated into Old Swedish from the Old French *Floire et Blanchefleur*, here likewise influenced by *Florés saga ok Blankiflúr*.² These three Old Swedish epics, known collectively as the *Eufemiavisor*, are unique in the Old Norse world for two reasons. In addition to pioneering the use of Old Swedish as a literary language, they are also the very first medieval Scandinavian epics of any type that were composed in rhyming couplets instead of the prose tradition established and maintained by the Icelandic sagas.³ Despite their newness of form, however, the *Eufemiavisor* were translations of older material; the source manuscripts for *Herr Ivan* and *Flores och Blanzeflor*, for example, were already in circulation (in Old French and Old Norwegian) at the Norwegian court by around 1300, as was a German manuscript containing the adventures of Duke Fredrik of Normandy. Our understanding of how (and when) the Old Swedish epics appeared under Eufemia's guidance is based to a large degree on the epics themselves. All three of the *Eufemiavisor* close

² The critical edition of *Herr Ivan* is Noreen 1931. Nordfelt 1920 presents a detailed comparison of *Herr Ivan* with its Old French source; see also Hunt 1975 and Coffey 1976. The critical edition of *Flores och Blanzeflor* is Olson 1921. His controversial thesis that the *Eufemiavisor* as a group cannot have been written before circa 1350 has not found acceptance in the field; see Olson 1916. The oldest surviving *Eufemiavisor* manuscript is a single parchment leaf of *Flores och Blanzeflor* from the mid 14th century, as edited by Malin 1921.

³ For the most recent scholarship on the *Eufemiavisor* epics, especially on *Hertig Fredrik*, see Layher 1999. Still considered a standard work despite some conceptual errors is Jansson 1945. On the *Eufemiavisor* in general see also Noreen 1923-29, Sawicki 1939, Ståhle 1967, esp. 54-67, Holm 1993, Mitchell 1996, esp. 12-26, and Mitchell 1997.

with a brief epilog describing the translation process: how Eufemia had the epics translated *litith før æn hon do* ‘shortly before she died’, how they were *giordh til rima* ‘set into rhyme’ and in the case of *Herr Ivan*, how the text was rendered *af walske tungo ok aa vaart maal*, ‘from French into our language.’⁴ The epilog of *HF* provides some interesting details about its German source:

*Thenne bok j hær høra
Hona loth keysær Otte göra
och wendbæ aff walsko j tytzt mall;*

*gudh nadbæ thæss ædblå forstæ sial!
Nw ær hon annan tüidh giordh til
rima
nylika jnnan stuntan tima
aff thyzke och j swænska
thungo,
thet forstanda gamble och vngæ.
Hona loth wænde a thetta mall
Eufemia drotning ...
(3279-3288)*

This book you are listening to
it was made for Kaiser Otto
who had it turned from French into
the German language
God be merciful to that noble prince's soul!
Now it is set to rhyme a second time
recently, after a brief process
from German into the Swedish tongue
— both old and young understand that.
It was put into that language
For Eufemia the queen...

According to this passage the story material was first adapted from Old French into German (*aff walsko j tytzt mall*) for a patron known as “Kaiser Otto” some years before the German version was translated into Swedish (*aff thyzke och j swænska thungo*) under Eufemia’s direction. Can this claim be verified?

Hertig Fredrik was introduced to the scholarly world in 1811 as an “Übersetzung” of a medieval German epic.⁵ Linguistic analysis of the

⁴ Olson 1921 (*Flores och Blanzeflor*), v. 2183; Noreen 1931 (*Herr Ivan*), vv. 6434, 6437.

⁵ Nyerup 1811. The title of Nyerup’s article, “Schwedische ungedruckte Übersetzungen altdeutscher Gedichte in der königlichen Bibliothek zu Stockholm”, reveals the obvious Germanic bias of his approach, which views all of the *Eufemianisor* (not just *Hertig Fredrik*) as translations of “altdeutsche” medieval German epics.

loan words and rhyming patterns in *HF* suggest that its source had been written in northern Germany, in a Low German or Ripuarian dialect, but the subject has not been investigated closely in more than 60 years.⁶ Attempts to reconstruct the literary prehistory of *HF* and establish once and for all the exact nature of its German birthright have not been entirely convincing, however, and the most detailed study, published almost 90 years ago in 1912, is in dire need of revision.⁷ But rather than focusing exclusively on identifying literary “parents” in the medieval German canon for the orphan text *HF*, as was done with mixed success in 1912, this study offers some new suggestions about a sibling text—a fragment of a 13th-century Middle Dutch epic about another duke of Normandy—whose strong narrative similarities with the Old Swedish epic help to shed some light on the murky questions of when and how the story first took form.

HF recounts the adventures and bridal-quest of Duke Fredrik of Normandy. Since this epic is relatively unknown to Old Norse and medieval German scholars alike, a brief synopsis is provided here.

The epic begins with a brief elegy about the past Golden Age of Arthurian culture. Some men who still remember those days are still alive—one of them was Fredrik, duke of Normandy. Fredrik is hunting in the forest when he suddenly strays off the path. Deep in the forest he encounters Malmrit, king of the dwarves, riding alone on a miniature horse. Malmrit asks for Fredrik’s assistance in putting down an armed rebellion by his dwarfish subjects. Fredrik helps to rout the rebel forces, and Malmrit rewards him with a magic ring from *Indialandb* which protects the wearer from fire, water, and iron, and also grants the power of invisibility. Soon afterward Fredrik hears about a beautiful princess who is kept sequestered in a tower by her jealous father, the king of *Yrlandb*. Fredrik resolves to marry her. With the help of his ring Fredrik abducts the willing daughter Floria and steals a great deal of the king’s gold at the same time. The two escape on a ship. Fredrik falls

⁶ For a brief overview see Schröder 1882, Schröder 1916, Sawicki 1939, 198-202.

⁷ See Lütjens 1912.

overboard during a sudden storm, but his ring saves him from drowning—he floats upon the waves like a cork. Fredrik is captured by sailors sent from *Yrlandb* and is taken back to be executed, but thanks to his magical ring neither fire nor ax blade can harm him. Fredrik escapes from his captivity by means of a clever trick and is soon reunited with his beloved Floria, who had continued on to *Schottland*. Her father gradually relents and allows them to be wed, and gives Fredrik his kingdom as a gift. Fredrik soon distinguishes himself as a noble and ethical ruler in *Yrlandb*. After Fredrik's death Floria enters a cloister until the end of her days.

Apart from some interpolated Arthurian references in the prolog and in one tournament scene just before Fredrik departs for *Yrlandb*, the epic is—at its core—a bridal-quest / adventure tale. The abduction of a bride is the *sine qua non* of bridal-quest epics, which were quite common in the 12th and 13th centuries, but *HF* has a number of literary themes and ancillary details that distinguish it as something much more rare. The Old Swedish epic shows a great deal of narrative similarity with the so-called *Spielmannsepen*, a well-defined subset of European bridal-quest epics unique to late 12th and early 13th-century Middle High German literature.⁸ The term *Spielmannsepos* is, admittedly, loaded with outdated Romantic connotations, and the unity of the *Spielmannsepen* as a genre—traditionally encompassing *König Rother*, *Oswald*, *Orendel*, and *Salman & Morolf*—has faced severe challenges in recent years. These four epics, however, though divergent in subject matter, length, diction and style, do tend to share a number of common themes and plot structures: their settings are informed by the Mediterranean/Oriental world of wonders while the plots feature treacherous sea voyages, the thwarting of a jealous father and the (repeated) abduction of a bride, the faked death as a means of escape, battles with Moslem or heathen armies, and an emphasis on piety. Because of these common themes

⁸ See Bahr & Curschmann 1984 and the orientation given in Schröder 1967. For more on the “schemagebundene Werbungshandlung” characteristic for medieval German bridal-quest epics, see Schmid-Cadalbert 1985, 40-100.

and their (at times) rough, unsophisticated narrative style, it has been suggested that the *Spielmannsepos* genre originated in the Franconian Rhineland area in the late 12th century.⁹ Although there is not adequate space here for a full explication of the bridal-quest elements in *HF*, the epic has so much in common with the other extant *Spielmannsepen*—namely, the twice-abducted bride, the disguised hero, the faked death, the jealous and overprotective father, the emphasis on marriage rather than romantic love, the triumph of trickery of *list* (“trickery”) over brawn, the burlesque scenes in Floria’s tower, the dangerous sea voyages, and so on—that it is surprising that its connection with this particular group of German epics has never before been emphasized.¹⁰ I will argue here that the source epic for *HF* was a pre-courtly bridal-quest epic—something very much akin to a *Spielmannsepos* narrative—that was composed in northern Germany in the early part of the 13th century. None of the extant *Spielmannsepen* are set in France, however, and if *HF* is to be included in this group, Fredrik’s identity as a duke of Normandy must be explained. Indeed, the link between *HF* and the land of Normandy has never been closely examined. The first step will be to draw into the discussion the Middle Dutch fragment mentioned above.

One literary analogue which bears striking similarity to the Old Swedish text are the “Bruchstücke eines niederrheinischen epischen Gedichts” first edited by Karl Bartsch in 1860.¹¹ The manuscript appears to be in a 13th-century hand, and the layout of the rhyming verses on the vellum, where each line contains one complete rhyme pair separated by a punctus elevatus, is consistent with local practice in

⁹ On dating and geography see Bahr & Curschmann 1984, 116 and Frings 1977. The common origin in the *fränkischen Rheinlanden* was argued by Schröder 1967, 10.

¹⁰ Stähle 1967, 61 notes a vague sense of stylistic affinity between *HF* and the *Spielmannsepen* on the basis of tone and pre-courtly *karaktär*, but draws up short of endorsing any similarity based on content. The bridal-quest content of *HF* is unmistakable, however, and once Fredrik begins the bridal-quest in earnest at verse 1514, the plot structure corresponds in full with all ten of the distinguishing structural elements of the bridal-quest as proposed by Schmid-Cadalbert 1985, 88.

¹¹ Bartsch 1860.

northwestern Germany from the middle of the 13th century.¹² Curiously, the fragment—a brief episode from the bridal-quest adventures of Duke Henric of Normandy—has left almost no trace in the literary histories of Low Germany or the Netherlands. It had not received an entry in the new *Verfasserlexikon* of medieval German literature¹³, nor was it mentioned in Borchling's catalog of Low German manuscripts¹⁴ or the older *Middelnederlandse epische Fragmenten, met aantekeningen*.¹⁵ The fragment was referenced in the recent standard edition of medieval Dutch literature, *Corpus van Middelnederlandse Teksten*, but no edition was given and the fragment's contents were not described.¹⁶ From the very start, this fragment has met a rather haphazard fate: in his 1860 article and transcription (still today the only edition) Bartsch did not identify the manuscript he was editing and neglected to provide any details about its provenance or location. Only after more than a hundred years had passed was G. de Smet able to identify Bartsch's manuscript as Berlin Preuss. Staatsbibl. Ms. germ 4to 1303.1.¹⁷ De Smet's linguistic analysis of the fragment was done on the basis of Bartsch's transcription from 1860 because that manuscript had been "ausgelagert" from Berlin during World War II and its

¹² Suggested by Bartsch 1860, 356. For details on northwestern German manuscript layout in the 13th century, see for example Beckers 1974, 27. The vellum has suffered water damage (or perhaps damage from a reagent applied by Bartsch to improve legibility) so that the text is nearly illegible today. The few complete lines still visible at the top of one leaf do, however, confirm that Bartsch's layout was accurate. Kienhorst 1988, 228-9 also dates the fragment to the first half of the 13th century, as does Klein 1995, 13. Kienhorst amends his dating in a later publication (Kienhorst 1999) to the second quarter of the 13th century. The early date is based primarily on the layout of the verses on the surviving fragment; the handwriting itself could support a younger dating, perhaps as late as the early 14th century.

¹³ Ruh 1978-. Burghart Wachinger has informed me that the "Nachtrag" to the *Verfasserlexikon* will include an entry on this fragment. (B. Wachinger, personal communication)

¹⁴ Borchling 1898; see also the continuations Borchling 1900, 1902, and 1913.

¹⁵ Kalff 1885.

¹⁶ Gysseling 1980, 336. For the most up-to-date cataloging see Kienhorst 1988, 228-29.

¹⁷ de Smet 1969.

whereabouts in the postwar years were unknown. Luckily, the manuscript has not been lost forever; it is currently at the Biblioteka Jagiellonska in Krakau, Poland, where it is cataloged under the old signature Berlin Preuss. Staatsbibl. Ms. germ 4to 1303.1.¹⁸

The surviving text is brief, only 118 rhyming couplets, and appears to fall near the conclusion of an epic about a duke of *Normandye* named Henric who journeyed to the Holy Land, married a heathen princess, thwarted a jealous father, fought battles with the heathen, returned home by ship from Jerusalem with his bride and planned a tournament in celebration of their marriage. For the sake of convenience I will give the Middle Dutch fragment the title *Hertog Henric*. A brief overview of its contents is given here; note that the first sentences, bracketed below, are not part of the fragment but are inferred from the general content.

[Henric, duke of *Normandye*, is in the Holy Land. He marries princess Claredamie, daughter of the heathen king of *Mec* (=Mecca), and baptizes her.] Claredamie implores her mother to be baptised also, and rebukes the old faith in Islam. Henric and Claredamie leave the city but are still in the Holy Land when Claredamie's mother visits them secretly. The queen, hearing of Claredamie's plans to return to Europe with Henric, is baptised also; she then gives Henric two thousand pounds of gold as a blessing of his love for her daughter. When the queen returns to *Mec* the king is enraged at her conversion and kills her. Battles between Christian and Heathen last seven years. Henric and Claredamie prepare to return home to *Normandye*. Henric's nephew Melantwier joins them on the journey homeward. Before their departure they give money to the poor Christians in the Holy Land. They take their leave of Amerade, the king of Jerusalem, and sail from Jerusalem to *Normandye*. At this time *Normandye* was free from the control of the King of France, so Henric could do as he saw fit. After their arrival Henric sends messengers across the land to announce a tournament in honor of Claredamie and the unnamed *amie* of Henric's nephew, Melantwier.

¹⁸ On the rediscovery of this fragment see Milde 1984.

The text moves at astonishing speed: it opens with Claredamie's rebuke of the Islamic faith (1-29), moves to the mother's conversion and death (30-71), and ends with the departure from Jerusalem (74-93) and arrival in Normandy (94-110). The narrator signals that the end is near with the words *Got late mi noc so gien / ende dit ende nit vertien* (111-12) before saying that messengers were sent out *in allen lande* to honor Henric's return with a tournament (113-18). From all appearances *Hertog Henric* was not a lengthy work; the end of the text likely came soon after the fragment breaks off, and an estimated total length of 2000 verses or less does not seem unreasonable. Bartsch considered briefly the possibility that *Hertog Henric* (*HH*) was a translation of an Old French source, and offers the names "Claredamie" and "Melantwier" as potential evidence of French origin. If such a source ever existed it has left no other trace in Old French or elsewhere, and the names in *HH* are not attested elsewhere in Old French romances composed between 1150 to 1300; indeed, the name "Henric" is clearly of Germanic origin.¹⁹ Thus a direct source in Old French for *HH* seems highly unlikely.

Bartsch and de Smet offer contrasting interpretations of the fragment's "niederrheinisch" dialect. In Bartsch's view, *HH* is a fragment of a Ripuarian epic that was composed in a northwestern German dialect strongly influenced by Middle Dutch.²⁰ De Smet's linguistic analysis suggests, in contrast, that the dialect of the extant manuscript differs from that of its source; the poet of the original epic probably was a native of the Maas/Rhine conjunction, an area around Eindhoven in southern Gelderland. Several linguistic features reinforce

¹⁹ Some of the names in *HH* do recall Old French naming patterns, such as Meliantwier < Meleagant/Meliandas/Meliadoc; Claredamie < Clarete/Clarie/Clarisenz; and Amerade < Amadis, but the name Henric is clearly Germanic and not French, and it has no analogous listings in the Old French romances save the obviously German figure Henris, the king of *Alemaingne* and *Coloingne*, a relative of Arthur. On the names in Old French romances see West 1969 and West 1978.

²⁰ Bartsch 1860, 361.

de Smet's hypothesis that *HH* began as a Middle Dutch epic; among these are the preference of *a>o* in *golt* : *gewolt* (*gewalt*), *golt* : *manecvolt* (*manecvalt*) as well as the use of *â* for *æ* in *openbâre* : *wâre* (*wære*), *mâre* (*mære*), a tendency also visible in works penned by the Maastricht-area poet Heinrich van Veldeke. The copyist of this surviving fragment, however, was a native of a more easterly area around Venlo and Krefeld, outside of Dutch-speaking territory.²¹ In sum: although the original *roman* was most likely composed in Middle Dutch, an unknown patron received a copy of it—this surviving fragment—which had been adapted for audiences further to the East, along the Lower Rhine. This may well be another instance of what Hartmut Beckers has called “eine sekundäre Ripuarisierung eines ursprünglich niederländischen Textes” during the 13th century, and it is certainly evidence of the rich literary interaction between these two regions at that time.²²

Was the Middle Dutch *Hertog Henric* contemporaneous with the medieval German source epic for *Hertig Fredrik*? Codicological evidence suggests that the surviving *HH* fragment was copied in the early-to-mid 13th century; its Middle Dutch source must be several years older, which would place the origins of *HH* somewhere in the years 1200-1220. Discussions about the age of the Old Swedish epic, however, must negotiate three separate issues: the age of the surviving manuscripts, the date of its translation into Old Swedish, and the year of origin for the German source. Copies of *HF* were very popular for a brief period in late-medieval Sweden: the oldest surviving manuscript of the Old Swedish *HF*, Codex Holmiensis D4, dates from the early 15th century, while the youngest was copied around 1505.²³ *HF* was known in the decades after its translation in the early 14th century, however, for there is written confirmation that a manuscript of *HF* was in circulation at the Norwegian court in 1340, just thirty years after

²¹ de Smet 1969, 173.

²² See Beckers 1989b, 216.

²³ The oldest hand in manuscript D4 (Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm) dates to around 1410-20. For more on the *Eufemianvisor* manuscripts see Layher 1999, 279-302.

Eufemia's death. Whether this manuscript was the first Old Swedish translation or a subsequent copy cannot be determined, but it does represent the beginning of the transmission of the story in the Nordic tradition.²⁴ There is considerable disagreement on the exact year the German source epic was translated into Old Swedish, and the task is not made easier by the otherwise fortuitous presence of specific dates embedded in the text because the different manuscripts do not agree on that issue. The epilog of manuscript D4 states that the epic was translated in 1300, while Codex Holmiensis K47 gives the date as 1301 and Codex Holmiensis D4a (together with its subsequent redactions) dates the translation to 1308. Not all of these dates are equally credible. The unwieldy phrasing and slightly garbled syntax of the relevant passage in manuscript D4, *Tha thusand aar ok thryhundbrath aar ... ok ther til atta maanadha ok twa*, appears to be the result of a scribal error, so its dating of the translation to the autumn of 1300 is unreliable. Although the year 1308 has long been regarded as the definitive dating since Valter Jansson endorsed it in his monograph *Eufemiasornna* in 1945, there is today good reason to question Jansson's methodology and substitute 1301 as the more accurate date of translation, making *Hertig Fredrik* the oldest of the *Eufemiasornna* and thus the oldest rhyming epic in the medieval Nordic tradition.²⁵

²⁴ A Latin inventory written by a Norwegian clerk and dated 5 May 1340 shows that the Norwegian king Magnus Eriksson, Eufemia's grandson, owned some dozen books and manuscripts. Among the literary treasures housed in Bohus castle, which guarded the coast north of the *Göta älv* near present-day Göteborg, was *i librum de hartogh Frathrik*, a bound manuscript of *Hertig Fredrik*. Although the inventory reveals that Magnus owned several German books, it is unlikely that this *librum* is referring to a medieval German version of the text because books or manuscripts written in German were described explicitly as *librum Alamanicum*. For the full text of the inventory see Hildebrand 1853-56, IV, 710.

²⁵ The manuscripts of *Herr Ivan* are unanimous that it was translated in 1303. In an endeavor to prove that *HF* was younger than *Herr Ivan*, Jansson undertook a stylistic comparison of the two epics and analyzed the number of syllables per epic line in both. His published results seem to suggest that the early lines of *HF* were metrically similar to the latter lines of *Herr Ivan*—implying that the Old Swedish translator had refined his skill in versification as he progressed from the end of *Herr Ivan* in 1303 to the beginning *HF* in, logically, 1308. Jansson's syllabic model

The last remaining issue is the date of the lost German source for *HF*, which I will call **Herzog Friedrich* (**H_zF*). There are several clues in the text of *HF* which suggest that the source epic **H_zF* may have been composed in the early years of the 13th century—at roughly the same time as *HH*. As we recall, the closing lines of *HF* make explicit the role played by “Kaiser Otto” in the production of **H_zF*, that is, its translation *aff walsko j tytzt mal*, from French into German. Was this information lifted verbatim from verses in **H_zF* or does it originate with the Old Swedish translator in 1301? Since these verses represent almost all of what we know (or what we think we know) about the origins of *HF*, they have been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny. Of the three predominant scholarly interpretations of this passage, only one takes it at face value; the other two view these lines as a mixture of truth and fabrication. On the question of *keysar Otte* and the Old French source, these are the verdicts thus far:

1. This passage is literally true. *Keysar Otte*—that is, Kaiser Otto IV (d. 1218)²⁶—had the epic translated into German from a lost Old French source. (Stähle, Fredén)²⁷
2. This passage is mostly accurate. Kaiser Otto IV was indeed the patron of **H_zF*, but he did not have the epic translated from French into German because the French source was nothing more than an amiable fiction, a spurious meta-literary fabrication intended to give

was not a statistical sampling, however; as pointed out first in Wieselgren 1947b, when the gaps in Jansson’s model are filled in, the alleged continuity disappears. The correct year of translation for *HF* should be 1301, as given by manuscript K 47. On this point see Layher 1999, 199f, contra Jansson 1945, 57-96. For other perspectives on the dating of *HF* see Beckman 1947 and Wieselgren 1947a. I intend to return to this topic in another setting.

²⁶ Since emperors Otto I-III reigned in the 10th and 11th centuries and predate German epic as we know it, the only possible candidate must be Kaiser Otto IV, who reigned as emperor from 1208-1214.

²⁷ See Stähle 1967, 60. Gustaf Fredén argues without much support that the German source epic had been based on a “Cymric saga” about Fredrik’s friendship with a dwarf, and that Kaiser Otto IV learned of this tale through his contacts with the English court, where the *matière de Bretagne* was well-received. See Fredén 1981, esp. 54f.

the German epic the appearance of a distinguished background (i.e. French origin). (Sawicki)²⁸

3. This passage is only nominally accurate. Another patron named Otto was responsible for **H_zF*, but somehow his real identity was lost in transmission and the figure of *keysar Otte* took his place. The reference to the French source is completely spurious. (Lütjens, Schröder, Jansson)²⁹

Let us begin with the third model, which questions the agency of “Kaiser Otto” as well as the existence of an Old French source. In Lütjens’ view, the reference to *keysar Otte* in verse 3280 is untrustworthy because the source epic **H_zF* could not have been composed before 1250, some three decades after Otto IV’s death. Lütjens’ reasons for dating **H_zF* to the middle of the 13th century are somewhat convoluted and difficult to summarize here, but one of the critical points was his belief that **H_zF* was not a bridal-quest epic, but rather a second-rate Arthurian romance whose unpolished narrative style, burlesque nature, absence of courtly love or *minne*, and pastiche plot structure (in which the Arthurian material is poorly integrated) suggests late authorship. Lütjens sees numerous stylistic parallels linking *HF* with the postclassical courtly epics fashionable around 1250 in northern Germany such as *Crane*, *Darifant*, and *Demantin*, all penned by a local poet named Berthold von Holle for literary circles close to the court at Braunschweig.³⁰ The epic *Crane* in particular is explicit about its literary debt to the Braunschweig court: *Nû wil ich in tûn bekant ... sô mir de wârheit hât geseit / ein vorste junc und gemeit / von Brûnswîch herzoge Jôhan* “Now I will tell you ... according to the ‘truth’ which has been said [given] to me by a young prince, duke Johann of Braunschweig.”³¹ The prolog of *Crane* credits Johann of Braunschweig with giving the *wârheit*—the story material—to Berthold to use in an epic. Duke Johann had a cousin at

²⁸ Sawicki 1939, 198, 213-14.

²⁹ Lütjens 1912, 88-97; Schröder 1916, 723; Jansson 1945, 200, 300, 311-12.

³⁰ See Urbanek 1952.

³¹ Bartsch 1858, 20.

the same court named Otto, and Lütjens argues that this “Otto” must have been the real patron of *H \ddot{z} F: Otto of Braunschweig-Lüneburg (d. 1252), a rather minor nobleman from northern Germany and also, coincidentally, a nephew of Kaiser Otto IV. Despite the close kinship between Johann and Otto, however, there is no evidence that Johann's literary interests were characteristic for his brother as well, and the connection to Otto is strained. Indeed, Duke Otto of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, born in 1204, has no record of literary patronage in northern Germany, and no known texts can be linked to his court or to his influence. Another serious concern is the discrepancy in titles: the Old Swedish text is specific that *keysar Otte* had the text translated into German. Lütjens' breezy dismissal of this apparent conflict as a scribal emendation or repair to a damaged manuscript source—i.e. a murky **hertog Otto* becoming *keysar Otte* in the final version—is unsupported and, in light of the translator's valiant efforts elsewhere to reproduce accurately his German source, unconvincing. There are additional flaws in this theory; indeed, the entire *keysar Otte* = Duke Otto of Braunschweig-Lüneburg scenario rests upon an erroneous assumption, namely, that *H \ddot{z} F must have been a postclassical Arthurian romance that was composed around 1250. *H \ddot{z} F was not a postclassical courtly romance, Arthurian or otherwise. There is insufficient evidence of an Arthurian focus in HF because the references to King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table occur in only two isolated spots in the text—in the prolog and during one tournament scene at the midpoint of the epic just before Fredrik is told about Floria and the abduction plot stirs into action. These isolated Arthurian references are spread too thinly to shape the text in any fundamental way; indeed, they fall away utterly once Fredrik leaves for *Yrlandb* and bridal-quest begins in earnest. Once we recognize the Arthurian references as ornamental rather than essential, then the unpolished narrative style, burlesque tone, and lack of *minne* which remain foregrounded in the bridal-quest structure of HF no longer signal late authorship but its opposite: early authorship. *H \ddot{z} F, then, was both in terms of date and style a precourtly epic that was composed before *amour courtois* and the other refinements of the courtly romances—which began to appear in German-speaking

Europe around 1190-1210—had taken root in German literary culture.

Models one and two, above, support the theory that Otto IV was the patron of **H̄z̄F* in the early years of the 13th century, as stated in the closing verses of *HF*, but they disagree on the status of the Old French source. The first interpretation assumes that some kind of (lost) Old French manuscript acted as a source text for the Otto IV's German translation, while the second model rejects that theory. Doubts about the validity of the Old French source are not new; Henrik Schück was among the first to suggest that the Old French source was an invention, analogous to the fictional Provençal author “Kyot” whom Wolfram von Eschenbach identifies as a source for his *Parzival*.³² But whereas Schück and Sawicki dismiss the references to an Old French source as interpolations penned by the Old Swedish translator in the early 14th century, they do not address the important question of why the Nordic redactor of **H̄z̄F* would choose to credit a German ruler of the previous century, *keysær Otte*, as the patron of the story. Schück and Sawicki also neglect to consider a viable alternative theory—that the references to “Kaiser Otto” and some kind of Old French source were in the text of **H̄z̄F* from the very beginning. As tempting as it may be to outsmart the text and credit another Otto as the patron of **H̄z̄F*, there are compelling reasons supporting a more literal interpretation of lines 3179-82. I propose here that the Old Swedish text is accurate on this point, that *keysær Otte*—that is, Kaiser Otto IV—was indeed responsible for the German source epic and, in addition, that France and the French literary tradition did play a role in the development of **H̄z̄F* as a northern German epic.

By several accounts, Kaiser Otto IV was a man interested in literature, and his court was a not insignificant hub of learning and cultural pursuits in northern Germany. Foremost among the literary figures associated with him is the prominent medieval German poet Walther von der Vogelweide, who spent part of 1212/1213 at Otto's court and composed two political poems for him. A number of other

³² Schück 1890, 122.

literary works and authors can also be linked to Otto's court.³³ Otto IV's strategic ambitions in northwestern Europe in the early years of the 13th century—and in particular his efforts to control Normandy—provide an interesting political subtext for *HF*.³⁴ Comparing the world of *HF* with the fate of Normandy as it hung in the balance in the early years of the 13th century, a few years before Otto IV was enthroned in 1208, can help to explain why *keysær Otte* came to be identified as the patron of an ostensibly “French” epic. The Middle Dutch fragment *HH* plays an important role in this investigation.

HF and *HH* have two political details in common. Both of the heroes are dukes of Normandy, and both epics state unequivocally that Normandy was an independent land at that time. Fredrik says that he is the only ruler of that country

Normandi iach enæ aa (2246) I alone own Normandy

while *HH* states that Normandy was free from the control of France, making Henric its sole and sovereign ruler

<i>... do was ledbic normandye</i>	At that time Normandy was free
<i>van den konenge van vrancrike</i>	from the king of France.
<i>des mohte dar gewaldenlike</i>	Thus Henric could easily
<i>henric dun dat on gut dubte</i> (102-3)	do as he saw fit.

Is there any correspondence between *Normandie* and the hero Fredrik, between Normandy and Otto IV? One important issue that has

³³ For more information on Kaiser Otto IV and literary patronage, see Bumke 1979 for connections to the Middle High German *Tristrant* epos (109f, 128f); to the poet Bliigger von Steinach (128f); and to the poets Thomasin von Zirklære, Neidhart, and Bruder Werner (419, note 2). Contrast this with Bumke's reservations about Otto's interest in German literature, namely that he was raised in a French/Norman cultural environment, rarely lived in Germany and probably spoke German infrequently if at all (Bumke 1979, 248).

³⁴ See Hucker 1990, esp. 519-526 and 637-639; see also Schaller 1989.

never been considered is the status of Normandy during the years around 1200 both as a geographical buffer zone as well as frequent flashpoint in the ongoing conflict between Otto IV's Welf dynasty and rival Hohenstaufen forces aligned strategically with the French king, Philip II. Otto IV was himself ruler of several territories in France—in 1196-1198 he was the duke of Aquitaine and count of Poitou—and in 1198 he became engaged to Maria of Brabant. At the close of the 12th and in the first years of the 13th century, Normandy was controlled by relatives of Otto IV (through his maternal line) or by allies of his Welf dynasty. Henry II Plantagenet remained the titular duke of Normandy until his death in 1189, at which time Normandy and the English crown passed to his son Richard the Lionhearted. King Richard was imprisoned in Worms by the German emperor Henry VI from December 1192 to March 1194, and Normandy was governed *in absentia* during most of Richard's rule. Shortly before his death in 1199 Richard returned to his lands in Normandy but accomplished little there. Because Richard left no heirs the duchy of Normandy passed to Richard's brother John Lackland, the next king of England. John, a staunch supporter of the Welf cause and ally of Otto IV, was duke of Normandy from 1199 until 1204. But on June 24, 1204, after a protracted battle, the city of Rouen capitulated to an army of French forces and Normandy passed into the control of Philip II of France, an ally of the Hohenstaufen dynasty and dedicated opponent of the Welf cause. When Otto's Welf and English coalition suffered a bitter defeat at Bovines in 1214, German preeminence over the northwestern kingdoms on mainland Europe faded in favor of French control.

As we recall, the first half and the conclusion of *HF* are set in Normandy and the territory around Rouen. Political control over *Normandie* is held by Fredrik alone. Fredrik never performs any administrative duties in the epic, and references to events in his duchy are few and far-between. He is, however, a successful ruler: *Normandie* is a peaceful, even bucolic land. During their encounter Fredrik tells Malmrit about the absence of petty crimes in his homeland—

*J mith landh ær swa godh friidh
och haffuer ther warith langan tiidh
at engen thor androm tagha fra
thet en peningh gældæ ma (2943-
47)*

in my country, things are so
peaceful
that it has been a long time
since someone dared take
even a penny's worth from
someone else

—a situation which hardly resembles Normandy's chronic state of armed conflict in the early 13th century. Fredrik is shown to be the beloved ruler of that land, as demonstrated by his triumphant return to his homeland from *Scotlandh* in verse 2745f, but the epic is otherwise devoid of overt political statements about Fredrik's actions in *Normandie*.

The geographical scope of *HF* is limited. Tournaments held in the fictional city of *Bærna* and within *Normandie* itself are attended by royal figures from a surprisingly small number of countries. Although the text of *HF* introduces the first tournament in *Bærna* by saying that knights will come *aff nordban ok aff väster...aff sunnan ok swa aff öster* (1635, 1637) only knights and royalty from *England*, *Frankariike*, *Scotlandh* and *Normandie* actually appear—all countries that formed the core of the Anglo-Norman sphere. The Old Swedish epic presents *Normandie* as an idyllic land whose ruler is subtly but unmistakably aligned not with France, but with England. Indeed, Fredrik has family ties to England, for his unnamed father is the brother of the king of England (1222) and Fredrik has had some diplomatic experience in that country. That much is revealed in an episode soon after Fredrik received the magic ring from Malmrit and struck off on his own. Hearing a woman's screams in the distance, Fredrik rides to investigate and discovers a princess pleading for the life of her husband, Gaymorin, who is being cruelly beaten by a ruthless giant. After Fredrik saves Gaymorin from the giant's attack, the lady Belaphir, Gaymorin's wife, thanks Fredrik for his service and reveals that she is the daughter of the King of England. Fredrik answers that the King of England is his uncle³⁵ and that he had

³⁵ The fact that Kaiser Otto IV's uncle was also king of England should not be

met Belaphir in England thirteen years ago on a visit to the king's court:

<p><i>thet ar xij aar och en mere iach henne saa och frur flere i England medh fadher sin nu forgaar henne blanka kin at iach idher næpligæ kenne ma. (1227-29)</i></p>	<p>that was thirteen years ago when I saw her and many other ladies in England with her father; but now her bright face is so clouded that I hardly can recognize her</p>
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Relations between *Normandie* and *England* are warm in the Old Swedish epic. In contrast, the ongoing conflicts between France and Normandy, so acute in the years around 1200, are not entirely absent from *HF* either. During the tournament at *Barna*, Fredrik meets the king of France on the jousting field. The anonymous French king, who is mentioned for the first time in this scene, is attending the tournament with 600 knights. He and his knights enter the *bobord* against the 300 knights led by the King of England (1649-1655). There is, perhaps, a subtle tension between England and France expressed in this joust scene, for when the king of England is surrounded by French knights and capitulation seems imminent, Fredrik enters the fray as a mediating figure and the *bobord* is ended for the night. England is spared an outright defeat thanks to Fredrik's appearance.

If Otto IV was the patron of **H_zF*, as I argue here, the setting of the epic in *Normandie* subtly but unmistakably underlines Otto's claim to those borderline territories in northern France under threat of conquest by the French king by making *Normandie* a province free from French control. When Fredrik is given lands in *Yrlandh* and installed as its king after marrying Floria, Otto's ambitions are again validated: in the epic, *Yrlandh* becomes a satellite kingdom linked to *Normandie*, which in turn is a cipher for Welf interests. A neat system of political alliances links the real world of Braunschweig and the Welf dynasty with the fictional

overemphasized. Fredrik says that his father's brother was king of England; for Otto IV the kinship ran through his mother Mathilde's brother, Richard I of England (d. 1199).

world of Fredrik's adventures. The new dynasty lives on after Fredrik and expands greatly over time, as his older son becomes king of *Yrlandh* after him, his younger son is the next duke of *Normandie*, and his daughter marries the Spanish king. Normandy's independence from France is also emphasized in the *Hertog Henric* fragment. Despite Henric's long absence from *Normandye*, upon his return he is still the sovereign and uncontested ruler of that country, which is described as an autonomous land free from French control, at least for the present time. Although little is certain about the date of composition of *Hertog Henric*, which survives only in a copy from the mid 13th century, its historical setting recalls the years prior to 1204, the year the last independent duke of Normandy capitulated to the French.

Trace linguistic evidence shows that **H \ddot{z} F* was composed in a northern German or Ripuarian dialect, while the Middle Dutch fragment *HH* was recopied from a Dutch source for a patron along the eastern region of the lower Rhine. This commonality strongly suggests that heroic stories about the dukes of Normandy had a localized reception in northwestern Germany and the northeastern Low Countries in the early 13th century. Normandy's historical status around the turn of the 13th century as a point of contention between France and the independent dukes of Normandy could well have encouraged the popularity of bridal-quest epics in particular, where the future security and prosperity of a kingdom can be guaranteed only through marriage to a suitable mate who lives in a foreign country, and it is not farfetched to view **H \ddot{z} F* and *HH* as independent manifestations of this local interest in Normandy as the setting of a heroic epic. The Low Countries in particular, where cross-cultural literary contact with France helped foster the first medieval German courtly epic, Veldeke's *Eneit* in the late 12th century, were an ideal crossover point for French narrative traditions.³⁶

It is unlikely, however, that either of the epics go back to a written

³⁶ A closer look at the importance of this literary region is found in Tervooren 1989 and Beckers 1989a, and from a Dutch angle see Goossens 1982 and van Oostrom & Goossens 1995.

or an oral Old French source, and references at the end of *HF* to an Old French book that was translated *aff walsko j tytzt mal* should not be taken at face value. Indeed, this information must have been present at the end of **H_zF*—what reason would the Old Swedish translator have to invent such a pedigree on his own?³⁷—but the alleged Old French source was in all likelihood not in book form at all. Instead, **H_zF* (like *HH* in its own way) took inspiration from the spirit of the French literary tradition—inventing some Francophone names and borrowing some epic locations—without necessarily being beholden to it in manuscript form or in any fixed form still at the oral stage, such as an orally-transmitted *chanson de geste*. False attributions of this type are not uncommon in medieval literature. **H_zF* was billed as a translation from an Old French source in order to give it an air of sophistication, and the epic is salted with just enough of these “foreign” touches, e.g. names like Belaphir and the river *Sequana* (the Seine), to make the invented French source seem credible. Thus it is best to conclude that the Old French source was no more than a literary phantom, whereas *keysar Otte*, on the other hand, was quite real. By linking the two together, the unknown German writer who produced **H_zF* accomplished two desirable things simultaneously. Attributing French origin to this bridal-quest epic increased its literary value in northern Germany and, in turn, raised the status of the epic’s patron, the powerful ruler Otto IV, under whose direction the “foreign” story was set down in German form.³⁷

There is a great deal more reconstructive work to be done on *Hertig Fredrik* and its source, **Herzog Friedrich*, but the Middle Dutch fragment known as *Hertog Henric* is a significant new piece of the puzzle. By

³⁷ The reference to *keysar Otte* does not necessarily prove that **H_zF* was composed during Otto’s 5-year reign as emperor (1209-1214). Otto could have been the patron of the German epic in the closing years of the 12th century—during the fertile period of the *Spielmannsepen*—while he was a nobleman in Braunschweig and, later, king of Germany after 1198. The final attribution to “Kaiser Otto” could well have been accomplished years later, when the text became affixed to his strongest personality, that of Holy Roman emperor, in the manuscript transmission after his coronation or even after his death.

placing *Hertog Henric* on the table, so to speak, we can better apprehend how the 14th-century Old Swedish text relates to its lost 13th-century source. If we re-assemble the pieces of *HF* in the manner outlined above, the following image appears: **Herzog Friedrich* was not a postclassical Arthurian romance but rather a pre-courtly bridal-quest narrative which was composed in the late 12th or early 13th century under the patronage of the Welf emperor Otto IV. Its connections to the medieval German *Spielmannsepos* tradition are provocative and deserving of further study. Both *Hertog Henric* and **Herzog Friedrich* tell of the bridal-quests undertaken by a duke of Normandy who was free from the control of France—suggesting that stories of this type may have been a localized heroic tradition in northern and northwestern Germany in the years around 1200, when Normandy was a contested political space. As is often the case with medieval literature, however, the whole picture still remains to be seen.

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