

MANUSCRIPT 708

Les Narbonnais (chanson de geste).

Fragments of Les Narbonnais and Le Siège de Barbastre,
two poems from the cycle of chansons de geste
built around Guillaume d'Orange.

PQ1496 .N7 .12--

MS 708

France (in Old French)

Late 13th century

Guillaume d'Orange, the hero of a cycle of 12th and 13th century French romances, is said to have been a grandson of Charles Martel and a defender of the French against the Saracens in the late 8th and early 9th centuries. Relatively little is known of his life; and no fewer than thirteen historical personages bearing the name of William have been thought to have their share in the formation of the legend as it is presented in the chansons de geste.

Les Narbonnais, one of the chansons in this cycle, recounts the deeds of Guillaume's six brothers; and the wars against the Saracens are carried on by nephews and nephews of nephews in Le Siège de Barbastre. The first of these two poems was edited and published in two volumes by Hermann Suchier (Paris, 1898); the second, by J.L. Perrier, (1926). The fragments of these poems which are contained in this MS correspond to verses 7739-end of Suchier's edition of Les Narbonnais, and verses 1-187 of Perrier's edition of Le Siège de Barbastre. (The second poem begins with the large illuminated initial on fol. 3r.) Each page contains two columns of text in a late 13th century hand,

and there are a few lines cut off at the top of every column. Marginal notes on fols. 3r and 4v have been added by two later hands.

According to the dealer from whom this MS was purchased, the fragments were discovered in 1926 in the binding of an old book. The MS has since then been described in detail in a paper by L.C. Kerlake (in secondary MSS file, Department of Special Collections), and has been the subject of an article by D.M. McMillan, "Les Narbonnais et Le Siègè de Barbastre; Fragments d'un manuscrit cyclique," Romania, LXVII (1942), 91-103. McMillan gives a transcription of the text (correcting the "faulty" typewritten transcription accompanying the MS), and says that this text differs significantly from those of the other known MSS of these works: "There is thus every reason to believe that we have here some fragments of a MS . . . independent of all the texts known up to now."

Loose leaves, 20 x 17 cm.

4 fols.

Vellum. Fourteen ornamental initials in red and blue, one of which (fol. 3r) is illuminated. In folder.

Purchased July 1929 (from E.v. Scherling, Leyden, cat. vii, item 689) with funds provided by Shirley Farr (class of 1904) in memory of her father Albert George Farr. There is a short printed description of the MS in DeRicci, Census of MSS, I, p. 596.

22 July 1968
JoAnn L. Strateman