# Giants in the Cities: Roland Statues in Late Medieval Germany

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From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, the urban landscapes of the free Hanseatic and imperial cities of northern Germany were shaped not only by town halls and by the soaring openwork spires of cathedrals but also by colossal statues of the semi-historical figure of Roland, located in markets, city squares, and harbours.[1] As the centrepiece of a new urban silhouette, the sculptures have been perceived as a symbol of civic juridical authority and freedom of trade,[2] as a proclamation of independence vis-à-vis the ecclesiastical institution, and as a visualization of the privileges granted to cities by the imperial court at Prague—in short, as a *signum libertatis* and *signum justitiae*.[3]

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1    Around ten sculptures dated to the fifteenth century have survived (for example, in Bremen, ca. 1404; Halberstadt, ca. 1433; Zerbst ca. 1445; and Quedlinburg, ca. 1450) and around thirty are recorded between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For comprehensive surveys and archaeological findings, see Theodor Goerlitz, *Der Ursprung und die Bedeutung der Rolandsbilder*, Weimar 1934; Antonius David Gathen, *Rolande als Rechtssymbole*, Berlin 1960, pp. 10–32; Hans Rempel, *Die Rolandstatuen. Herkunft und geschichtliche Wandlung*, Darmstadt 1989; Wolfgang Grape, *Roland. Die ältesten Standbilder als Wegbereiter der Neuzeit*, Hürtgenwald 1990; Dietlinde Munzel-Everling, *Rolande. Die Europäischen Rolanddarstellungen und Rolandfiguren*, Dößel 2005.

2    For the political function of the statue, see Antonius David Gathen 1960 (note 1), pp. 5–9 and 83–105; Rolf Lieberwirth, "Zum Stand der rechtsgeschichtlichen Beurteilung der Rolandbilder," in *Nordharzer Jahrbuch* 11, 1986, pp. 5–9; Dieter Pötschke, "Ursprung und rechtliche Bedeutung insbesondere der märkischen Rolandstandbilder," in *forum historiae iuris*, 1999, URL: http://www.forhistiur.de/media/zeitschrift/9909poetschke_1.pdf [accessed: 20.03.2023]; Dieter Pötschke, "Fälschung – Dichtung – Glaube. Wie aus Rolanden Rechtssymbole wurden," in Dieter Pötschke (ed.), *Stadtrecht, Roland und Pranger. Zur Rechtsgeschichte von Halberstadt, Goslar, Bremen und märkischen Städten*, Berlin 2002, pp. 177–237; Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon, *The Legend of Roland in the Middle Ages* [original ed. *La Légende de Roland dans l'art du Moyen Âge*, 1966], London 1971, p. 356; Grape 1990 (note 1), pp. 23–48; Munzel-Everling 2005 (note 1), pp. 49–85.

3    The sixteenth-century reception already understood it as such. The historian Philip of Diversis of Ragusa described it in 1534: "Orlandi forma sculpta ensem manu tenentis, in signum justitae, quae ibi exercetur," quoted after Gathen 1960 (note 1), pp. 99–101. The function of Roland as a symbol of Bohemian imperial identity and solidarity was suggested by Munzel-Everling 2005 (note 1), pp. 41–85. See also Lejeune and Stiennon 1971 (note 2), pp. 59–63.

First executed in wood, the statues were replaced with stone versions by the fifteenth century. Each measures about 6 to 10 metres in height and represents a fully armoured knight standing upright with a raised sword in his right hand and a coat of arms attached to his left shoulder. Although Roland's iconography in narrative cycles was highly sophisticated at the time of their production, the statues lack any specific attributes that could identify them as Roland or associate them with the *Chanson de Roland* or any of this figure's other legends; for example, his most distinct attributes—Roland's horn and helm—are never included.[4] Previous studies have consistently focused on the late medieval cult of Charlemagne—and by implication, of Roland—as the key to the political meaning and function of the sculptures. None of these studies, however, have been able to anchor the suggested political resonances in the visual properties of the sculptures themselves. And, though the sculptures are called "Roland" in contemporary sources, one might wonder whether late medieval viewers would have perceived them solely as such, or whether their visual features might have offered additional associations.
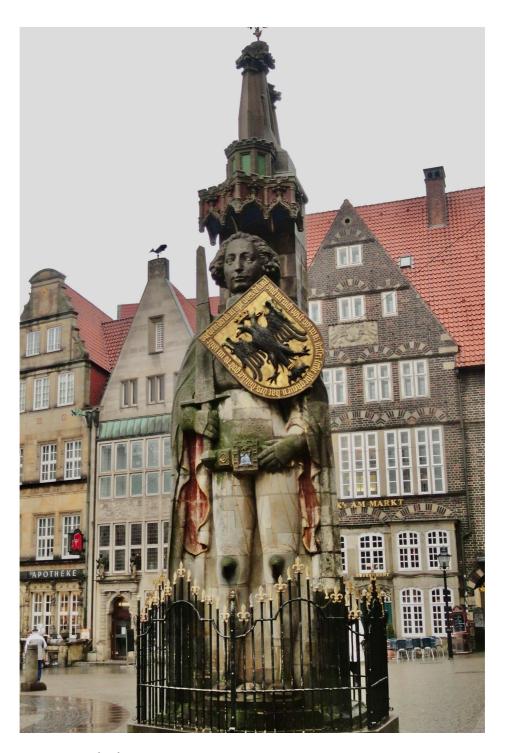
Here, I would like to argue that the visual characteristics of the Roland colossi relate to their protective function, to their ontological status as alive, and to magic. These aspects would have aroused in the medieval mind what I term the "colossus imagination," namely the cultural associations that the works' material (wood or stone), medium (colossal sculptures), and topic (mighty giants) evoked for contemporary viewers. Focusing on the Rolands of Bremen, Zerbst, and Stendal, and examining these through the lens of their medium, I shall argue that, through their size and stature, the Roland sculptures projected fabricated memories of colossal statues of the ancient world. More crucially, I argue, they evoked the entire medieval epistemology related to the notion of giants: foreign lands, superhuman creatures, supernatural powers, and magic. Within this framework, the colossal Rolands were viewed as living, protecting, and semi-mythological giants.

The earliest documented freestanding monumental Roland is a wooden statue dated 1342, once located in Hamburg on the *pons Rolandinus* on the Niederelbe, at the heart of the city's maritime trade and navigation.[5] Functioning as a symbol of the city's freedom, it marked the location of the civic juridical process known as *iuxta Rolandum*. Its polychromy was renewed every second year, and in 1375 the city council commissioned the renowned Meister Bertram to repaint it.[6] In 1389, it was replaced with a stone

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4   For iconographic surveys, see Robert Folz, *Le souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne dans l'Empire germanique médiéval*, Paris 1950, pp. 502–513; Grape 1990 (note 1), pp. 12–54; Douglas David Roy Owen, *The Legend of Roland. A Pageant of the Middle Ages*, London 1973, pp. 45–58; Lejeune and Stiennon 1971 (note 2), pp. 270–329 and 354–364. By 1170, the text had been translated into Middle High German by the Bavarian priest Konrad, and in the thirteenth century it appeared in the Nordoberdeutsch version by the Rheinisch poet Der Stricker. See *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*, Dieter Kartoschke (ed.), Munich 1971; Der Stricker, *Karl der Große*, Karl Bartsch (ed.), Berlin 1965.

5   Heinrich Reincke, "Der Hamburger Roland," in *Nordelbingen* 25, 1957, pp. 55–62.

6   The cost was around twenty-five *Schillinge*. See Munzel-Everling 2005 (note 1), p. 61.

1    Bremen, *Roland*, 1404

2   Bremen, *Roland*, 1404, detail, the so-called "Cripple"

sculpture and relocated "int myddel der Stadt."[7] A similar history is documented for all the early Roland statues. Whether at Magdeburg, Greifswald, Elbing, or Prague, all fourteenth-century Rolands were first erected in wood in proximity to rivers, and were therefore associated with commerce and travel. Each thus constituted a standing colossus watching over the entrance to the city, like the classical Colossus of Rhodes.

Among the many Roland statues, that of Bremen is perhaps the most appropriate to be considered 'giant,' measuring about 10 metres in height (fig. 1). The wooden giant of Bremen stood in the old city marketplace, but it was burned down in 1366 during the city's struggle with the local bishop.[8] Around 1404, the stone Roland was erected in its

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7   It was probably transferred to the area around the town hall. It is unknown when exactly it was relocated there; the burgomaster and lawyer Langenbeck mentioned this location in his 1503 gloss to the Hamburger Stadtsrecht. See Goerlitz 1934 (note 1), p. 47.

8   Johann Martin Lappenberg, *Geschichtsquellen der Erzbistum und der Stadt Bremen*, Aalen 1967, p. 114: "Do branden die vygende Rolande vunde gunden der stat nener vryheit vunde besetten dat Osterdore

present place between the competing institutions, the town hall and the cathedral.[9] Here, Roland is represented in a conventional manner. Over his armour he wears a long *Schecke*; his girdle (*Dupsig*) is adorned with roses and its buckle features an angel playing a lute.[10] The shield is framed with an inscription that declares civic freedom.[11] Standing between the town hall and the cathedral and directing his gaze toward the latter—an installation that might have been perceived as challenging ecclesiastical authority—the Bremen Roland manifested the city's growing power against the archbishop and promised its citizens imperial protection.[12]

Even those familiar with the Roland legends circulating widely at the time could not have predicted the most peculiar detail of this sculpture: the miniature figure crawling beneath Roland's feet (fig. 2). Oral tradition has identified this as a *Krüppel* (cripple), servant of Countess Emma, who in 1032 had granted the city the area known as Bürgerweide, whose size was determined by the ability of the "disabled" to walk it.[13] This tradition has no historical foundation and most probably represents a fiction derived from the statue itself rather than a motif derived from a now lost text or an unrecorded legend. Scholarship has tended to identify the figure as a defeated Muslim king, associating it with the *Chanson de Roland*. Nothing in the sculpture, however, supports this interpretation. Roland is not trampling on the miniature figure, who is neither explicitly defeated nor a king. Another possible identification is that of a conquered Frisian, as recounted in the *Chanson de Roland*, which would have had symbolic relevance to the contemporary political conflicts between Bremen and Frisia.[14] Yet, as nothing in the figure's attire or gesture suggests this, this historical anecdote

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vnde beplankeden dat." Originally, the statue was installed in proximity to the Liebfrauenkirche. Older literature has mistakenly assumed that the wooden Roland also stood where the stone one is located today. See Rudolf Stein, *Romanische, gotische und Renaissance-Baukunst in Bremen. Erhaltene und verlorene Baudenkmäler als Kultur- und Geschichtsdokumente*, Bremen 1962, pp. 225–230.

9   Bremen's *Ratsdenkelbuch* records a payment of 170 Marks for the statue: "Do na ghodes bord weren ghan M.CCCC unde III jar, let de rad to Bremen buwen Rolande van stene, de kostede hundert unde seventich bremere mark, de Clawes Zeelsleghere unde Jakob deme rade rekenden." Dietrich Ehmck and Hermann Albert Schumacher, *Denkmale der Geschichte und Kunst der freien Hansestadt Bremen*, Bremen 1862, p. 23; also transcribed in Goerlitz 1934 (note 1), p. 34.
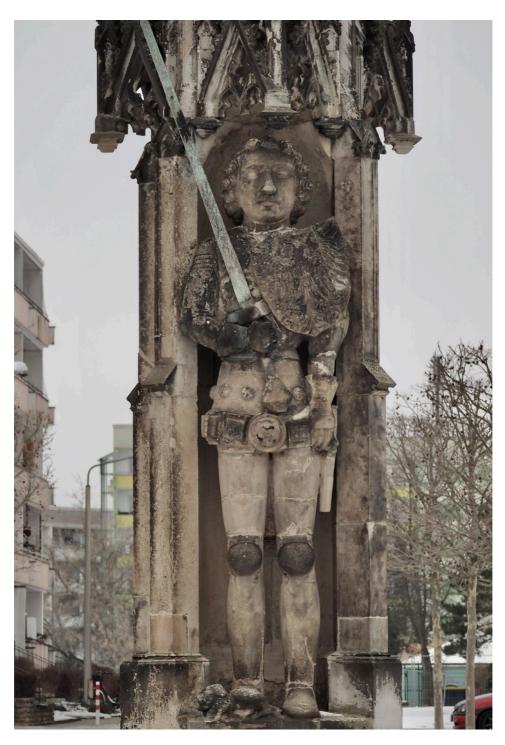
10   Hoffmann understood this as a heavenly choir, marking Roland as a martyr, see Hans-Christoph Hoffmann, *Bremen, Bremerhaven und das nördliche Niedersachsen. Von der Unterweser zur Elbe*, Cologne 1986, p. 66. It might also function as a reminder that Roland's sword was brought to Charlemagne by an angel. See Lejeune and Stiennon 1971 (note 2), p. 359.

11   The inscription reads: "Vryheit do ik ju openbar, de Karl vnd menich vorst vor war, desser stede ghegheven hat, des danket gode is min rat" ("I will reveal your freedom / that Charles and a few other Princes sincerely / gave this city / thanking God is my advice" [author's trans.]).

12   See most recently Achim Timmerman "'Freedom I do reveal to you.' Scale, Microarchitecture, and the Rise of the Turriform Civic Monument in Fourteenth-Century Northern Europe," in *Art History* 38/2, 2015, pp. 331–339.

13   Munzel-Everling 2005 (note 1), p. 94.

14   Rolf Gramatzki, *Das Rathaus in Bremen. Versuch zu seiner Ikonologie*, Bremen 1994, p. 25. The figure's garments, as well as its hairstyle, are too plain and general in their form and have no details of late

3   Zerbst, *Roland*, 1455

4   Zerbst, *Roland,* detail,
    a dog, 1455



cannot be anchored in the visual findings. All that can be said is that the Bremen colossus seems to be a giant hovering over a dwarfish figure in proskynesis.

Almost all the Roland statues are characterized by a similar uncertainty and obscurity in relation to the textual sources that supposedly inspired the iconography of the figure—whether the *Chanson de Roland*, its ca. 1170 Middle High German adaptation *Rolandslied* by Pfaffe Konrad, or the thirteenth-century Nordoberdeutsch *Karl der Große* by Der Stricker.[15] The 1455 Roland of Zerbst, which replaced a wooden sculpture dating to 1385, is considered one of the most immediate sequels to the Bremen Roland (fig. 3). The Zerbst Roland, however, is shown stepping on a dog and not on a human figure (fig. 4).[16] The dog has been variously interpreted as a symbol of the Saracens or of the Hussites, or of infidelity in general, though there is no literary or visual tradition that might confirm this symbolism. Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century tradition saw it as referring to a local story about a criminal called Dannekow, despite his having been active seventy

medieval fashion that would suggest their similarity to those of Roland. Moreover, Gramatzki has compared the crawling figure to those that appear beneath the figures of jamb statues, which he perceives as presenting an antitype of the saints, a subdued evil. This, however, is only one possibility; many figures reveal other typological relationships. The comparison to a tomb plaque is also misleading, as they are installed in a different technical manner.

15   For the various German adaptations, see Folz 1950 (note 4), pp. 502–513; Grape 1990 (note 1), pp. 12–54; Owen 1973 (note 4), pp. 45–58; Lejeune and Stiennon 1971 (note 2), pp. 270–329 and 354–364; Kartoschke 1971 (note 4); Der Stricker 1965 (note 4).

16   For the documents, see Goerlitz 1934 (note 1), pp. 121–128; Gathen 1960 (note 1), p. 39.

5    Stendal, *Roland*, 1525, copy after the original in Stendal, Altmärkisches Museum

years after the erection of the sculpture.[17] More recently, Gramatzki has associated the dog with a legend that recounts how Charlemagne was saved from an attacking lion by a mighty dog. This, however, would be at odds with Roland's trampling posture and the dog's apparent submission.[18] It is remarkable that Roland is shown stepping on a specific local hunting dog—a *Bracke*. The animal appears exhausted, lying beneath Roland's right foot, its tongue lolling out of its mouth as if recovering from strenuous exercise as it submits to its master. The dog appears to cosily recover under Roland's foot and, at the same time, to be controlled and subdued by its master; it is therefore both wild and domesticated. Although the installation is suggestive of tomb sculpture, it is devised differently: while the animals depicted at the feet of tomb effigies display a different orientation and logic to those of the effigies themselves (making it unclear whether the figure is supine or standing), here the animal is positioned 'naturally,' perhaps as a loyal dog with its master. As was the case with the Bremen Roland, the anecdotal narratives arose in later periods as a response to the sculpture, rather than the sculpture reflecting the anecdotes. This interpretive complexity remains characteristic of later Rolands, as for example that at Stendal (fig. 5). Dated 1525, with a *terminus ante quem* of its wooden precursor usually considered to be 1462, the statue is supported by a pedestal that features representations of a *Werkmeister* (a bearded figure with a protractor and a ferule) in the posture of a telamon (fig. 6), and either a monkey or a human figure sitting on a pedestal and holding a disk (fig. 7). At the back of the pedestal, a head with a double-belled foolscap is featured with hands held up to the mouth (fig. 8). The relief is in poor condition, but the general composition closely echoes the frequent type of late medieval marginal imagery in which the jester pulls his mouth open widely with his hands and sticks out his tongue, as is found on corbels, capitals, and misericords of choir stalls. In 1698, as attested in the inscription, the relief of the fool was either renovated or (more probably) added as an homage to the local fictional literary character Till Eulenspiegel. Following the inscription, earlier studies have identified the monkey as deriving from a wooden engraving of the Eulenspiegel text.[19] Although this is indeed compelling, such an homage to Eulenspiegel on a civic monument seems a modern idea, completely foreign to the period and geographical space in which the sculptures flourished. Moreover, this context cannot accommodate the *Werkmeister* figure. Again, all iconographic identifications tread here on shaky ground. This obscurity, I argue, results from a misinterpretation of the cultural associations of the sculptures.

In his pioneering study of the temporalities of German Renaissance art, Christopher Wood contextualized the Bremen Roland within the late medieval fictionalized memory of the ancient colossus.[20] As a case in point, he referred to the text by Bernhard von

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17  Gathen 1960 (note 1), pp. 58–59.

18  Gramatzki 1994 (note 14), pp. 24–25.

19  See Goerlitz 1934 (note 1), pp. 72–76; Gathen 1960 (note 1), pp. 43–44.

20  Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction. Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*, Chicago 2008, pp. 164–184.

6 Stendal, *Roland*, 1525, copy,
  detail, a Werkmeister

Breydenbach, who reported that on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem he heard a story about a colossus on Mount Ida in Crete, watcher over the port, whose pouring tears became rivers—a description that is heavily based on Dante's *Inferno*.[21] According to Wood, this poetic colossus evoked a wide range of associations, suggesting its origin in distant

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21  Breydenbach, "Die Reise ins Heilige Land, Mainz 1486," in Wood 2008 (note 20), p. 165: "For this reason the poets placed a great statue of an old man on the highest mountain of the island, called Ida. The head of the statue was gold, the chest and arm silver, the body and the loins bronze, the legs iron, and the feet clay."

7   Stendal, *Roland*, 1525, copy,
    detail, allegory of Idolatry



cultures associated with paganism and their idols.[22] With its overexaggerated size differen-tiating it from the Christian sacred *imago*, the colossus might have appeared to the Christian devotee as a *mirabil*.[23]

Medieval authors were not unaware of ancient colossi. The twelfth-century pilgrimage guide *De mirabilia urbis Romae*, by Magister Gregory, describes several bronze colossi and equestrians that may have once stood in Rome. In Gregory's account, magic had given these figures the ability to move and speak.[24] These marvellous moving colossi were destroyed by

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22  Wood 2008 (note 20), p. 170.

23  For an introduction to the Christian notion of *imago* versus simulacrum, see Assaf Pinkus, *Sculpting Simulacra in Medieval Germany*, 1250–1380, Farnham 2014, pp. 1–27.

24  *Master Gregorius. The Marvels of Rome*, John Osborne (trans.), Toronto 1987, pp. 23–24: "The strangest thing of all about it was that it turned continuously in a motion equal to that of the sun, which it there-fore always faced. [...] While Rome flourished, every visitor to the city worshipped it on bended knee, offering honor to Rome by worshipping its image [...] and if you look at it intently, transfixed by its splendor, it gives the appearance of being about to move or speak. [...] If any of the nations dared to rise in rebellion against Roman rule, its statue would immediately move, causing the bell to ring. [...] Above

8   Stendal, *Roland*, 1525, copy, detail, head with foolscap

Pope Gregory, leaving only the heads and hands, thus generating a fragmented memory of the once whole colossi. Such self-moving colossal sculptures, devised as guardians of the Empire in case of rebellion, were believed to have had a protective function.

Might the Roland colossi have been perceived in a similar manner, as protectors of the harbour in Hamburg or of the citizenry in Bremen, as huge magical automata or living sculptures? Should they indeed be associated at all with the antique colossi? Such texts as *De mirabilia urbis Romae* were, after all, anchored in Roman soil.[25] But why would the

this hall of statues there was a bronze soldier on horseback who would move in conjunction with the statue, aiming his lance at the race whose image had stirred [...]."

25   Eighty German texts that either mention or include a translation of the *Mirabilia* are known, see Nine Robijntje Miedema, *Mirabilia Romae. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Überlieferung mit Edition der deutschen und niederländischen Texte*, Tübingen 1996, pp. 95–144; Wood 2008 (note 20), p. 172.

'revival' of colossal sculptures have occurred so far north, in the German-speaking lands, and not in Italy? Was this indeed the outcome of an interweaving of late medieval imagination and a memory of antique colossi? Roland sculptures emerged as early as the fourteenth century, and, unlike their alleged ancient precedents, originally in wood, not in stone or bronze. Moreover, accounts such as Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio* appeared after the Roland statues were already scattered around the free cities of Germany; earlier Middle High German popular travel accounts did not mention the Colossus of Rhodes, nor of Rome, nor any other one. Rather, it was giants that occupied the contemporary imagination in travel and courtly literature.

In the Middle High German version of Sir Mandeville's travels,[26] giants appear as great warriors, in the contexts of struggle, battle, and magic, living close to the Vale of Enchantment, a place of great *mirabilia*, precious *materiae* such as gold and silver, and illusionistic *magica*.[27] The giants—half human and half beast—are revealed to exist beyond that valley on an island "where the folk are as big in stature as giants of twenty-eight or thirty feet tall" and to live in a wild and violent manner, devouring humans.[28] Their otherness, brute force, and wildness, however, have merit, as the text reads: "Thanks to them no pilgrim dare enter this isle; for if they see a ship in the sea with men abroad, they will wade into the sea to take the men."[29] As the Middle High German version reports, anyone who tries to invade this island will encounter them as if encountering the deathly gaze of the Basilisk.[30] Giants are sea watchers, their maritime shores are safe; their territory and its

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26  His *Travels* were composed as early as the mid-fourteenth century, probably in 1356. Approximately one hundred (!) German and Netherlandish versions of Mandeville's *Travels* are known, of which thirty-nine are in Middle High German and dated to the end of the fourteenth century. See John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville. The Version of the Cotton Manuscript in Modern Spelling*, Alfred William Pollard (ed.), London 1900, p. 110. John Mandeville, *Mandeville's Travel. Translated from the French of Jean d'Outremeuse. Edited from MS. Cotton Titus C. XVI*, Paul Hamelius (ed.), London 1919; John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, Charles Moseley (ed.), Harmondsworth 1983. For an essential bibliography and seminal study, see Michael C. Seymour, "Sir John Mandeville," in Michael C. Seymour, *English Writers of the Late Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1993 (Authors of the Middle Ages, 1), pp. 1–64. On the German translations, see Eric John Morrall, "Michel Velser. Übersetzer einer deutschen Version von Sir John Mandevilles Reisen," in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 81, 1962, pp. 82–91; Jean de Mandeville, *Reisen. Reprint der Erstdrucke der deutschen Übersetzungen des Michel Velser (Augsburg, bei Anton Sorg, 1480) und des Otto von Diemeringen (Basel, bei Bernhard Richel, 1480/81)*, Ernst Bremer and Klaus Ridder (eds.), Hildesheim 1991, p. VI. For the translation and its circulation in the German-speaking lands, see ibid., pp. VII–XXI; Seymour, 1993, pp. 38–56.

27  Those who had blessed themselves with the sign of the Cross could cross the valley safely and would see "many marvelous things, and gold and silver and precious stones and many other jewels on each side of us – so it seemed. But whether it really was as it seemed, or was merely illusion, I do not know." Moseley 1983 (note 26), pp. 173–174.

28  Ibid., pp. 174–175.

29  Ibid., p. 175.

30  "Wen sie ainem menschen mit zorn ansehend der nit uß der selben ynsel ist, der muß sterben, als hett in ain basilicus gesehen." Michel Velser, *John Mandevilles Reisebeschreibung, nach d. Stuttgarter Papierhandschrift Cod. HB V 86, in deutscher Übersetzung von Michel Velser*, Eric John Morrall (ed.), Berlin 1974, p. 164.

treasures of gold and silver are impenetrable. If anyone were able to domesticate their power, his city would be secure, and marvellous treasures would be at his disposal. No one dares to challenge a city protected by a giant, and this is precisely the function of Roland: a giant safeguarding the German Hanseatic cities.

In the Middle High German epics, giants appear as guardians of wild regions, and as keepers of city gates; alternatively, they appear as adversaries of Christian heroes, but no less often also as their loyal allies.[31] Regardless, the approach to giants always remains ambivalent—they are ugly and stinking but, at the same time, can also be beautiful and courtly.[32] Once converted into Christian protectors,[33] the giants, with their power, size, and hyper-masculinity, are compared to King Arthur, Charlemagne, Siegfried, and Roland, all of whom are described as men of great stature.[34] Giants are also mentioned as shapers and builders of the world.[35] In the Hall of Statues in Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan*, giants are portrayed as architects, sculptors, and magicians.[36] In the romance, the

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31  Tina Marie Boyer, *Chaos, Order, and Alterity. The Function and Significance of Giants in Medieval German Epic*, PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 201, p. 36.

32  For example, in *Wolfdietrich D* the giant is described as follows: "His face was long and broad. His eyes were yellow, as this book tells us. His nose was formed like the horn of a goat. Many heroes lost their lives because of the 'Waldaffe.' The hair on his head was as white as a swan: the face of the unbaptized man was black. His mouth so broad, as we can read here, no man has ever seen a wider mouth. The teeth in his mouth were also white. When he started to commit evil deeds he wanted to gain renown. Now we tell of his ears and how they were fashioned: they seemed like donkey ears. He wore terrible clothes." Arthur Amelung and Oskar Jänicke, *Ortnit und die Wolfdietriche. Nach Müllenhoffs Vorarbeiten*, 2 vol., [1871–1873], Dublin / Zurich 1968 (Deutsches Heldenbuch, 3–4), vol. 1., pp. 57–59. Translation after Boyer 2010 (note 31), p. 74. In Dietrich's cycle, the giant Sigenot is depicted as follows: "His legs were like pillars. His armor was very dark, reaching almost to his knees with leather straps woven into it. Bad breath came out of his throat as if wind was blowing. His mouth was large and his eyes were red like fire." Joachim Heinzle, *Der ältere und der jüngere "Sigenot." Aus der Donaueschinger Handschrift 74 und dem Straßburger Druck von 1577 in Abbildungen herausgegeben*, Göppingen 1978 (Litterae: Göppinger Beiträge zur Textgeschichte 63), pp. 1–9 and 61. English translation after Boyer 2010 (note 31), p. 74.

33  For example, the Giant Witold from *König Rother, see König Rother*, Ingrid Bennewitz (ed.), Stuttgart 2000. See also Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days. Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism*, Lincoln 1989, pp. 58–97 ("In Diebus Illis. Giants, History, and Theology").

34  Indeed, many legends claim that great leaders stem from a giant race, though not being giants themselves. Frederick III and his successor Maximilian even set out on an expedition to excavate the corpse of Siegfried, which was soon found to be giant, see Wood 2008 (note 20), pp. 177–184.

35  Susan Stewart, *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham/London 1993, p. 71.

36  For the text, see Thomas de Bretagne, *Tristan*, Gesa Bonath (ed.), Munich, 1985. Its dating is divided between those who favor 1157 as a *terminus ad quem* and those who relate it to the courtly milieu of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine's patronage. It has survived in ten fragments (drawn from six manuscripts), which supply the last third of the romance as known from later versions. These fragments were later adapted in the German Gottfried of Strassburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1217), the Norse *Tristramssaga* (ca. 1226) by Brother Robert, and the fourteenth-entury English version *Sir Tristram*. The "Hall of Images" itself appears in the Turin fragment; see Thomas of Britain, *Les fragments du*

hero orders a giant and his minions, skilled carpenters and goldsmiths, to build a vaulted cave and to erect living animated statues of Ysolt and her retinue in it:

> One day Tristran overcame a giant in a forest beyond the boundary of the Duke's domain and accepted the monster's homage. The following day, Tristran commanded him and his minions, who were skilled carpenters and goldsmiths, to make a hall in a cavern and to fashion lifelike statues of Queen Ysolt and Brengvein. When these were finished, the image of Ysolt held in its right hand a scepter with a bird perched on it that beat its wings like a live bird; in its left hand the image held a ring on which were inscribed the words which Ysolt had uttered at the parting. Beneath Ysolt's feet lay the image of the Dwarf who had denounced her to Mark in the orchard, while beside her reclined Peticru, modelled in pure gold; and as the dog shook its head, its tiny bell jingled softly. The statue of Brengvein held a vial, around which ran the legend: "Queen Ysolt, take this drink [the potion] that was made for King Mark in Ireland" [...]. Whenever Tristran visits the image of Ysolt he kisses it and clasps it in his arms, as if it were alive.[37]

These statues not only appear vivid and lifelike but are also mechanically designed to simulate a living being: a sweet smell emanates from Ysolt's mouth and nape, and when her dog shakes its head, its bell rings.[38] Tristan often visits the Hall of Statues, embracing, kissing, talking, and rebuking them. No viewer could therefore say that the sculptures were not alive, and they enable immersion in a magical, perhaps mythical, time.[39]

In Der Stricker's Arthurian romance *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal*, a giant challenges King Arthur and demands his immediate submission.[40] Powerful and great in size, the

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*Roman de Tristan. Poème du XIIᵉ siècle*, Bartina H. Wind (ed.), Geneva 1960, pp. 69–83. On the grouping of the fragments, their non-courtly counterparts (*versions communes*), their content, dating, and ascription, as well as the reconstruction of the missing parts of Thomas's Tristan, see Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan, with the Surviving Fragments of the Tristran of Thomas*, Arthur Thomas Hatto (ed.), London 1967, pp. 355–363; more recently, Tony Hunt and Geoffrey Bromiley, "The Tristan Legend in Old French Verse," in *The Arthur of the French. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (eds.), Cardiff 2006, pp. 112–134, here pp. 118–120.

37  Hatto, 1967 (note 36), pp. 315–316.

38  On lifelike animated images see Stephen Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King. A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France*, Chicago 2009, pp. 27–84. And in the German-speaking lands, see Pinkus 2014 (note 23), pp. 1–27.

39  Jean-Marc Pastré, "Géants, initiations et rituels dans la matière de Tristan," in Claude Thomasset and Danièle James-Raoul (eds.), *En quête d'utopies*, Paris, 2005, pp. 299–313, here pp. 302–308; Jean-Marc Pastré, "Mythe, rituel et transmission d'expérience dans le prologue du *Tristan de Gottfried de Strasbourg*," in Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre 19, 2001, pp. 191–200.

40  Almost nothing is known about his origin apart from his being of modest origin and from Franconia, implied by his pseudonym the Knitter, see Ludwig Julius Fränkel, "Stricker," in *Allgemeine Deutsche*

giant wears a magnificent cloak of silk and gold, and "[w]hoever were to see this creature in a dream would be gripped indeed by fear, and as they saw him coming, many a brave hero shuddered in terror. So dreadfully enormous was the giant that they became vexed at the very sight of him."[41] As in Mandeville's *Travels*, Der Stricker's giant too is connected to precious materials, marvellous objects, and undefeatable power—protector of the kingdom. The giant boasts of the king's artisans, who create from gold, with "great skill and mastery," living, protective sculptures, devised to imperil the life of any man. The very same artisan who wrought such automata, he continues, "created me – as well as a brother of mine – and endowed us both with such enormity, for we are both his offspring. Because of the close bond which ties him to us, he employed his craft to invest us both with an impenetrable skin, such that neither of us has ever suffered a wound."[42]

Having stated this and manifested his unassailable power, the giant leaves King Arthur's court. Der Stricker recounts that "a great array of swords were tried out on this creature, but he was left unscathed. And regardless how many lances were thrust at him, how many arrows were shot at him, they were unable to harm him. Any man whom he could lay his hand on was doomed to die."[43] Giants, therefore, are not merely powerful protecting creatures but are also associated with magical human craftsmanship, and especially with monumental (living) sculptures. These many characteristics would have been embodied in the monumental Roland statues.[44]

All this brings us back to the initial problematic: were the 'Roland' statues really Roland of the medieval epics? Late medieval legends of Roland characterize him as

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*Biographie* 36, Leipzig 1893, pp. 580–587; Peter Kern, "Rezeption und Genese des Artusromans. Überlegungen zu Strickers 'Daniel vom Blühenden Tal'," in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 93, 1974, pp. 18–42; Karin R. Gürttler, "Der Stricker," in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, New York 1991, p. 434; Karl-Ernst Geith, Elke Ukena-Best, and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler, "Der Stricker," in Gundolf Keil et al. (eds.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, 14 vol., Berlin / New York 1978–2008, vol. 9, 1995, pp. 417–449; Sabine Böhm, *Der Stricker. Ein Dichterprofil anhand seines Gesamtwerks*, Frankfurt am Main 1995. He is also the author of *Karl der Große*, see note 4 above.

41   I am relying here on the revised translation of Der Stricker, *Daniel of the Blossoming Valley*, Michael Resler (ed.), New York/London 2005, pp. 11 and 414–417.

42   Ibid., pp. 17–18 and 761–787.

43   Ibid., pp. 18, vv. 824–827, p. 61, vv. 3177–3203.

44   It is hardly possible to discuss the efficacy and liveness of images beyond the scope of this article; these topics have been the focus of several recent publications. See Johannes Tripps, *Das handelnde Bildwerk in der Gotik. Forschungen zu den Bedeutungsschichten und der Funktion des Kirchengebäudes und seiner Ausstattung in der Hoch-und Spätgotik*, Berlin 2000, pp. 149–152 and 159–173. Assaf Pinkus, "Lost in Symulachra. The Living Statues on the Imperial Balcony in Mühlhausen," in *Theologisches Wissen und die Kunst. Festschrift für Martin Büchsel*, Rebecca Müller, Anselm Rau, and Johanna Scheel (eds.), Berlin 2015 (Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst, 16), pp. 393–398; Elly R. Truitt, *Medieval Robots. Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art*, Philadelphia 2015, pp. 116–140; Elina Gertsman (ed.), "Animating Medieval Art," special issue of *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 4/1, 2015; Ittai Weinryb, *The Bronze Object in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 108–146.

a man of great height. Beyond this, the sculptures' attributes do not actually refer to Roland as he appears in textual or visual accounts, lacking, for instance, Roland's horn and helm. On the other hand, all the attributes mark these statues as giants. Medieval giants are usually equipped with three attributes: a huge magical shield, a power belt, and a magical sword.[45] Christian heroes set off to kill giants in order to procure their armour. Dietrich, for example, kills two giants, Grine and Hilde, to obtain their armour and, later, kills the giant Ecke merely to strip him of his magical shield; he then has to cut the shield down to size to fit it to his own body.[46] Such armour had a magical origin, was saturated in dragon blood, and was worn by legendary warriors. This might explain the strange attachment of the shield to the left arm in all the Roland statues, artificially hovering over his shoulder as if by magic, a feature completely at odds with medieval representations of military saints.[47] The belt is another sign of a giant's power: in the *Laurin* epic, the belt worn by the king of the dwarves endows him with the strength and other characteristics of a giant.

Viewed in this light, the Roland statues have all the attributes of giants—belt, sword, and magical armour and shield. Moreover, the miniature figure at the feet of the Bremen Roland might either refer in general terms to dwarves, whom giants, according to these legends, were created to protect, as in the *Straßburger Heldenbuch*.[48] Or it might refer to the minions, as in *Tristan*, who were competent craftsmen and assistants of the artisan-giants. In the Stendal Roland, the figure of the *Werkmeister* or telamon explicitly references the role of giants as builders, architects, and world shapers, as, for example, in *Tristan*. Rather than being related vaguely to Till Eulenspiegel, the monkey with the disk, sitting on a pedestal, actually represents idolatry, a conventional allegory that appears in many Gothic quatrefoils.[49] The fool with its mockery gesture brings into

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45   For example, in *Orendel*, the armour and shield of the giant Mentwin are described as "Dannoch fuort er vor der hant / eines kluogen schiltes rant, / der was gezieret unz ûf die erden, / in der mitten was er berlin; / ûf dem schilt vor der hant/schein mancher liehter jôchant, / smaragten und manig liehter rubîn, / die gâben dâ vil liehten schîn; / dâ bî daz edel gesteine, bêde grôz und kleine, / wârent mit goltfellen Überzoge." Arnold E. Berger, *Orendel*, Berlin 1974, pp. 1207–1217. In *Eckenlied*, David the giant king has sacred armour and a magical sword. See Martin Wierschin, *Eckenlied*, Tübingen 1974, pp. 1680–1689.

46   Heinzle 1978 (note 32), pp. 1–9.

47   Compare, for example, with St. Theodore and St. George in Chartres, ca. 1220–1230; St. Maurice in Magdeburg's choir, ca. 1232; the figure of Ekkehard in Naumburg, ca. 1249; or the Black Magus from the Schwertbrunnen, in Schaffhausen, ca. 1535.

48   According to the *Straßburger Heldenbuch*, giants were created to safeguard dwarves from wild beasts and dragons, but the giants then became evil. See Walter Kofler, *Das Straßburger Heldenbuch, Rekonstruktion der Textfassung des Diebolt von Hanowe*, Göppingen 1999, pp. 54–57.

49   For example, in Amiens Cathedral, ca. 1220, or in Chartres Cathedral, ca. 1230. See Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image Making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 10–11; Jean Villette, *Les portails de la cathédrale de Chartres*, Paris 1994, pp. 259–260; Stephen Murray, *Notre Dame Cathedral of Amiens. The Power of Change in Gothic*, Cambridge 1996, p. 97; Danny Sandron, *Amiens. La cathédrale*,

play the chaotic disorder embodied in both the giant and the ape but also the world upside down with which Till Eulenspiegel is associated, whether in advance or as an afterthought. Being viewed as lacking in intellectual and moral capacities, fools and jesters like Eulenspiegel were pushed to the margins of society, legally and topographically. They were forced to settled outside the borders of cities and villages as well as outside of normative, civilized Christianity.[50] They thus occupied the same imaginary, peripheral space as giants and dwarfs. Eulenspiegel's figure possesses a foolscap with the ears of an ass and a bagpipe. The conventional erotic evocation of the bagpipe's iconography is doubly accentuated by Eulenspiegel's swollen belly and his dangling money bag. His engorged belly causes the buttons of his shirt to burst, revealing his navel. Such a protrusion of flesh was an image of sexual arousal, as was frequent in representations of female martyrdoms in which executioners, triggered by the naked breasts of the martyrs, experienced such a sudden sexual response that the buttons of their codpieces and shirts flew away and their tights fell down, exposing either the undergarments or skin, sometimes even their naked buttocks.[51] Although only the Stendal Eulenspiegel's upper garment gapes open, the image nevertheless explicitly evokes carnality and lust, animality, and even bestiality. The various figures around the Stendal Roland thus hint both at the memories of the colossal statues and at the ambivalent character of giants before their conversion to Christianity, presenting an exposition of the promises and dangers encoded in the late medieval notion of giants. This ambivalence is also indicated in the dog figure beneath the foot of the Zerbst Roland, as a pre-civilized creature related to the world of the forest and animality, while at the same time attesting to the giant's loyalty, once converted, and his function as a courtly city protector. For contemporary viewers, it would seem that the giant of Bremen did not necessarily mediate the particular Roland lauded in medieval epics and romances. The new Roland-skyline that dominated the late medieval urban silhouette provided the citizenry with a magical protector, evoking fabricated memories of classical glory and a contemporary imagination related to the notion of giants. Overwhelming in size, it is the medium that

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Paris 2004, p. 115; Sara Lutan-Hassner, *The South Porch of Chartres Cathedral. The Margin of Monumental Sculpture*, Leiden 2011, pp. 38–50. The fool on the back of the sculpture is a later addition. Previous studies have interpreted the fool figure as that of Till Eulenspiegel, native of Stendal. Although this is indeed compelling, the sole evidence suggesting such an identification is a certain similarity between the monkey figure and a wooden engraving of the Eulenspiegel text; the *Werkmeister* figure, however, cannot be accommodated within this context. Moreover, adding a portrait of Eulenspiegel to the civic monument seems a modern idea, completely foreign to the period and geographical space in which the sculptures flourished. For the sources, see Goerlitz 1934 (note 1), pp. 72–76; Gathen 1960 (note 1), pp. 43–44. Although closely associated with one another, it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss each of the Roland sculptures.

50 Maurice Lever, *Zepter und Schellenkappe: zur Geschichte des Hofnarren*, Munich 1992, pp. 47–48.

51 Assaf Pinkus, *Visual Aggression: Images of Martyrdom in Late Medieval Germany*, University Park 2020, pp. 86–94.

communicates the entire range of the late medieval "colossus imagination," presenting Roland as a *mirabile*, manifesting foreign nations, lands, and races, mythological times, as well as a magical-protective presence.

Image p. 134: Stendal, *Roland*, 1525, copy after the original in Stendal, Altmärkisches Museum (detail of fig. 5, p. 142)