



Se j'ai lonc tans esté en Romenie

(RS 1204)

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Raoul de Soissons (?)

I

Se j'ai lonc tans esté en Romenie
et outremer fet mon pelerinage,
sousfert i ai moult dolereus damage
4 et enduré mainte grant maladie;
mes or ai pis c'onques n'oi en Surie,
que bone amour m'a doné tel malage
dont nule foiz la dolour n'asouage,
8 ains croist adés et double et monteplie,
si que la face en ai tainte et palie.

II

Car jone dame et cointe et envoisie,
douce et plaisant, belle et courtoise et sage
12 m'a mis ou cuer une si douce rage
que j'en oubli le veoir et l'oïe,
si comme sil qui dort en letargie,
dont nus ne puet esveillier son coraige;
16 car quant je pens a son tres dous visage,
de mon penser aim mierz la compeignie
c'onques Tristans ne fist d'Yseu s'amie.

III

Bien m'a Amours feru en droite voine
20 par .i. resgart plain de douce esperance,
dont navré m'a la plus sage de France
et de biauté la rose souverainne;
si me merveil que la plaie ne saine,
24 car navré m'a de si douce sanblance
c'onques ne vi si tranchant fer de lance;
mes [est] sanblant au chant de la seraine,
dont la douçours atret dolours et paine.

I

Even if I have stayed in the East for a long time and made my pilgrimage overseas, suffering many painful reverses and enduring many grave illnesses, now I am in a worse state than I ever was in the Holy Land, because good love has inflicted on me an affliction whose pain is never assuaged, but instead continues to increase and double and multiply, making my face pale and bloodless.

II

A delightful young lady, merry, sweet and pleasing, beautiful and courtly and virtuous has put such a sweet madness in my heart that it makes me lose my sight and hearing, as one who sleeps lethargically, so that no-one can rouse him to consciousness; for when I think of her most sweet face, I prefer the company of my thoughts more than Tristan ever did of his beloved Yseut.

III

Love has struck me in in the most telling spot through a look full of sweet promise, from which the most virtuous lady of France, and the supreme rose of beauty, has injured me; and I marvel that the injury does not heal, because it has wounded me with such a sweet appearance that I have never seen such a sharp lance-head; it is like the siren's song, whose sweetness brings pain and suffering.

IV

²⁸ Si puisse je sentir sa douce alaine
 et retenir sa simple contenance,
 que je desir s'amour et s'acointance
 plus que Paris ne fist onques Elaine;
³² et se Amour n'est en moi trop vilainne,
 ja sanz merci nem ferai penitance,
 car sa biauté et sa tres grant vaillance
 et li biaux vis ou la vi primieraine
³⁶ m'ont .c. soupirs le jour doné d'estraïne.

V

Car sa face, qui tant est douce et bele,
 ne m'a laissié c'une seule pensee,
 et celle m'est au cuer si enbrasee
⁴⁰ que je la sent plus chaude et plus isnele
 c'onques ne fu ne brese n'estincele;
 si ne puis pas avoir longue duree
 se de pitié n'ai ma dame navree,
⁴⁴ quant ma chançon li dira la nouvele
 de la dolour qui pour lui me flaele.

VI

Chançon, va t'en a Archier qui vielle
 et a Raoul de Soissons qui m'agree:
⁴⁸ di leur c'amours est trop tranchant espee
 [...]

IV

If only I could feel her sweet breath and take
 pleasure in her lovely ways, for I long for love and
 intimacy with her more than Paris longed for
 Helen; and if Love is not too cruel to me, there will
 be no pain without recompense, for her beauty and
 her most great worth and the way she looked so
 lovely when I saw her for the first time bestowed on
 me the gift of a hundred sighs a day.

V

For her face, which is so sweet and beautiful, has
 left me with but a single thought, and this has so
 inflamed my heart that I feel it more burning and
 glowing than an ember or a spark; therefore I
 cannot live long if I fail to strike my lady with
 compassion, when my song tells her of the pain
 which lashes me on her account.

VI

Song, go to Archer who plays the viel and to Raoul
 de Soissons, whom I like: tell them that love is too
 sharp a sword...

Notes

This song forms together with RS 421=422 and RS 502 of the Vidame de Chartres, RS 1575 of Gautier de Dargies and the anonymous RS 227b a group of texts on the theme of distance from the beloved lady and besides the obvious similarities of their opening lines shares various motifs with these texts: mention of a long period of separation from the lady, the difficulties and sufferings that have characterised the author's life, the impossibility of forgetting the lady and love for her, the comparison between the anxieties provoked by life's hardships and the pains of love. However, only in Raoul de Soissons' texts, certainly the latest in date, is there any explicit reference to crusading. Allusions to crusading are concentrated in the first stanza and, as in the case of the song RS 1154, are used to express experience of suffering in the past which is compared with the greater suffering provoked by a love relationship in the present. On this see the commentary to RS 1154 and Toury 1989. From stanza II the song becomes a traditional courtly love lyric, characterised by the presence of comparisons with famous lovers (Tristan and Yseut, Paris and Helen) and by an allusion to the mythological figure of the siren.

- 1-4 On the syntactic level, the initial *se* has clearly concessive force and the sentence has every appearance of being an interrupted hypothetical phrase such as those signalled by Jensen § 976, p. 508, with the conditional clause left in suspense, followed by a main clause in the present indicative expressing a fact.
- 1 In later texts, from the age of St Louis, *Romenie* appears to designate not just the Latin empire of Constantinople, but all the Latin possessions in the East in general or even an important place of pilgrimage beyond the Alps independently of its geographical position. See for example RS 1729, 51 composed in 1248, before the seventh crusade of St Louis in Egypt, and RS 2125, where according to the editor *Romanie* in v. 3 indicates the pilgrimage to Rome (Långfors 1937, p. 470). The same reading *Romenie* can certainly be reconstructed in v. 5 of the anonymous song RS 227b.
- 2 *pelerinage*: for its possible connotation in the sense of 'crusade' see for example Conon de Béthune RS 1125, 27 and Guiot de Dijon RS 21, 15.
- 5 The author uses the name *Surie* to designate the difficulties described in the preceding lines and linked to *Romenie*, thereby establishing a sort of identity between the two names which seems to confirm my hypothesis about them.
- 21 *sage*: the author seems to insist particularly on the moral attributes of the lady rather than her physical qualities, and in this respect the readings of B, which always tend in this direction (see the interpretations of vv. 29 and 35), amount to *lectiones difficiliores*.
- 26 B's text lack of one syllable must have been in the archetype, since the reading *sont* of N presumes a plural subject of which there is no trace in the preceding line. La correction of *sont* to *est* is Winkler's, repeated in Rosenberg and Baumgartner. In the absence of better alternatives I have accepted the suppletion *est*, even though it is not particularly satisfactory, but have moved it to after *mes*, since the partial homophony of the two terms could have led to the omission. For the image of the siren in the lyric see Comte de Bretagne RS 597, 12 and especially Châtelain d'Arras RS 140, vv. 11-16, a crusade *chanson de départie* which also refers to the famous lovers Lancelot and Guinevere (vv. 33-38).
- 29 In this context, the infinitive *retenir* seems to mean 'contemplate' or, better, 'enjoy'. I have opted for B's reading *simple* because it confirms the author's tendency to privilege the moral attributes of the lady over the physical (to which the scribe of N, which has *bele*, seems to turn systematically).

- 31 In another song attributed to Thierry=Raoul de Soissons (RS 2106, 60) the figures of Tristan and Paris, evoked in our text, are found associated in the same line.
- 32 B's reading is acceptable, despite apparently creating a hypometric line, if one assumes a hiatus between *se* and *Amour* (the elimination of the hiatus leading to a hypometric line is a widely-attested phenomenon in Occitan and Old French mss.), especially as the use of *en* in the sense of 'towards, against' is rare but attested (TL 3, 148, 35-39), and hence constitutes a *lectio difficilior*.
- 35 *vis*: Hardy thinks that this line was corrupt at the archetype stage, because she thinks that N's reading *liz* makes little sense and that B's *vis* is an erroneous anticipation of v. 37. In reality *vis* can also mean 'aspect, expression', and again B's reading seems to privilege the lady's moral rather than physical attributes, which would be emphasised by the strong erotic connotation of *liz*.
- 43-44 The use of the present indicative to convey a future idea is common in Old French hypothetical phrases, where the future tense is extremely rare in the conditional clause (Ménard § 264 n. 1, p. 235; Jensen § 977 and 978, p. 509). It is normal for the future to be employed correctly in the temporal clause, even if this refers to something happening before or at the same time as the hypothetical situation, and certainly not after it.
- 46-48 These three lines constitute not a farewell but rather the beginning of a new incomplete stanza, because the rhymes correspond not to those of the final but to the initial lines of the preceding stanza, and because the final sentence seems left in suspense. There is no reason, however, to consider these lines as spurious, especially Raoul de Soissons seems to favour the structure of six *coblas doblas* without *envoi* (see RS 778, RS 1267, RS 1393, RS 2106, RS 2107). The dedication to *Archier qui vielle* also seems to indicate the authenticity of these lines, since the same name is found at the beginning of song RS 1970 also attributed to Thierry=Raoul de Soissons. For attempts to identify *Archier* / *Harchier* see Hardy 2009 (www.lfa.uottawa.ca/activites/textes/ineke/Chansons/Not1970.htm), 8.

Text

Luca Barbieri, 2014.

Mss.

(4). B 8v (anonymous), N 63d (*Mes sires T. de soissons*), Me 64r? (*Messire Thierrri de Soissons*), V 59c (anon., modern attribution *Raoul de Soissons*).

Versification and music

10a'b'b'a'a'b'b'a'a' (MW 1310,2 = Frank 477); 5 *coblas doblas* , plus three initial lines of what is probably a sixth stanza (rhymes a'b'b' repeated from the fifth stanza); rhyme a = *-ie* , *-aine* , *-ele* ; rhyme b = *-age* , *-ance* , *-ee* ; numerous rich and leonine rhymes, including some involving the repetition of whole words, vv. 11 and 16 (*sage* and *visage*), 12 and 15 (*rage* and *coraige*), 24-25 (*semblance* , *lance*); there is a lyric caesura in v. 28 and a feminine caesura with elision in vv. 9 and 10. Melody in N and a second independent melody in V (T 682).

Previous editions

La Ravallière 1742, II 144; Tarbé 1850, 63; Winkler 1914, 46; Baumgartner 1983, 122; Rosenberg-Tischler 1995, 646; Hardy 2009 (www.lfa.uottawa.ca/activites/textes/ineke/Chansons/R1204ed.htm).


Analysis of the manuscript tradition

Analysis of the ms. readings show the division NV and B, confirming the stemma of Schwan 1886, p. 171 which also appears in other editions and studies. V shows its typical independence, though this is noticeably more pronounced than usual. The evidence from Me is negligible since it is reduced to the first two lines of the song. The edition is based on B, the only ms. to record the last incomplete stanza, and the transmitter of some conservative readings.

Historical context and dating

The song is unanimously attributed to a certain Thierry de Soissons, if one ignores the modern attribution found in ms. V. Two other elements would appear to exclude attribution to Raoul: the allusion to *Romenie*, which normally indicates the Frankish possessions in Greece which Raoul does not seem ever to have visited (but see the note to v. 1), and the dedication to *Raoul de Soissons* in v. 47. For these reasons some scholars have suggested that the song must have been written by an unknown knight from Soissons after he had taken part in the fourth crusade of 1202-1204 (Winkler 1914, p. 25; Lubinski 1915, p. 474) and perhaps also the following one of 1215-1221 (Hardy, to justify *Surie* of v. 5). In both cases, the Raoul to whom the song is sent could be identified as the count of Soissons, the father and homonym of the trouvère. However, first Paulin Paris and then Winkler suggested that Thierry and Raoul could be the same person. The name Thierry de Soissons is actually only found in mss. belonging to the same closely related group of the ms. tradition: N mainly, but in some cases K and Me as well (and perhaps V, if only indirectly); besides this, in four cases N's attribution is refused by the same ms. K, which confirms the attribution to Raoul by other mss. belonging to different branches of the tradition. For one of these texts (RS 2063) the attribution to Thierry is definitely wrong, since it is a reply to a song addressed by Thibaut de Champagne to Raoul de Soissons (RS 1811) himself; to these cases are added song RS 1154 where Me's attribution to Thierry is contradicted by that of C to Raoul, and two other songs (RS 429 and RS 1911) where K's attribution to Thierry is isolated and contradicted by all the other mss. (even by N in the case of RS 429). For the remaining compositions (including RS 1204) the mss. apart from KN(V) offer no attribution. It is clear that the case for the attributions to Thierry de Soissons is quite weak, especially given that outside mss. KNMe the name is never attested and no knight of the castle of Nesle (the title *Messires* used in the attributive rubrics of N and Me point to this) has ever borne the name Thierry.

If we then examine the text we find a striking correspondence with the biographical information contained in stanza III of RS 1154 – the long stay in the East, defeats and imprisonment, illness – and it seems unlikely for such a coincidence to concern two trouvères both coming from Soissons. In the light of these factors the attribution of song RS 1204 to Raoul di Soissons seems highly probable. In this case the addressee mentioned in v. 47 could be the trouvère's nephew of the same name, the younger son of count John. But there is a more intriguing possibility, and that is that Thierry de Soissons is an alternative name for Raoul himself. This would easily account for the confusion of certain scribes; in this case it would not be impossible for the author of the text, under the name Thierry, to send the piece to himself under the name of Raoul, with a hint of irony (for the phenomenon of alternative names in troubadours and trouvères see Rossi 2009). This hypothesis may be supported by the existence of a *jeu-parti* between a Raoul and a Thierry (RS 1296) whose authorship the text does not allow us to identify precisely, and whose four rhymes (*-ier*, *-ent*, *-er*, *-i*) are all found in the poetic dialogue between Thibaut de Champagne and the same Raoul de Soissons (RS 1393). The fact that, with the exception of ms. K which attributes some texts to Thierry and others Raoul, the two names are often applied to the same texts, but never appear together in the same ms., seems also to point in this direction: NMe do not mention the name Raoul, while the other mss. do not mention that of Thierry.



Given its strong analogies with RS 1154, the text seems very likely to have been composed in the same period, that is, after 1253-1254, even if there is nothing in it to pin down the exact date. But it cannot be ruled out that the *terminus post quem* could be as early as the end of Raoul's first long stay in the Holy Land, in c. 1243.