



## **E! coens d'Anjo, on dist per felonnie**

**(RS 1154)**

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## Raoul de Soissons

I

E! coens d'Anjo, on dist per felonnie  
ke je ne sai chanteir fors por autrui.  
Il dient voir, je nes en desdi mie,  
4 c'onkes nul jor de moi sires ne fui;  
et s'il veullent savoir a cui je sui,  
je lor dirai per ma grant cortoixie:  
saichiés Amors m'ait si en sa baillie  
8 ke je n'ai sen, volenteit ne raixon  
ke je sens li saiche faire chanson.

II

Sire, saichiés, et si n'en douteis mie,  
ke cheveliers n'iert jai de grant renom  
12 sens bone amor ne sens sa signorie,  
ne nuls sens li ne puet estre proudom;  
car sous ces piés met les plux hauls barons  
et les povres fait meneir haute vie;  
16 prouesse, honors, solais vient de s'aïe,  
et done plus de joie a ces amis  
ke nus ne puet avoir sens paradix.

III

Bien m'ait Amors esproveit en Sulie  
20 et en Egypte, ou je fui meneis pris,  
c'adés i fui en poour de ma vie  
et chascun jour cuidai bien estre ocis;  
n'onkes por ceu mes cuers nen fut partis  
24 ne decevreis de ma douce anemie,  
ne en France per ma grant maladie,  
ke je cuidai de ma goutte morir,  
ne se pooit mes cuers de li partir.

I

Ah, Count of Anjou, it is treacherously said that I only know how to sing through other people. What they say is true, I do not deny it, because I was never my own master; and if they want to know whose man I am, I shall tell through my great courtliness: know that Love so holds me in its power that I have neither the ability, will or intellect to compose a song without him.

II

My Lord, be aware, and have no doubt about it, that a knight will not have great renown without true love and without its lordship, and no-one can be a worthy man without it; for it tramples the highest barons underfoot and makes the poor lead a high life. Prowess, honour and the pleasures of company derive from its support, and it gives more joy to its friends than anyone could have outside paradise.

III

Love has sorely tested me in Syria and in Egypt, where I was taken prisoner, for I was constantly in fear for my life and every day I was sure I would be killed; but despite this my heart was never separated or parted from my sweet enemy, nor in France during my grave illness, when I thought I would die from my gout, was my heart capable of leaving her.

## IV

<sup>28</sup> N'est mervoille se fins amans oblie  
 aucune foix son amers desir,  
 quant outre meir en vait sens compaignie  
 dous ans ou trois ou plux sens revenir;  
<sup>32</sup> bien me cuidai de sa prizon partir,  
 maix dou cuidier fix outraige et folie,  
 c'Amors m'ait pris et tient si fort et lie  
 ke por fuïr ne la puis oblieir,  
<sup>36</sup> ains me covient en sa mercit torneir.

## V

De l'angoixe ke j'ai por li sentie  
 ne devroit nuls sens morir eschappeir,  
 et por paour de mort ke me deffie  
<sup>40</sup> seux je vers li venus mercit crier;  
 et s'en plorant ne puis mercit troveir,  
 morir m'estuet sens confort d'autre amie;  
 et c'elle veult l'amor de li m'ocie,  
<sup>44</sup> dur cuer avrait felon et sens dousour,  
 se me laissoit morir a teil dolor.

## VI

He! cuens d'Anjo, per vostre chanterie  
 poriés avoir joie et prix et honor,  
<sup>48</sup> maix ma joie est sens gueridon fenie  
 et tuit mi chant sont retorneit a plour,  
 si ke jamaix ne chanterai nul jor;  
 por ceu vos pri, et ma chanson vos prie,  
<sup>52</sup> ke la chanteis tant k'elle soit oïe  
 davant celi ke paise de bonteit  
 toutes celles de la crestienteit.

## IV

It is no marvel if a true lover occasionally forgets  
 his amorous desire, when he goes overseas alone  
 for two or three years or more without returning. I  
 certainly thought I could escape its prison, but I  
 was presumptuous and foolish in this thought, for  
 Love has imprisoned me and holds and binds me so  
 fast that even if I flee I cannot forget her, but  
 instead am constrained to be at her mercy once  
 more.

## V

From the anguish I have felt on her account no-one  
 could escape without dying, and for fear of the  
 death that threatens me I have come to her to cry  
 her mercy; and if by weeping I cannot find mercy, I  
 must die without the comfort of another lover; and  
 if she wishes my love for her to kill me, she would  
 have a cruel, unfeeling heart, if she let me die in  
 such pain.

## VI

Ah, Count of Anjou, through your singing you could  
 have joy and reputation and honour, but my joy is  
 over, without reward, and all my songs have turned  
 to weeping, so that I shall never sing again; I  
 therefore beg you, and my song begs you, to sing it  
 so that it will be heard before the one who  
 surpasses in goodness all other ladies in  
 Christendom.



VII

<sup>56</sup> Si voirement com je di veriteit,  
se m'envoist Deus de li joie et santeit.

VII

As truly as I speak truth, may God send me joy and  
health from her.

## Notes

Raoul de Soissons' lyrics bring to completion the process of development of the Old French crusade song that began with Conon de Béthune's song RS 1125 and was followed for example in the work of the Châtelain de Couci. In comparison with the Châtelain's texts, Raoul's reveal a further move away from exhortations to go on crusade in favour of emphasis on the intrinsic value of expeditions to the Holy Land: crusading is evoked only with respect to the past, in order to compare the dangers, sufferings and imprisonment endured during the overseas experience with the much more bitter torments provoked by a difficult love relationship in the present. If departure on crusade for the Châtelain de Couci and Hugues de Berzé still generated the drama and tension expressed in their songs, for Raoul de Soissons crusading is reduced to a simple term of comparison and «se trouve placé sur le même plan que n'importe quelle autre référence mythique ou historique» (Tourey 1989, pp. 98-99). The crusading references are concentrated in the third and fourth stanzas: initially the author emphasises the dangers faced in the Holy Land and Egypt, to imprisonment and illness, to stress that none of these circumstances has been able to separate him from his beloved lady; he goes on to employ a generalisation to underline the extraordinary strength of his love, which not even a long stay abroad has been able to affect, as one might have expected. The rest of the song simply exalts the absolute sovereignty of Love and stresses the indissoluble link between love and song.

- 1 *coens d'Anjo*: Charles I, count of Anjou and Maine, then also count of Provence through his marriage to Beatrice in 1246, and younger brother of Louis IX, was a lover of literature and protector of *trouvères* and troubadours. Crowned king of Sicily in 1266 after his victory at the battle of Benevento, which saw the death of young Manfred, son of the emperor Frederick II and regent of the Regno, Charles assumed a rôle of great responsibility in both crusades, in 1248-1250 and in 1270, launched by his brother the king of France. Raoul dedicated two other songs to him: RS 767 (where he uses the simple and familiar form *Challon*, v. 46) and RS 929 (where he gives him the unique designation *rubis de jovent*, v. 41, drawing on a metaphor already employed in the song RS 767, vv. 48-49: *Autant con li bons rubis / Passe le faus voire taint*).
- 7 Ellipsis of the conjunction *que* after the verb *savoir* (Ménard § 199, pp. 188-189 and Jensen § 957, pp. 497-498). I interpret similarly the construction of v. 43 with the verb *voloir*.
- 11-13 For the impossibility of being an excellent knight without love see also Gace Brulé RS 1795, 7-12 and Thibaut de Champagne's RS 1469, 9-10 (and my commentary on these lines). There seem to be numerous echoes of Thibaut's production in Raoul de Soissons' lyrics; the friendship between the two *trouvères* is guaranteed by the reciprocal dedication of numerous lyrics and by their joint composition of the *jeu-parti* RS 1393=1423a.
- 14 The irregular reading *barons* at the rhyme has been retained because the correction proposed by Hardy also affects the following line (all the plurals are transformed into singulars) and seems too heavy; furthermore, analogous approximations at the rhyme are found elsewhere in Raoul's corpus (*tenebros* with rhymes in *-ors* in RS 1393, 50; *enbracié* with rhymes in *-ier* in RS 1393, 52; but especially *cors* with rhymes in *-or* in RS 1978, 19).
- 19-20 The author refers to a stay in the Holy Land and one in Egypt, followed by imprisonment. Since Raoul is not indicated among the prisoners taken to Cairo after the ambush of Gaza in 1239, the stay in Egypt must refer to the seventh crusade, when the whole of the French contingent found itself in Muslim hands after the defeat of Mansura on 8 February 1250.
- 23 The impossibility of renouncing love for the lady despite the trials undergone during the crusade is a development of the theme of separation of heart and body typical of the *chansons de départie*; see especially Chardon de Croisilles' RS 499, the anonymous RS 1636 and Thibaut de Champagne's RS 1469, 6-8.



- 25-26 There are various accounts of Raoul de Soissons' illness, which the song declares to be a form of gout: Joinville writes of it in his *Vie de saint Louis* (§ 470) and the same Raoul maintains he was forced to use the support of a stick in the *jeu-parti* with Thibaut de Champagne (RS 1393, vv. 47-48). Another mention of the illness occurs in song RS 1204, v. 4. I accept the interpretation of Hardy who attributes temporal force to the preposition *per* (*par*) (Ménard § 333, p. 286); the same force, though rarely attested, may also be attributed to *ke* in v. 26 (Ménard § 213, pp. 197-198 and § 219, pp. 201-202).
- 32 The theme of love's prison, typical of Thibaut de Champagne (see for example RS 1152, 35) which is generally used within the oxymoronic image of the sweet prison or voluntary imprisonment, here suggests a desire for flight, the illusion of being able to escape from love's power through the crusade. The last two lines of the stanza (35-36) bring the situation back to its more usual context, stressing that not even flight allows the speaker to forget love, to which he is forced to submit.
- 43 I interpret the syntax of these lines differently from Winkler and Hardy. The subjunctive *ocie* seems to me to make more sense if it is understood as part of a predicate within a hypothetical sentence with a double conditional proposition involving vv. 43-45. To support this interpretation it is necessary to suppose the ellipsis of the conjunction *ke* after the verb *veult*, on which see the note to v. 7. As often in such cases, the two conditional propositions show temporal asymmetry (Ménard § 213 rem., pp. 197-198), perhaps used by the author for expressive purposes.
- 46 A fresh reference to the count of Anjou and his activity as singer. The count was not only a patron of poets but a poet himself. Attributed to him, though not always with sound arguments, are five French poems, three Occitan ones and a *jeu-parti* with Perrin d'Angicourt (Linker 1979 n. 46, pp. 125-126; ed. Maillard 1967).
- 54-55 These two lines are identical with vv. 55-56 of Raoul's song RS 363 (where they occupy the same position at the beginning and end of the stanza), but repetition extends to vv. 53-56 of our song, which are echoed in vv. 54-59 of RS 363: *Que vous passez de sens et de bonté / Toutes celes de la crestiënté. // Si voirement con je di verité / Et je vos aim de cuer sanz traïson, / Me doigne Deus, par vostre volenté, / Joie et merci a sa beneïçon.*

## Text

Luca Barbieri, 2014.

## Mss.

(3). C 64v [66v] ( *messires raious de Soixons* ), O 12c (anon.), Me 57v? ( *Messire Thierry de Soissons* ).

## Versification and music

10a'ba'bba'a'cc (MW 891,2 = Frank 298); six *coblas redondas*, with a two-line *envoi* which picks up the c rhyme of the last stanza; rhyme a = *-ie*; rhyme b = *-ui*, *-on(s)*, *-is*, *-ir*, *-er*, *-or*; rhyme c = *-on*, *-is*, *-ir*, *-er*, *-or*, *-é*. The versification with *coblas redondas* is typical of Raoul di Soissons, who uses it in six other pieces; here he produces a complex structure consisting of one constant rhyme and two others which change from stanza to stanza according to a pattern of *retrogradatio* (from the second stanza the b rhyme echoes the c rhyme of the preceding stanza); frequent rich rhymes (for example *oblie*, *folie*, *lie* vv. 28, 33 and 34; *mie*, *anemie*, *amie* vv. 3, 10, 24 and 42) and derivative rhymes (for example *ocis* and *ocie* vv. 22 and 43, *partis* and *partir* vv. 23 and 27, *oblie* and *oblies* vv. 28 and 35); equivocal rhymes *partir* vv. 27 and 32; identical rhymes *mie* vv. 3 and 10, *vie* vv. 15 and 21. Lyric caesuras occur in vv. 15, 25, 37 and 54 and a feminine caesura with elision in vv. 17 (if the decasyllable

is considered to be structured according to the form 6+4) and 20. Melody in O (T 660).

## Previous editions

Jubinal 1838, 46; Brakelmann 1868, 285 (diplomatic edition of ms. C); Winkler 1914, 46; Beck 1927, 17 (diplomatic edition of ms. O); Rosenberg-Tischler 1995, 646; Hardy 2009 ([www.lfa.uottawa.ca/activites/textes/ineke/Chansons/R1154ed.htm](http://www.lfa.uottawa.ca/activites/textes/ineke/Chansons/R1154ed.htm)).

## Analysis of the manuscript tradition

The complete text of six stanzas + *envoi* is found only in ms. C; ms. O transmits only stanza I, while we have only the third stanza of the text which was in the lost songbook of Mesmes (close to N, according to Huet 1902, xxiv), transcribed by Claude Fauchet in his *Recueil de l'origine de la langue et poésie françoise*, published in 1591. The text given here is that of C, with the variants of O and Me adding little of quantitative or qualitative significance. For the attribution to Thierry de Soissons see the introduction to song RS 1204.

## Historical context and dating

The younger son of Count Raoul the Good of Soissons (Raoul III of Nesle), Raoul was invested with the title of Lord of Cœuvres in 1232, but the title is never mentioned in the documents or chronicles, where he continues to be called Raoul de Soissons or Raoul de Nesle. Impulsive, fiery and adventurous in character, Raoul went on three crusades and spent several years in the East. After taking part in expedition led by Thibaut de Champagne (1239-1241) he remained in the Holy Land and married Alice of Champagne to bolster his claim to the kingdom of Jerusalem. As a consequence he found himself involved in the long struggle between the Ibelin family and the emperor Frederick II (see the description of the historical context in the edition of the *Verse Letter* of Philippe de Novare) and in 1242 (or less probably 1243) he played a significant rôle in the Ibelins' occupation of Tyre. Humiliated, his pride wounded by the lack of acknowledgment of his aspirations, he decided to return to France, abandoning his consort. He later took part in St Louis' first expedition to Egypt (1248-1250) and was among the prisoners after the defeat of Mansura. Once again he decided to remain behind in the Holy Land along with the king of France and he probably returned home at the end of 1253 or the beginning of the following year. Harrassed by economic problems (he had already requested a huge loan from Thibaut de Champagne in 1245), he decided to set sail again in St Louis' second expedition in 1270. The last mention of his name is found in a document of September 1272 (Newman 1971, I, p. 68).

The song's historical allusions suggest that it was written after the seventh crusade. The text mentions his participation in the crusade in the Holy Land (*Sulie*), imprisonment in Egypt (vv. 19-20), and his stay in the East of three years or more (vv. 30-31). The fact that Raoul calls Charles of Anjou only count and not king of Sicily suggests that the writing of the text precedes Charles's coronation on 6 January 1266. RS 1154 would therefore have been composed after Raoul's return to France, between 1254 and 1265, and the content of the song suggests that the date of composition must not be too long after this.