



Ore est acumplie / par [le] myen escient

(RS 665a)

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Anonymous

I

Ore est acumplie
par [le] myen escient
la plente Jeremie
4 ke oï avum suvent,
ke dist: «Cum[ent] set sule
cyté plene de fule
plurant amerement!
8 Ore est sanz mariage
e mis sur grief truage
la dame de la gent».

II

Ceo est [de] saynte Glise,
12 trestut apertement,
ke est hunye e maumise,
chescun veyt bien cument:
ele se gient e plure,
16 n'est nul ke la sucure
de [tut] sun marrement;
mes chescun la defule
e tire cum nel sule;
20 çoe est duel verrayment.

III

Jadis fu [cleregie]
franche e [a] desus,
amee et cherie,
24 [ke] nule rien [pot] plus:
mes ore est enservie
e tant [est] avilie
e abatu[e] jus;
28 par [ic]eus est hunie
dunt dust aver aïe;
jo n'os [en] dire plus.

I

Now is fulfilled, it appears to me, the lament of Jeremiah we have often heard, which says: "How alone stands the city full of folly, bitterly weeping; now she is husbandless and subject to heavy tribute, the princess of the peoples".

II

This most patently refers to the holy Church, which is being dishonoured and abused, and all can see well how: she groans and weeps, there is no-one who aids her in all her tribulations; but each tramples on her and drags her on the ground (?); this is truly sorrowful.

III

Time was that the clergy was free and respected, loved and cherished above all else: but now it is enslaved and greatly vilified and disprised; and it is traduced by those who ought to succour it; I dare not say more.

IV

Le rei ne l'apostoille
 32 ne pensent autrement
 [mes coment] il nus toillent
 nos biens e nostre argent,
 çoe est tute la summe;
 36 ke la pape de Rume
 au rei [trop] se consent;
 pur ayder sa curune,
 la disme a clers li dune,
 40 si [en] fet sun talent.

V

Le rei vet a Surie
 par bon entendement:
 vivëra de rubberie
 44 ke la clergie li rent,
 ja ne fëra bone enprise,
 pur reyndre seynte Glise,
 jo quid certaynement.
 48 Ke veot aver [semblance]
 regarde·l(e) rei de France
 e sun achiefement.

VI

Grevus est li tallage,
 52 mes y (nus) cuveynt souffrir;
 mes ceous nus funt damage,
 ky le deyvent cuillir.
 Mes que ke nus [en] die
 56 chescun en sun quer prie,
 si Deu le veut oïr,
 ke Dampnedeu (les) maudie
 (tut) ceous ke mettent aïe
 60 pur [le] nostre tolir.

IV

The king and the pope think of nothing but stealing
 our goods and money from us, this is the sum of it;
 for the pope of Rome is too compliant with the
 king; to support his crown, he grants him the
 clergy's tithe, and he does what he likes with it.

V

The king goes to Syria with good intentions, (but)
 he will live on the spoils given him at the clergy's
 expense, and I certainly believe he will not succeed
 in his plan to reimburse the holy Church. If anyone
 wants to have proof let him look at the king of
 France and what *he* has achieved.

VI

The tax is grievous, but we have to put up with it;
 but those who have to collect it damage us.
 Whatever anyone may say, each man prays in his
 heart - may God hear him - that the Lord will curse
 all those who collaborate in taking from us what is
 ours.

Notes

As in the case of the song RS 1887, the lyric form is applied to “political” content, following the style of the Occitan *sirventes*. This use of the *canço* form for invective or political purposes seems particularly common in medieval Anglo-Norman literature, as is shown by the numerous anthologies devoted to this type of text (Wright 1839, Aspin 1953, Jeffrey-Levy 1990). Such types of lyric are found not in songbooks similar to those of the continental tradition but in manuscripts containing chronicles or miscellaneous texts of historical or legal interest, as is typical of this peripheral tradition. To this type of non-professional tradition should be attributed the lack of formal and rhetorical refinement typifying *trouvère* texts, even if the structure of the text and the arrangement of arguments denotes a certain familiarity with the techniques of persuasion which the clerical author of the text could be expected to know. The song expresses the protest of the English cleric against the ecclesiastical tax imposed by the pope with the agreement of Henry III with the aim of collecting the funds initially designed to finance an expedition to the Holy Land, and subsequently diverted to support the project directed at the conquest of the kingdom of Sicily, after the death of the emperor Frederick II. This confirms the growing burden of the more material aspects of crusading organisation, and bears witness to people’s impatience over the ever-increasing costs of expeditions to the East, typical of the later crusading period, costs which seemed ill-justified in the light of the actual results and particularly resented by the classes more directly affected by the levies. The text opens in a style typical of preaching, with allegorically- interpreted scriptural quotations referring to the present state of the English Church, and goes on to denounce the loss of prestige of the clergy abused by those who ought to support it. The author denounces the injustice of the agreement between king and pope concerning the Church’s property, and stigmatises their policies, essentially accusing them of theft at the clergy’s expense. The song then proceeds to a direct criticism of Henry III’s crusading project, in the light of the recent failure of King Louis IX of France’s expedition, and concludes by invoking divine curses on the usurious merchants charged with the tax-collecting. The tenor and content of the text fit in well with the protest recorded by the chronicles of 1255 and 1256, particularly with certain passages of Matthew Paris’s *Chronica majora*.

- 3 The *plente Jeremie* refers to the short Biblical book of Lamentations, traditionally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah.

- 5-10 These lines constitute a virtually literal translation of Lam 1,1: *Quomodo sedet sola / civitas plena populo! / Facta est quasi vidua / domina gentium; / princeps provinciarum / facta est sub tributo*. The book of Lamentations was often used in medieval Latin and vernacular to indicate oppressive measures, sometimes political, imposed on the Church.

- 9 Note the form *sur* where one would expect *soz/sus*. For the possible confusion between *sur* and *sus* in Anglo-Norman see Pope § 401, p. 159

- 11 Following the purest traditions of ecclesiastical texts, the author explicitly provides the key to reading the biblical prophecy, applying it to the Church. For the use of biblical quotations interpreted allegorically compare for example song RS 886 of Maistre Renaut.

- 13-17 The author picks up the biblical source again, albeit indirectly, citing Lam 1,2: *Plorans ploravit in nocte / et lacrymae eius in maxillis eius; / non est qui consoletur eam, / ex omnibus charis eius; / omnes amici eius spreverunt eam, / et facti sunt ei inimici*.

- 19 The reading of this line, found only in O, is hard to justify and is probably corrupt. Aspin interprets *sule* as third person present indicative of the verb *suleir* to which an unstressed final *e* was added, citing analogous cases attested in the XIVth c., specifically a form *voile*. The sense would be “is being dragged in an unusual way”, or “as is unusual”, but neither the sense nor the explanation of the reading seems satisfactory, especially because there is no other attestation of this verbal form and the attestations of the phenomenon in other verbs are very late. As a noun, *sule* can mean “ground, floor” (TL 9, 791, 49ff.) and taking the previous line into account one might imagine a fairly plausible interpretation of the kind: “but each one tramples it and drags it to the ground” (see for example 2 Sam 22,43 and Mi 7,10), but in this case it is hard to explain the presence of *cum* and especially *nel*, which seems impossible to interpret other than as a negative.
- 25-27 The author attributes to the clergy the same fate as that of the Church, taking up the metaphor from Lamentations.
- 28-30 The image of friends becoming enemies again reflects Lam 1,2, but at the same time anticipates stanza IV in which the accusations are explicitly directed against the king and the pope.
- 36-39 The accusation concerns the 1254 agreement between Henry III and the pope (initially Innocent IV, then his successor Alexander IV) over the succession in Sicily, to which the king wished to link his son Edmund. The detailed history of the agreement, the papal legate Rostand’s preaching and the collecting of the ecclesiastical tithe between 1254 and 1256 is related in Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, V, pp. 457-459 and 510-552, but more concise references are also found in the chronicle of St Benet of Hulme, pp. 201-206. There is no explicit mention of the Sicilian question in the song, but the *curune* alluded to in v. 38, rather than being a simple metonymy for the king, may actually refer to the Sicilian crown promised to Henry by the pope.
- 41-42 If we disregard the idea that these lines are incompatible with any reference to the crusade in 1256, an interpretation whose inconsistency has already been demonstrated, O’s reading is clearly better than L’s which appears to be a hasty and clumsy revision, seriously irregular both in syllabic count and choice of rhymes. It is hard to establish whether the expression in v. 42 is to be taken literally or ironically.
- 44 The verb *rendre* needs to be understood in the sense of “consign, cede”, *rubberie* being considered “plunder, fruit of robbery”; the verb also has the technical sense of “to pay” tribute (TL 8, 796, 27-44) and the author is probably playing on this ambiguity.
- 46 Here again the verb *rendre* assumes a particular meaning, that of “redeem, repay, reimburse” attested in TL 8, 790, 26-34 and 794, 7ff.

- 49-50 Louis IX had returned from the Holy Land in 1254, where he had stayed for four years to consolidate the overseas territories. However, he did not succeed in completely eradicating the impression of failure created by the defeat of Mansura in 1250, the king's captivity and the enormous sum paid for his ransom (see the introduction to RS 1887). Matthew Paris gives an account of the Christians' defeat and the king's capture (*Chronica majora* V, pp. 157-159), but also emphasizes several times how the money for the financing of this disastrous crusade had been extorted from the Church in France, as he had similarly denounced the damage done to the Church in England (*Chronica majora* V, pp. 116-117 and 170-172). The author's comparison between Henry's crusading project and the ruinous outcome of king of France's crusade is therefore unsurprising (*Chronica majora* V, pp. 174-175, but see also the interesting correspondence with a passage on p. 102, in which Matthew Paris comments on Henry III's taking of the cross in 1250: *Hujus autem dubitationis seminarium praestitit regis Francorum exemplum perniciosum, qui [pecuniam] infinitam, minime tamen Deo vindice profecturam, a regno suo maxime abraserat, ut suam promoveret peregrinationem. Sed quales inde fructus collegerit, sequens sermo declarabit*). It seems clear that the noun *achiefement* in v. 50 of our text is ironic.
- 51-60 Stanza VI, found only in ms. O, shows some interesting similarities of content and form with Matthew Paris's attack on the ecclesiastical tax of 1255-1256 (*Chronica majora* V, pp. 535-536); see especially the sentence: *Et praeter hoc quod etsi intolerabile sit, tamen tolerabilius reputatur, bonis temporalibus violenter depraedantur* in relation to vv. 51-54. A subsequent sentence where he laments that the clergy are prey to the usurers responsible for collecting the tax, calling for divine vengeance, shows similarities to the whole stanza, especially vv. 55-60: *Concedere cogimur terminos solutionis, quos nullo modo tenere possumus, ut incidamus in laqueos usurariorum suorum, quos socios eorum novimus et participes. Datur potestas personis prorsus indignis super nobiles ecclesias et eorum praelatos excellentes. Venduntur praelati, ut boves et asini; ecce ultimae conditio servitutis. Ecce venditores, eiciendi a templo, flagellandi. Sed quia ignobilius est facere injuriam violenter quam pati cum innocentia, credendum est quod super hoc clamor ascendat querulus ad Deum Dominum ultionum*.
- 51 For *taillage* in the sense of "levy" see TL 10, 36, 46-49.
- 53-54 The lines probably refer to the papal legate Rostand and above all to the merchants and usurers charged with tax-collection against whom Matthew Paris also inveighs, as shown above. See also *Chronica majora* V, p. 552.
- 58-60 Those on whom the divine curse should fall will be the ones mentioned in vv. 53-54, namely the legate Rostand and the merchants charged with the tax-collection. For the correspondence of these lines with certain passages of contemporary chronicles see above.

Text

Luca Barbieri, 2014.

Mss.

(2). Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 137, 112v (O, anonymous); London, British Library, Cotton Julius D VII, 133v (L, anon.).

Versification and music

6a'ba'bc'c'bd'd'b (MW 1181,2); 6 *coblas singulares* ; rhyme a = *-ie* , *-ise* (or *-ie* in L), *-ie* (or *-ise* in O), *-oille(nt)* (or *-oloie* in L, but corrupt), *-ie* (or *-as* in L, but corrupt), *-age* ; rhyme b = *-ent* , *-ent* , *-us* , *-ent* ,

-ent , -ir ; rhyme c = -ule , -ure , -ie , -um(m)e , -ise , -ie ; rhyme d = -age , -ule , -ie , -une , -ance (or -ample in O), -ie . The verse form is basically respected, but there are numerous irregularities at the rhyme. The same rhyme may be repeated several times within a stanza or in different stanzas, sometimes at the same position and sometimes in different positions, without there being any perceptible plan; there are also numerous assonanced forms among them (-ule , -ure , -ume , -une). In addition there is a huge variation in the number of syllables per line (in both manuscripts, but not always in the same lines), with frequent hypometric lines of five and sometimes even four syllables, and a few rare cases of hypermetry. There are many cases of rich and leonine rhymes, as well as identical rhymes (*glise* vv. 11 and 46 [and 21 in O], *plus* vv. 24 and 30, *aïe* vv. 29 and 59), and one example of equivocal rhyme (*sule* vv. 5 e 19). No melody has been preserved.

Previous editions

Wright 1839, 42; Leroux de Lincy 1841, 188; Meyer 1875, 397; Aspin 1953, 42; Jeffrey-Levy 1990, 169; Wright 1839, 42; Leroux de Lincy 1841, 188; Meyer 1875, 397; Aspin 1953, 42; Jeffrey-Levy 1990, 169.

Analysis of the manuscript tradition

Although Aspin 1953 and then Jeffrey-Levy 1990 write of two different versions, the text of the two witnesses is substantially the same and the divergences compatible with the types of variants that can be seen in texts of the same kind and belonging to similar traditions, if one disregards the syllabic oscillations typical of Anglo-Norman texts. The most significant divergence actually concerns vv. 41-42, which in ms. O contain the reference to the crusade; this can be explained by the different audiences for the text and the particular interests of the transcribers. The text presents some of the main phenomena of the Anglo-Norman *scripta* , but without particular excesses. It gives the impression of having been written in an essentially correct French. Also typical of Anglo-Norman texts are the frequent variations in the syllabic count, often leading to cases of hypometric and more rarely hypermetric lines. Such features are encountered in both copies, and at least some of these may have been present in the original version. Nevertheless the irregularities are below average for the texts published by Aspin, and in some (six) cases they can be corrected by comparing the readings in the two manuscripts; the remaining irregularities can be ironed out through simple and obvious conjectures, sometimes restoring the correct grammatical forms (vv. 27 and 60), or forms that are particularly common or suggested by the sources (vv. 2, 17, 24, 30, 55). In short the text gives the impression of having originally been strikingly regular, and so it has seemed appropriate to suggest ways of regularising the few remaining lines as well (6/7). The edition is based on ms. O which is the only manuscript to contain the sixth stanza and the reference to the crusade and which certainly offers the better text for stanza II, although L has been drawn on each time its reading has permitted the regularisation of rhyme or syllabic count. All changes to the base manuscript are signalled: the dots underneath the letters indicate the vowels which are present in the spelling of the manuscript but, according to Anglo-Norman norms, do not count as syllables; the square brackets indicate suppletions, especially those included to correct hypometric lines, while round brackets indicate forms that could be suppressed to eliminate supernumerary syllables. Inside the square brackets the use of Roman characters indicates suppletion on the basis of L, while italics indicate conjectural reconstructions.

Historical context and dating

The introductory rubric in ms. L explicitly dates the song to 1256 (*Istum canticum factum fuit anno gratie .m°cc°.lvi°. super desolacione ecclesie anglicane*), and the Latin chronicle of the reign of Henry III of England contained in the same codex indirectly confirms this, inserting into the margin of f. 105v, which corresponds to the year 1256, an explicit reference to the French song (*In fine libri invenies*

canticum hoc anno gallice compositum super desolacione ecclesie anglicane). Henry III had taken the cross in 1250, but in 1255 the pope had invited him to commute his vow, promising him the throne of Sicily in exchange for military assistance against Manfred, son of the emperor Frederick II. The pope had also promised Henry economic support through a new round of ecclesiastical taxes; the same Latin chronicle of ms. L refers to the protests of the English clergy against the pope's decision to devolve the tithe to the king (f. 105r). The absence of lines referring to the crusade in L's version seems to confirm the idea that the clergy's protest was directed against the collection of funds for the Sicilian affair rather than the expedition to the Holy Land. For this reason some critics have maintained that O's reference to the crusade is incompatible with the situation in 1256, but that it must be connected to a revision of the text that must have taken place at the time of taxation linked to crusading plans of Edward I, Henry's son and successor (1274-1276, 1287 or 1291-1292). In reality the date 1256 attested by L should not be set aside, since Henry III never officially agreed to commute his vow, as the bishop of Hereford, the pope and his legate Rostand advised him to do; on the contrary, he continued to affirm his wish to leave for the Holy Land, as he delegated the administration of the Sicilian affair to his son Edmund (Weiler 2006, pp. 147-155; Tyerman 1988, p. 119 n. 32). Confirmation of this is found in the authoritative *Chronica majora* of Matthew Paris, who at the beginning of 1256 records the protests of many monastic communities against the rapaciousness of the merchants charged with collecting the tithe who did not hesitate to assert that the money was for the king's crusade (*Chronica majora* V, pp. 536 and 552). The idea of dating the text to the reign of Edward I are plausible but not very likely, especially as the single real crusading levy to have left any trace in contemporary chronicles relates to 1291-1292 and does not seem to have provoked particular protests on the clergy's part. Such a late dating would also make it hard to explain the reference to the king of France, whereas this is certainly relevant to the context of 1256.