



## **Diex est ausis conme li pellicans**

**(RS 273)**

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## Thibaut de Champagne

I

Diex est ausis conme li pellicans  
qui fait son nif el plus haut arbre sus,  
et li mauvais oisiax, qui est dejus,  
4 ses oiseillons ocist, tant est puans;  
li peres vient destroiz et angoisseus,  
dou bec s'ocist, de son sanc doulereus  
fait revivre tantost ses oiseillons.  
8 Diex fist autel quant fu sa passions:  
de son dous sanc racheta ses anfanx  
dou dëable, qui tant par est puissanz.

II

Li guerredons en est mauvais et lens,  
12 que bien ne droit ne pitié nen n'a nus,  
ainz est orguieux et baraz au desus,  
felonie, traïson et bobans.  
Moult par est ore vostre estaz perilleus,  
16 et se ne fust li exemples de ceus  
qui tant ainment et noises et tençons -  
ce est des clers qui ont laissié sermons  
por guerroier et por tuer les gens -  
20 jamais en Dieu ne fust nus hons creanz.

III

Nostre chiés fait touz noz membres doloir,  
por ce est bien droiz qu'a Dieu nos en plaignons;  
et grant corpe ra moult sor les barons,  
24 cui il poise quant aucuns veut valoir;  
et entre gent en font moult a blasmer  
qui tant sevent et mentir et guiller;  
le mal en font desus aus revertir  
28 et qui mal quiert maus ne li doit faillir:  
qui petit mal porchace a son pooir  
li grans ne puet en son cuer remanoir.

I

God is similar to the pelican which makes its nest up in the highest tree; and the evil bird underneath kills its chicks, it is so foul. The father returns full of distress and anguish, kills itself with its beak and from the painful flow of blood brings its chicks immediately back to life. God did the same in the hour of His passion: with His sweet blood He ransomed His children from the devil, who is so enormously powerful.

II

Repayment is deficient and slow, for no-one harbours goodness or justice or pity; so pride, fraud, disloyalty, treachery and arrogance prevail. Now your situation is extremely dangerous, and were it not for the example of those who so love both uproar and disputes - that is, the clergy who have abandoned sermons to wage war and kill people - no-one would have faith in God any more.

III

Our head brings pain to all our limbs, so it is right that we should complain of this to God, but the heavy guilt lies largely with the barons, who grieve when anyone wants to give proof of valour; and those who know so much about lying and cheating thoroughly deserve publicly condemnation. They bring the evil back upon themselves, and anyone who seeks after evil will find it without fail: for if a man tries his utmost to pursue a small evil, a great one is able to settle in his heart.

## IV

Bien devriens en l'estoire veoir  
<sup>32</sup> la bataille qui fu des .ij. dragons,  
 si com l'an trueve el livre des Bretons,  
 dont il covint le chastel jus chaoir:  
 c'est li siecles cui il covient verser,  
<sup>36</sup> se Diex ne vuet la bataille finer;  
 le sens Mellin en covient hors issir  
 por deviner qu'estoit a avenir.  
 Mais Andecriz vient, ce poez savoir,  
<sup>40</sup> as malices qu'ennemis fait movoir.

## V

Savez qui sont li vil oisel punais  
 qui tuent Dieu et ses anfançonnez?  
 li papelart, dont li mons n'est pas nez;  
<sup>44</sup> cil sont bien ort et puant et mauvais:  
 il ocient toute la bone gent  
 pour lor faus moz, qui sont li Dieu enfant.  
 Papelart font le siecle chanceler;  
<sup>48</sup> par saint Pierre, mal les fait ancontrer!  
 Il ont tolu joie et soulaz et pais:  
 s'en porteront en enfer le grant fais.

## VI

Or nous doint Diex lui servir et amer  
<sup>52</sup> et la Dame, c'on ne doit oublier,  
 et nous veille garder a touz jours mais  
 des maus oisiaus qui ont venin es bes.

## IV

We ought to bear well in mind the story of the  
 battle of the two dragons to be found in the book of  
 the Bretons, which caused the castle to collapse;  
 this is the world, which risks ruin if God is  
 unwilling to put an end to the battle. Merlin's  
 science was needed to divine what the future would  
 bring; but Antichrist is coming: this you may know  
 from the vices that the devil is fomenting.

## V

Do you know who are the vile, stinking birds who  
 kill God and his little progeny? Religious  
 hypocrites, who are unclean en masse; they are  
 truly repulsive and stinking and evil: they kill all  
 the good people, who are God's children, through  
 their false words. Religious hypocrites make the  
 world falter; by St Peter, woe betide anyone who  
 meets them! They have taken away joy and comfort  
 and peace and will bear the great burden of this to  
 hell.

## VI

God grant that we may serve and love Him and Our  
 Lady, whom we should keep in remembrance, and  
 protect us for evermore from the evil birds which  
 have poison in their beaks.

## Notes

This is not really a crusade song, but an invective against religious hypocrisy (see especially vv. 16-20 and 41-50) containing historical references that can be interpreted in relation to a crusade, particularly because of its strong resemblance to RS 1152. Thibaut de Champagne's piece belongs to the context of polemics against the *falsa clercia* well exemplified by certain Occitan *sirventes* written at the time of the Albigensian crusade by the troubadours Falquet de Romans and Peire Cardenal. The interest of the text lies in the expression of pro-imperial and anticlerical positions unusual for someone of the count of Champagne's status, and also in its quantity of scriptural, proverbial and literary quotations which reveal the author's broad culture and intellectual curiosity. For a more detailed commentary see Barbieri 2013a.

- 1-7 The parable of the pelican which resuscitates its dead chicks by sprinkling them with its own blood is widely diffused in medieval encyclopaedias and bestiaries, especially because it can readily be interpreted in Christological terms, but it probably derives from classical and pagan sources. The earliest attestations are found in the Greek *Physiologos*, from where the image enters Christian Latin literature through St Augustine. The version which identifies the pelican's enemy with another bird is extremely rare, and is found in a 12th-c. Occitan sermon published by Chabaneau (1885, p. 20) and reprinted in Appel's Occitan *Chrestomathie* (Appel 1895, p. 176).
- 1 The first line is indubitably inspired by a verse of the Psalms (Ps 101 [102], 7: *similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis; factus sum sicut nycticorax in domicilio*), which is already evoked in the Greek *Physiologos*.
- 11 The allusion to the slowness of the *guerredon* recalls one of the recurrent themes of crusade preaching, namely the pressing invitation to repay in some way the sacrifice of Christ who accepted death on the cross for the sake of all humankind. Such an exchange is usually identified with the service offered for the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre and the Holy Land which has fallen into pagan hands, and in this respect the similarity with Falquet de Romans BdT 156.11, 51-53 appears significant.
- 13-14 The list of the worst vices proliferating in the world and announcement of the coming of the Antichrist is similar to one found in RS 1152, 1-4, where it provides one of the justifications for the need for the crusade. With these lines Thibaut prepares the prophecy contained in vv. 39-40, and the link between the two passages is strengthened if one accepts the reading *malices* ("vices") in v. 40 in place of the incomprehensible, though well attested in the MSS, *maques*.
- 16-20 Nowadays most critics interpret this passage as ironic, as this is the only way it can fit with the following vv. 41-50. Such a reading is supported by the similar tone found in certain contemporary Occitan *sirventes* such as BdT 225.4 by Guillem de Montaignagol.
- 21-22 The allusion to the suffering of the head which is transmitted to all the body's limbs is scriptural (1Cor 12, 26-27) but has become proverbial. Here it may be a criticism of the pope expressed cautiously at a moment when Thibaut de Champagne's personal and political position is very delicate; this interpretation appears to be supported by the following lines.
- 23-24 The reference to the generic appearance of envy aroused by the most valorous may point to the emperor Frederick II, as is suggested by the similarity with RS 1152, 7-8.

- 27-30 It is not obvious how these clearly proverbial lines should be interpreted. If v. 27 at first appears comprehensible and recalls numerous biblical passages (e.g. Job 4, 8; Ps 7, 15-17; Eccl 8, 6), vv. 29-30 are more ambiguous and would be clearer if we knew whether the reference to the two evils should be taken generically or as referring to specific facts. I do not consider it necessary to force the interpretation of the two evils too specifically, as do some scholars who see the smaller evil as Muslim power in the Holy Land and the greater, hypocrisy. The meaning of these lines must be simply that whoever continually pursues evil, however small it is, ends by attracting a greater one to himself and receiving it into his heart. For the various forms assumed by this proverb and its literary fortune see the collections of Schulze Busacker 1985 and Morawski 1925, n° 1979, 1982, 1983.
- 31-34 The episode of the fight between the dragons is found in various medieval redactions of the life of Merlin, from Wace's *Roman de Brut* onwards, but Thibaut's reference is particularly close to the version of the *Merlin* of the pseudo-Robert de Boron (§§ 19-30) and the *Lancelot-Graal* (*Merlin*, §§ 50-76). Scholars have tried to interpret the allegory by identifying the two dragons firstly with the Church and the Cathar heresy (or else as the two most significant characters of the Albigensian crusade: count Raymond of Toulouse and Simon de Montfort), and then, with greater plausibility, as the pope and the emperor Frederick II, locked in a long and exhausting conflict.
- 35-36 The theme of the decline of the world is the logical follow-up to the proliferation of vices described in vv. 13-14 and will find its fulfilment in the coming of the Antichrist announced in vv. 39-40; once again there is a clear similarity with the crusade song RS 1152, 5-6.
- 40 For the very common designation of the devil as *ennemis*, see also Thibaut de Champagne RS 6, 31: *ensi les tient Anemis et pechiez*.
- 41-44 The spelling out of the meaning of a symbolic image (in this case that of the first stanza) is typical of moral and didactic literature as well as sermons. The same procedure is adopted by the author of the crusade song RS 886, definitely a cleric (*maistre Renaut*), applied in vv. 71-78 to the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25, 1-12).
- 43 The noun *mons* here means "société", "catégorie d'êtres humains" (Godefroy X, 168c). Naturally the adjective *nez* must be understood here in both its literal and moral senses.
- 47 This returns to the theme of the decline of the world (v. 35) which, in the choice of the verb *chanceler*, evokes the image of a tower collapsing. Not only the struggle between pope and emperor but also the actions of the hypocritical clergy contribute to the world's ruin.
- 49-50 This obviously concerns the burden of eternal consequences which the hypocrites must bear for having deprived the world of peace and joy. Compare Ps 37, 5: *Nam culpa meae supergressae sunt caput meum, sicut onus grave gravant me nimis*.
- 51-54 The prayer addressed to God and the Virgin is a feature of Thibaut de Champagne's envois, and we can find it in other religious compositions of his; as far as crusade songs are concerned see RS 6, 26 and 36-38.

## Text

Luca Barbieri, 2015.

## Mss.

(9). B 3v-4r (anon.), K 34b-35b ( *li rois de Navarre* ), M<sup>t</sup> 67d-68b (anon.), O 37b-38a (anon.), S 317d-318a (anon.), T 16rv ( *li rois de Navare* ), V 17d-18b (anon.), X 29d-30c ( *li rois de Navarre* ), za 142v; even in songbooks which do not include attributions the text is always included in a series of



compositions attributable to Thibaut de Champagne. Base: S (B for the *envoi* ).

## Versification and music

10abbacddaa (MW 1432,1 = Frank 579); 5 *coblas doblas* (2+2+1) with an *envoi* of 4 lines (ddaa); rhymes a = -anz/enz , -oir , -ais/es ; b = -us , -ons , -ez ; c = -eus , -er , -ent/ant ; d = -ons , -ir , -er ; the b rhyme of stanzas iii and iv repeats the d rhyme of stanzas i and ii, the d rhyme of stanza v repeats the c rhyme of stanzas iii and iv; feminine caesura with elision in v. 33; lyric caesura lirica in vv. 7, 10, 14, 17, 23, 24, 26, 32, 35, 40, 45, 48, 52; melody in KM <sup>t</sup> OVX, with few variants (van der Werf 1979, II, p. 18; Tischler 1997, III n° 164).

## Previous editions

La Ravallière 1742, II 158; Tarbé 1850, 119; Wallensköld 1925, 194; Järnström-Långfors 1927, 41; Toja 1966, 423; Brahney 1989, 238; Rosenberg-Tischler 1995, 596, Barbieri 2013a, 338.

## Analysis of the manuscript tradition

An error in vv. 41 and 44 shows a family of mss. BKOSVXza (δ) opposed to the usual pair α M <sup>t</sup> T (see vv. 10, 33 and 43). Ms. S, while showing some points of contact with the δ family, seems to preserve traces of a different tradition from that of the *Liederbuch* , with numerous individual variants which at times constitute excellent readings probably going back to the original source (see especially *est* for *vient* in v. 3, the oblique case *le chastel* in v. 34 and *malices* for *maçues* in v. 40). Given the analogies with the tradition of song RS 1152, it has been decided for the same reasons, and under the same risks, to publish the text of S, except where this presents excessively banal or obviously erroneous readings.

## Historical context and dating

Two dates are possible for this text. It may refer to the events of 1236-1239, the period of constant conflict between Pope Gregory IX and the emperor Frederick II and of long and difficult preparations for the expedition to the Holy Land which was in fact to be led by Thibaut de Champagne (see the numerous points of contact with the song RS 1152, probably written near the time of departure of the 1239 expedition). Alternatively, and more probably, it may date from the time of the Albigensian crusade following the siege of Avignon (1226-1229, but certainly before Frederick left for the Holy Land in the summer of 1228). Characteristic of compositions of these years are the condemnation of hypocrisy and anti-clerical polemics.