



Bien me deüsse targier

(RS 1314)

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Conon de Béthune

I

Bien me deüsse targier
de chançon faire et de mos et de chans,
quant me convient eslongier
4 de la millor de totes les vaillans;
si em puis bien faire voire vantance,
ke je fas plus por Dieu ke nus amans,
si en sui mout endroit l'ame joians,
8 mais del cors ai et pitié et pesance.

II

On se doit bien efforchier
de Dieu servir, ja n'i soit li talans,
et la char vaintre et plaissier,
12 ki adés est de pechier desirans;
adont voit Dieus la doble penitance.
Hé! las, se nus se doit sauver dolans,
dont doit par droit ma merite estre grans,
16 car plus dolans ne se part nus de France.

III

Vous ki dismés les croisiés,
ne despendés mie l'avoir ensi:
anemi Dieu en seriés.
20 Dieus! ke porront faire si anemi,
quant tot li saint trambleront de dotance
devant Celui ki onques ne menti?
Adont seront pecheor mal bailli,
24 se sa pitiés ne cuevre sa poissance.

IV

Ne ja por nul desirier
ne remanrai chi avoc ces tirans,
ki sont croisiet a loier
28 por dismer clers et borgois et serjans;
plus en croisa covoiétés ke creance,
et quant la crois n'en puet estre garans,
a teus croisiés sera Dieus mout soffrans
32 se ne s'en venge a peu de demorance.

I

I really ought to give up making a song and words and music, since I have to go far away from the best of all worthy ladies; indeed, I can truly boast that I am doing more for God than any other lover, but if I am joyful about it as regards my soul, I feel pity and sadness for my body.

II

It is right to make an effort to serve God, even if the desire to do so is not there, and to conquer and subdue the flesh, which is always inclined to sin; in this case God sees the double penitence. Alas, if it is by suffering that one is to obtain salvation, then my merit should rightly be great, for no man leaves France more sorrowfully.

III

You who tax the crusaders, do not spend the money thus: you will become God's enemies. Oh God, what will His enemies be able to do when even the saints tremble with fear before the One who never lied? Then sinners will be in a dreadful plight, if His pity does not overcome His anger.

IV

I have absolutely no desire to remain here with these tyrants who have taken the cross out of self-interest, to tax clerics, burghers and men-at-arms/sergeants; greed more than faith has made them take the cross, and since the cross cannot (suffice to) protect them, God will certainly prove very patient with such crusaders if He does not swiftly take vengeance on them.

V

Li ques s'en est ja vangîés,
des haus barons, qui or li sont faillit.
C'or les eüst anpiriés,
³⁶ qui sont plus vil que onques mais ne vi!
Dehait li bers qui est de tel sanblance
con li oixel qui conchïet son nit!
Po en i a n'ait son renne honi,
⁴⁰ por tant qu'il ait sor ses homes possance.

VI

Qui ces barons empiriés
sert sans eür, ja n'ara tant servi
k'il lor em prenge pitiés;
⁴⁴ pour çou fait boin Dieu servir, ke je di
qu'en lui servir n'a eür ne kaance,
mais ki mieus sert, et mieus li est meri.
Pleüst a Dieu k'Amors fesist ausi
⁴⁸ ensvers tos ceaus qui ens li ont fiance.

VII

Or vos ai dit des barons la sanblance;
si lor an poise de ceu que jou ai di,
si s'an praignent a mon mastre d'Oïssi,
⁵² qui m'at appris a chanter tres m'anfance.

[VIII]

*Par Deu, compains, adés ai ramambrance
c'onques aüst amin,
ne tous li mons ne vadroit riens sans li;
⁵⁶ magrei Gilon, adés croist sa vaillance.*

V

He [God] has already taken vengeance on the great barons who have now failed Him. Would that He had made things worse for them, for they are baser than anyone ever seen! A curse on the lord who behaves like the bird that soils its own nest! There are few who have not treated their own lands shamefully, just to have power over their own men.

VI

Anyone who has the misfortune to serve these degenerate lords will never serve sufficiently for them to take pity on him; so it is better to serve God, for I say that in serving Him there is no element of chance or risk, but whoever serves best is best rewarded. Would that it pleased God that Love would do the same with those who trust in him.

VII

Now I have told you how the barons are behaving; if they are annoyed at what I have said, let them take it up with my master of Oisy who has taught me to sing since my childhood.

[VIII]

By God, companion, I always recall [that Love has never] had a [more loyal] friend, and the whole world would be worth nothing without him/her [Love?]; despite Gilles, his/her worth is always increasing.

Notes

The song has the same structure as RS 1125, with the first stanza again presenting the motif of the separation from the lady, also present in the body of the song in vv. 14-16 and 47-48. From the second stanza the song becomes essentially a harsh tirade against the king and the lords who have taken the cross and collected taxes to finance the expedition to the Holy Land but continue to delay their departure, wasting time and money in inter-Christian conflicts and wars. This theme is very common in Third Crusade preaching, emphasised particularly by Peter of Blois in his *Conquestio* (especially 222-252 and 471-480) and *Passio Raginaldi* (especially 1-222). Conon's text shows many points of contact with Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.41, probably composed in 1187-1188. There is also a dense network of reciprocal cross-referencing between Conon de Béthune and Bertran de Born, in particular with the song BdT 80.17 (and its reworking BdT 80.4). The final dedication of BdT 80.17, 36-38: *A mon Ysombart, part Troia, / vai, serventes, e di li-m, q'ieu lo-l man, / q'als reis crozatz es amta, qar non van* is addressed to Conon de Béthune, and by repeating the accusation against the tardy kings it seems to seek to echo RS 1314 (but *amta* also seems to repeat the emphasis on the lexical field of *honte* in RS 1125, 41-48, just as vv. 15-16 seem to refer to RS 1125, 18 and 42).

- 1-2 For the incipit see Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.41, 6-17.
- 7-8 The different destinies of soul and body recalls the theme of the separation of heart and body expressed in RS 1125, 7-8.
- 11-12 The reflection on the need for the spirit to dominate the flesh, inclined to sin, derives from the Bible, in particular the Pauline Epistles, as can be seen for example in Romans 7. 22-25 and Galatians 5. 17. Compare also Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.41, 45-48 and especially 67-72: *Qu'er es paucs pros e niens, / si sas colpas penedens / non eschan, / Dieu sirven e-l cor forsan; / c'aisi venra veiramen / al sieu premier estamen.*
- 13 The double penitence would be the renunciation of love, and hence the mortification of the flesh, and the pilgrimage in God's service. It should be noted that the stress on penitence, taken from St Bernard, characterises Third Crusade preaching in particular. See for example Gregory VIII, *Audita tremendi* (PL 202), col. 1541; Alain de Lille, *Sermo de cruce Domini*, pp. 281-282.
- 14-16 Lines imitated by the Châtelain de Coucy RS 679, 7 and Hugues de Berzé RS 1126, 1-2.
- 17 This refers to the establishment of the Saladin tithe in France and England from the end of March 1188. On criticisms of this tax, especially on the part of the clergy and religious orders, see Peter of Blois, *Epistle* 112 (PL 207, coll. 335-340) and Steven of Tournai, *Epistles* 167 and 183 (ed. Desilve). In reality the tax did not directly affect the crusaders (Bédier 1909, p. 42), since anyone leaving for the Holy Land was exempt from paying the tithe, but in these lines Conon shows himself to be consistent with his declaration in song RS 1125, 25-27, where he says that anyone contributing through donations and charitable works participates in all the benefits of the crusade.

- 18-19 The crusade's departure date, initially set for Easter 1189, was long delayed because of renewed hostilities between France and England from the summer of 1188, in particular because of a new rebellion of Richard the Lionheart, supported by Philip Augustus, against his father Henry II. It culminated in Henry's defeat at Ballans on 4 July 1189, followed by the King's death on 6 July. To finance the military campaigns during this rebellion the rulers used funds from the Saladin tithe destined for the crusade. For criticisms of the wars between Christians which were delaying departure for the Holy Land see Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.6, 15-20 and Falquet de Romans BdT 156.12, 9-12 (the latter composed on the occasion of Frederick II's crusade). Once again Conon draws on a typical topic of crusade preaching, that of the opposition of *malitia* and *militia*, already present for example in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistle* 363 (ed. Leclercq-Rochais, VIII), p. 315: *Cesset pristina illa non militia, sed plane malitia, qua soletis invicem sternere, invicem perdere, ut ab invicem consumamini* and taken up in the preaching of the Third Crusade, for example by Henry of Marcy, *Epistle* 32 (PL 204), col. 250. A particularly harsh condemnation of the crusading lords' lack of interest in the Holy Land, expressed in similar terms to those of Conon de Béthune (see also vv. 26-29), is found in Peter of Blois, *Conquestio*, 248-252: *Nunc autem, quod flens dico, inimici crucis Christi, qui debuerant esse filii, per avariciam suam pretextu cuiusdam collectae dampnabilis prima voti sui fidem irritam faciunt, luxuriantes in cruce domini*. For the betrayal of the crusading vow on the part of the crusading lords see also Henry of Marcy, *De peregrinante civitate Dei* (PL 204), col. 360: *Jam enim servos crucis, qui se cruci dedicaverant, qui se non nisi Christo militaturos devoverant, ad vomitum rediisse videmus, et contra tam recens votum arma corripuisse dolemus. Jam crux adversus crucem dimicat, crucifixus crucifixum impugnat*.
- 20-24 For the evocation of the Last Judgment see the various occurrences in crusade songs: RS 401, 24-28, Huon de Saint-Quentin RS 1576, 1-11; Maistre Rainaut RS 886, 13-18 and 51-60; RS 1020a = 1022, 15-24; Thibaut de Champagne RS 6, 22-28; RS 1887, 26-27; RS 1548a, 9-12; RS 1967, 14-20; Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.6, 51-60 and BdT 242.41, 52-60; Falquet de Romans BdT 156.12, especially vv. 17-38; Pons de Capdoill BdT 375.2, 54; Peire Vidal BdT 364.43, 41-50. On God's wrath and pity on the Day of Judgment see also Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.41, 80-84: *e las penas e-ls turmens / que venran / ira Dieus amezuran, / si-l platz, venian e parcen, / merce mesclat d'espaven*. For *cuevre* in v. 24 see the sense "zurückdrängen" in TL 2, 1004, 5-7, attested for example in Jean Renart, *Ombre* (ed. Bédier) 672-673: *La joie del retor li cuevre / le penssé dont il est en doute*.
- 28 The list of the three categories echoes official documents of the time. See for example *Gesta regis Enrici secundi*, II, p. 32: *Dispositum est etiam quod omnes clerici, milites et servientes qui hoc iter arripient, decimas terrarum suarum et hominum suorum habeant, et pro se nihil dabunt. Burgenses vero et rustici, qui sine licentia crucem acceperint, nihilominus decimas dabunt*. In reality *milites* and *servientes* could both be included under the term *serjans*: see Schöber 1976 p. 141 n. 1.
- 30-32 Although *soffrans* is usually not constructed with the dative, the reading has been retained since the use of *a* in the sense of *vers* is typical of Conon de Béthune (see for example RS 1325, 9 and RS 1574, 16). For the possible consequences of breaking one's crusading vow see Peter of Blois, *Conquestio*, 259-262: *vereor ne signum crucis plerisque in subversionem anime cedat, quia illud minus digne fortassis ad questum vel ad apparentiam, vel ad gratificationem hominis usurparunt* and 399-420.

- 30-34 I restore the reading of ms. U (isolated here), abandoning the conjecture *li quens* proposed by Bédier and accepted with some hesitation by Wallensköld 1921, p. 25 n. 1, since the context seems clearly to refer to God (see in particular the expression *qui or li son faillit* of v. 34). There remains the need to explain the peculiarity of a stanza beginning with a relative pronoun. Schöber 1976, pp. 128-130 interprets the passage as an inter-stanzaic enjambement of which he offers some examples (Blondel de Nesle RS 120 st. I-II; Colin Muset RS 1298 st. IV-*envoi*; Gace Brulé RS 1536 *envois*; Thibaut de Champagne RS 106 st. II-III; RS 1083 st. I-II), but perhaps it is unnecessary to resort to this kind of daring syntax. In this context two examples seem particularly significant in that, while they retain a logical link to the preceding stanza, they can be interpreted as syntactically autonomous (Guiot de Dijon RS 1246, 25-26: *Que sa bone amor, que ne l'ai, / desservi la voudroie avoir!*, where Lannutti interprets the *que* as a conjunction expressing a wish; see also RS 1083, 13-16: *Si oil cleir / m'ont navreit / d'ameir, // si ke je m'anjoie*). Moreover the syntactic link between vv. 32-33 confirms U's stanza order (Jeanroy 1909, p. 445).
- 34 For the barons' wavering see Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.41, 17-24 and Bertran de Born BdT 80.4, 15-21, who aims explicitly at Richard the Lionheart and Philip Augustus.
- 35 The reading of the isolated manuscript is *vosist*, but U is most probably corrupt here since this verb would require an infinitive; I accept Wallensköld's conjecture *eüst* (Bédier had proposed *veïsse*).
- 38 See Robert of Blois, *Enseignement des princes*, 339-340: *Tuit les oiseaul soient honi, / qui suelent conchier lor ni*. There may also be an echo of this polemic in Thibaut de Champagne RS 273, 41-43. For other examples of criticisms of the barons see Thibaut de Champagne RS 273, 23-24; RS 1133, 3 (but the whole song is a protest against the conduct of the barons, even if the context is different) and especially Thibaut de Champagne RS 1152, 5-6 with lexical analogies.
- 43 The expression is proverbial: see Morawski and Schulze-Busacker n° 631 and 1861 and the examples cited.
- 45-46 In v. 45 it is undoubtedly preferable to adopt MT's reading *servir* (as does Bédier) rather than the isolated reading of U (as does Wallensköld). Given the impossibility of finding a better solution to this case of diffraction, MT's reading may appear banal, but it gives a much clearer sense and fits better with the proverbial context. See Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles* (ed. König), II Ch 9 (D. 60), 3457-3461: *En amer Dieu, c'est sanz doutance, / n'a aventure ne cheance. / Qui mielz l'aimme, qui mielz le sert / mielz est de lui plus desert. / Cielz qui mielz l'aimme milleur l'a* (which among other things supports the reading of U+KNOX in v. 46). See also Giraut de Borneil BdT 242.41, 85-89, especially 88-89: *e ren als larcx largamen / com larcx senher larc prezen*.
- 49 I have preferred U's reading *la*, which could refer to vv. 37-38, where Conon does in fact describe «*la sanblance*» of the barons, compared with birds which soil their own nests. In this challenge aimed at the barons there are some analogies with Bertran de Born BdT 80.17, 15-21 (29-35 Paden).
- 50 Both testimonies contain a line with epic caesura, which it is preferable to preserve (in U's version) rather than adopt a conjecture such as Wallensköld's which in any case resorts to another unusual (median) caesura.
- 54-56 Petersen Dyggve 1951, p. 60 proposes the following conjectural reconstruction of v. 54: *C'onques n'aüst Amours plus fin ami*; this hypothesis relies on the fact that the feminine pronoun *li* of v. 55 refers not to a lady, of whom there is no trace in the song, but rather to Love.

Text

Luca Barbieri, 2016.

Mss.

(7). K p. 398a (anonymous), M 47b (*sire Quenes*), N 183b (anon.), O 18b (anon.), T 100v (*me sire Quenes*), U 96r (anon.), X 255d (anon.).

Versification and music


7a 10b 7a 10b 10c' 10b 10b 10c' (MW 1119,2 = Frank 351); 6 *coblas ternas* "linked", with two 4-line *envois* (c'bbc'), the second incomplete and possibly spurious; rhyme a: -ier , -iés ; rhyme b: -ans , -i ; rhyme c: -ance ; the same stanzaic structure is found in the song RS 985 by the Châtelain de Coucy, and the fixed c rhyme is found in the other crusade song by the Châtelain, RS 679. There is an identical rhyme in vv. 44 and 50e (*di* , but the whole expression *ke je [ai] di* is identical), an equivocal rhyme in vv. 24-40 (*poissance*), 35-41 (*empiriés*) and 37-49e (*samblance*); paronymous rhymes are found in vv. 34- 55 (*failli-li*), 36-42 (*vi-servi*) and 38-39 (*ni-honi*); many rhyme-words in -i are monosyllables which only change the initial consonant, producing an elementary *annominatio per immutationem* (v. 36 *vi* , v. 38 *ni* , vv. 44 and 50 *di* , v. 55 *li*); etymological figure in vv. 4 and 56 (*vaillans-vaillance*); strong assonance and consonance in the rhyme-words of vv. 47 and 51 (*ausi-Oissi* , but see also *ensi* in v. 18); the caesuras are generally regular: there is a lyric caesura in v. 51, a feminine caesura with elision in vv. 2 and 32 and an epic caesura in v. 50; melody in all mss. bar U, with three variants MT, O, KNX; melodic structure ABAB CDEF (T 743).

Previous editions

Paris 1833, 95; Buchon 1840, 420; Leroux de Lincy 1841-1842, *I*, 30; Dinaux 1837-1863, *III* , 389; Brakelmann 1870, 78; Scheler 1876, *I* , 12; Wallensköld 1891, 228; Bédier-Aubry 1909, 39; Wallensköld 1921, 8; Beck 1937, 22; Brittain 1937, 134; Pauphilet 1952, 870; Gennrich 1958, 3; Toja 1966, 207; Picot 1975, II, 20; Schöber 1976, 127; van der Werf 1977-1979, I, 295; Collins 1982, 33; Dijkstra 1995a, 190.

Analysis of the manuscript tradition

Wallensköld 1891 and Bédier 1909 draw up a two-branch stemma: the first branch comprises MT only, the second U and O+KNX. According to Bédier there are no elements in the tradition of this song to unite U with the other mss. of the second branch and such a grouping is only made possible through the analysis of Conon's other songs (see Wallensköld 1891, pp. 40-42); but the examples adduced are of little significance and U could constitute a third independent branch. U is in any case the only ms. to preserve all the stanzas plus the two *envois* ; MT lack stanza V, while OKNX lack stanza III. The second *envoi* is in U only, whereas the first is also attested in O. The edition of Wallensköld 1921 is presented here, even though his reconstruction of the text and his graphies are highly eclectic. The structure and order of stanzas are those of U, partly confirmed by MT; the fact that this structure is taken up by the Châtelain de Coucy in song RS 985 provides a further element of confirmation. As far as the choice of readings is concerned, Wallensköld does not rely on the highly individual text of U, and corrects it at various points even where this is the only ms. (vv. 33-36); he mainly follows MT, where this is possible, rejecting their readings whenever these are isolated against a united alternative in other mss. (it should be noted that MT's readings in this text do not show their usual reliability and are often trivial). In the absence of MT, Wallensköld follows KNOX (vv. 37-40) or freely mixes readings from O and U (vv.



49-52). The following modifications have been made to Wallensköld's text: in v. 33 I abandon Bédier's conjecture and return to the text of the single ms. *li ques* ; in the case of diffraction in v. 45 I adopt MT's reading; in v. 49 I prefer U's *la* to *ma* ; in v. 50 I restore the reading of the mss. which show an epic caesura, following U's text.

Historical context and dating

Line 17 mentions the establishment of the so-called 'Saladin tithe', the tax imposed to finance the Third Crusade (end of March 1188); in addition song RS 1314 is echoed by Huon d'Oisy in RS 1030 (see the commentary to that text) and its composition must therefore precede Huon's death, documented as falling on 20 August 1189. This limit seems also confirmed by the document in which Philip Augustus cancels the collection of the tithe (April-October 1189) and by the attack on the conduct of the men of power (vv. 17-19) which seems to allude to the situation preceding the death of Henry II of England (6 July 1189; see Schöber 1976, pp. 130-131). The song must therefore have been composed between the summer of 1188 and that of 1189, probably soon after RS 1125. It seems likely that Bertran de Born's *sirventes* BdT 80.17 was composed shortly after Canon de Béthune's crusade songs. In this case the date proposed by Gouiran for BdT 80.17 (February-November 1188, see Gouiran 1987, p. 473) would allow us to date the composition of RS 1314 to the second half of 1188. The date proposed by Paden 1986 for BdT 80.17 (shortly before Richard's departure on crusade in the spring of 1191) would however leave a wider margin.