



## **Nuns ne poroit de mavaise raison**

**(RS 1887)**

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## Anonymous

I

Nuns ne poroit de mavaise raison  
bone chanson ne faire ne chanteir,  
por ceu n'i veul mattre m'antansion,  
4 car j'ai asseis atre chose a panseir;  
et non por cant la terre d'outre meir  
voi an si tres grant balance,  
c'an chantant voil preier lou roi de France  
8 ke ne croiet cowairt ne losangier  
de la honte nostre Signor vangier.

II

Ai, gentis rois, cant Deus vos fist creusier  
toute Egipte doutoit vostre renon;  
12 or perdés tout, cant vos volés laisier  
Jherusalem estre an chativeson;  
kar cant Deus fist de vos election  
et signor de sa vanjance,  
16 bien deusiez monstreir vostre pousance  
de revangier les mors et les chaitis,  
ke por vos sont et por S'amour occis.

III

Rois, vos savez ke Deus ait poc d'amis,  
20 nen onkerais n'an ot si boen mestier,  
car por vos est ces pueples mors et pris,  
ne nus for vos ne l'an puet bien aidier;  
ke povre sont li atre chivelier,  
24 se criement la demorance,  
et s'ans teil point lor feisiez faillance,  
saint et martir, apostre et inocent  
se plainderoient de vos a jugemant.

I

No-one could compose or sing a good song on a bad  
theme, so I do not wish to set my mind to this, since  
I have enough other things to think of;  
nevertheless, I see the Holy Land in such great  
danger that by singing I wish to beg the king of  
France not to pay heed to cowards or flatterers  
when it is a question of avenging Our Lord's  
shame.

II

Ah, noble king, when God made you take the cross,  
all Egypt feared your name. Now you risk losing  
everything if you are prepared to leave Jerusalem  
in captivity; once that God has chosen you to  
champion His vengeance, you should show your  
power to avenge the dead and the prisoners who  
were killed for you and for His love.

III

King, you know that God has few friends and that  
He never had greater need of them, for it is for  
your sake that His people have been killed and  
imprisoned, and no-one but you can truly help  
them, since the other knights are poor, and they  
fear a long stay, and if you were to abandon them  
at this point, saints and martyrs, apostles and  
innocents would complain of you on the Day of  
Judgment.

## IV

<sup>28</sup> Rois, vos aveis tresor d'or et d'argent  
 plus ke nus rois n'ot onkes, ce m'est viz,  
 si an doveis doneir plus largemant  
 et demoreir por gardeir cest pais;  
<sup>32</sup> car vos avez plus perdu ke conkis,  
 se seroit trop grant vitance  
 de retourner atout la mescheance:  
 mais demoreis, si fereis grant vigour  
<sup>36</sup> tant ke France ait recovree s'onour.

## V

Rois, s'an teil point vos meteis a retour,  
 France dirait, Chanpagne et toute gent  
 ke vostre los aveis mis an tristour  
<sup>40</sup> et ke gaingniet aveiz moins ke niant;  
 et des prisons, ke vivent a tormant,  
 deusiez avoir pesance:  
 bien deusiez querre lour delivrance;  
<sup>44</sup> †ke por vos sont et por S'amour occis,†  
 c'est grans pechiez ces i laxiés morir.

## IV

King, it seems to me you have more gold and silver  
 treasure than any king ever possessed, and so you  
 ought to spend more liberally and stay to defend  
 this land; since [up until now] you have lost more  
 than you won, it would be too humiliating to go  
 home at the peak of misfortune: stay on, and you  
 will perform great deeds, until France has  
 recovered her honour.

## V

King, if you went home at this point France,  
 Champagne and all people would say that you have  
 sadly lowered your reputation and that you have  
 gained less than nothing; and that you should have  
 cared about the prisoners who live in torment, and  
 sought their freedom; since they are in prison for  
 having served God and you, it is a great sin to let  
 them die there.

## Notes

This song, which is an excellent example of a literary text having a clear civil and political function, draws on many themes typical of crusading exhortation: the invitation to seek honour and glory and to avoid shame and blame, the awareness of the captivity of Jerusalem (vv. 12-13), the need for vengeance, the threat of damnation at the time of the Last Judgment (vv. 25-27). However, unlike in the normal songs of exhortation, these themes are evoked here not to urge a king to *leave* for the Holy Land, but to convince him to stay in it.

- 1 The expression *mavaise raison* should be understood as “unpopular theme” (see the sense “bad, displeasing” attributed to *mauvais* in TL 5, 1313, 25ff or “sad, unfortunate” in Godefroy 5, 129a), in conformity with Joinville’s chronicle according to which virtually all the barons advised the king to return home.
- 9 La formula *vengier la honte* is quite a common one in crusade songs and refers to any defeat of the crusaders in the East and more generally to the fact that the Holy Land is in Muslim hands; see for example Conon de Béthune RS 1125, 43-46; RS 1157, 13-14.
- 10-11 The author is probably referring to the very rapid occupation within a single day (6 June 1249) of Damietta, a city which had resisted for a whole year at the time of the fifth crusade (1219-1220). This had been brought about partly by the flight of the panicking enemy and the evacuation of the inhabitants (Joinville, §§ 163-165 and Gabrieli 1957, pp. 268-270).
- 13 On the imprisonment of Jerusalem (which recalls the Babylonian captivity of the Jewish people in the Bible) fallen into the hands of the infidels, see particularly RS 1729, 19-27.
- 14 The text attributes to the king the rôle of divine instrument (see also v. 10, perhaps an indication of the miraculous cure recounted in RS 1729, 32-36 and RS 1738a, 21-50), chosen to carry out His works, thus confirming the prestige and the reputation for Christian piety which the king enjoyed among his contemporaries. This is well attested in the documents and chronicles, and also reflected in the two songs written before this same seventh crusade (RS 1729, 37-41 and especially RS 1738a, 11-20).
- 17-18 This refers to the consequence of the defeat of Mansurah 5-7 April 1250, when the crusaders and the king, debilitated by hunger, thirst and sickness, were surrounded and captured by the Egyptians. The new Mameluk rulers frequently demonstrated their unwillingness to honour agreements concerning the freeing of prisoners, whose uncertain fate was one reason that incited Louis to remain in the Holy Land (*Cont. Roth.*, pp. 622-623; Joinville, § 370). In addition, the verb *ocire* can also mean “torment, torture, afflict, lacerate, harrass” (see TL 6, 976, 12-24).
- 21-22 These lines are similar to the passage in which Joinville reports the words said to him by his cousin the lord of Bourlémont before their departure on crusade (Joinville, § 421).
- 23-24 The realistic observation concerning the economic difficulties of the poorest crusaders who could not afford a long stay in the East is particularly typical of later crusades: compare RS 1133, 31-40 and my comment. For the eastern form *se* for *si* here, compare RS 1154, 56.
- 26-27 The threat of damnation at the Last Judgment for anyone not supporting the expedition to the Holy Land is a classic theme of hortatory crusading songs. See RS 401, 24-28, Huon de Saint-Quentin RS 1576, 1-11; Richart de Fournival RS 1022, 17-24; Maistre Renaut RS 886, 13-18 and 51-60. See also my comments on Thibaut de Champagne RS 6, 22-28.
- 26 The Innocents were the infants slain by king Herod who saw his power threatened by the prophecy of the birth of Jesus (Mt 2, 16); these are also evoked in Maistre Renaut RS 886, 77.

- 28-32 The invitation to Louis IX to spend more liberally to enable the knights to stay on in the Holy Land corresponds to a passage in Joinville's speech during the barons' council, which took place in the king's presence (Joinville, § 427).
- 35 The specificity of the situation allows the author to invert the typical use of crusading vocabulary. The verb *demorer* is usually employed negatively to blame those who do not intend to take part in expeditions (see Conon de Béthune RS 1125, 24; Thibaut de Champagne RS 6, 8, 18 and 29; RS 1729, 49).
- 36 The reference to the honour of France and to a sort of "national" dimension of the crusade is a typical element of the later crusades which is introduced for the first time in the songs written during the Barons' crusade: Philippe de Nanteuil RS 164, 7, 11, 24 and RS 1133, 28 and 41.
- 44 Ms. U's reading is undoubtedly corrupt, not only because it is identical to v. 18, but also because it introduced an infraction of the rhyme-scheme. Gaston Paris proposed a conjectural emendation of the second hemistich replacing *e por s'amour occis* with *e por Jesu martir*, which was accepted by Bédier, Guida and, partially, Hardy (*por s'amour martir*). This proposal does not seem defensible since it is supported by no objective element and since a formula of this type is found nowhere else in crusade songs; in particular, recourse to the noun *martir* in a context discussing the need to liberate prisoners who are still alive seems quite unsatisfactory. There is little option but to retain U's corrupt reading in the text. A passage of Joinville's chronicle («et par sa demouree seront delivrez les povres prisonniers qui ont esté pris ou servise Dieu et ou sien, qui jamés n'en istront se li roys s'en va», § 427) would seem to suggest a possible conjectural reconstruction *cant il sont pris por Dieu et (por) vos servir*.
- 45 I interpret the form with the eastern graphy *ces* as a hypothetical conjunction *se*; I respect the manuscript's graphy, even if the final *s* is probably erroneous and analogous to other forms *ces* (demonstrative, possessive) present in the text. In v. 21 the graphy *ces* certainly represents the possessive *ses*.

## Text

Luca Barbieri, 2015.

## Mss.

(2). U 117r (anon.), V 116d (anon.).

## Versification and music

10ababb7c'10c'dd (MW 1079,23 = Frank 335); 5 *coblas redondas* ; repetition of *rois* at the beginning of stanzas (ii), iii, iv and v; rhyme a = *-on* , *-ier* , *-is* , *-ant/ent* , *-our* ; rhyme b = *-e(i)r* , *-on* , *-ier* , *-is* , *-ant/ent* ; rhyme c = *-ance* ; rhyme d = *-ier* , *-is* , *-ant/ent* , *-our* , *-ir* . The rhyme-scheme involves one constant rhyme (c) and three other rhymes which change from stanza to stanza according to a *retrogradatio* pattern (from stanza ii rhyme a takes up rhyme d and rhyme b takes up rhyme a of the preceding stanza; this technique also creates *coblas capfinidas* , since the final rhyme of each stanza is the same as the first of the following stanza); frequent leonine rhymes; derivative rhyme *vengier/vanjance* in vv. 9 and 15, *chativeson/chaitis* vv. 13 and 17; rich rhyme in vv. 28 and 38 ( *argent* and *gent* ); lyric caesura in vv. 8, 9, 11 (but vv. 8 and 11 could be decasyllables 6+4), epic caesura in v. 27 (but the unstressed *e* of the conditional *plainderoient* probably does not enter into the syllabic count, or else it may be a dialectal form introduced by the scribe, in which case we have a lyric caesura



or a decasyllable 6+4) and feminine caesura with elision in v. 36. Melody in V (T 417,4). According to Râkel 1977, p. 59 the song must originally have had the same tune as the Châtelain de Couci's song RS 700, from which the metrical shape and rhyme pattern derive, while V's tune must, as usual, be a later re-elaboration.

## Previous editions

Paris 1833, 100; Leroux de Lincy 1841, 118; Dinaux 1837-1863, III 401; Paris 1893, 545; Bédier-Aubry 1909, 257; Guida 1992, 142; Dijkstra 1995a, 215; Hardy 2009 ([www.lfa.uottawa.ca/activites/textes/ineke/Chansons/R1887ed.htm](http://www.lfa.uottawa.ca/activites/textes/ineke/Chansons/R1887ed.htm)).

## Analysis of the manuscript tradition


Only ms. U transmits the complete text of five stanzas, though interverts stanzas iii and v; V has a text reduced to only three stanzas, but in the correct order (i, ii, iii) respecting the metrical structure. V's text is very close to U's, with few and not particularly significant variants. The edition follows U's text, but re-establishes the correct order as in V.

## Historical context and dating

The seventh crusade, the first expedition to Egypt led by St Louis, had ended with a stinging defeat and on 6 or 7 April 1250 the king, together with all the French weakened by illness, had suffered the humiliation of imprisonment. Difficult negotiations and payment of an enormous ransom of 800,000 gold besants (400,000 *livres tournois*) were needed to bring about their release. Freed on 6 May and reaching Acre on 13 May, the king was reluctant to resign himself to a campaign deprived of results in the Holy Land and sought advice on how some could be achieved, thus provoking a debate which is documented in the contemporary sources (Joinville, §§ 419-437; *Continuation Rothelin*, pp. 618-623; Matthew Paris IV, 163-164 and 174-175). In the end the king took the decision to stay on, remaining for a good four years (May 1250 - April 1254) and this was to be the most fruitful phase of his campaign, with constant activity involving reinforcement, exhortation, diplomacy and pacification which would serve to glorify its image in the eyes of the Christian population despite the scarcity of actual results. The song RS 1887 belongs to the context of the debate provoked by the king, and its author exhorts him vehemently, and daringly, to stay.

A preliminary council of notables was summoned by the king on 12 (or 19) June to ask the French barons and those responsible for the Franks of Outremer and for the military orders about the advisability of staying on (Joinville, § 419). The real discussion took place on 19 (or 26) June, during which the assembled barons declared themselves in favour of returning to France; Joinville's position stood out among the few exceptions (Joinville, §§ 422-429). On 26 June (or 3 July) the king communicated his own decision to stay on (Joinville, §§ 435-437). The song must have been written after the first council and before the communication of his final decision, so 12 - 26 June 1250 (or 19 June - 3 July according to Grousset and Richard). Some elements of the text, such as the author's passionate emphasis or the presumption that the king was leaning towards not staying on, seem to point to the final week, after the barons' council had seen the emergence of a view favouring return to France, in other words 19 - 26 June (or 26 June - 3 July). The first lines of the song tend to support this hypothesis, particularly the reference to an "unpopular subject" (*mavaise raison*).

The song is anonymous in both mss. It is to the credit of Ineke Hardy that she resurrected the hypothesis that it should be attributed to Raoul de Soissons, formerly signalled by Foulet 1953. Such an attribution is in fact found in the *Généalogie de Godefroy de Bouillon* of Pierre Desrey de Troyes, who



was also responsible for the first printed edition of the text (1500). One element in favour of attributing the song to Raoul, who is confirmed as having stayed on in Acre by the testimony of Joinville (§ 470), is the metrical structure of the song which involved a rarely-attested pattern of rhymes particularly favoured by Raoul, who uses them in six other compositions. But the style and content of these lines do not in fact correspond to what we know of Raoul de Soissons' poetic production, which is almost exclusively amorous and traditional, and where crusading is evoked only sporadically and incidentally; furthermore the mention of Champagne in v. 38 suggests that the author may have come from that region.

Another possibility might be to attribute the song to Jean de Joinville, the author of the *Vie de saint Louis*, a suggestion of Paris 1893 which was taken up, though with less conviction, by Bédier-Aubry 1909, p. 262, Râkel 1977, p. 59 and Hardy 1995a, p. 137. The seneschal of Champagne attributes views to himself similar to those expressed in the song and there is a striking correspondence between the formulae and arguments proposed by the song's author and certain passages of the *Vie de saint Louis* (see the notes to vv. 21-22 and 28-32). This attribution would among other things explain the mention of Champagne. However, Joinville is not known to have composed any other verse compositions and there is no record of any poetic activity on his part; moreover the lack of any mention of the song in the chronicle would be very surprising, given that it tends to lay such emphasis on Joinville's rôle in the events described.

Despite the possibility of two serious and plausible candidates for the authorship of our text, it seems preferable to record it as anonymous. Anonymity may have been necessary as a result of the delicate situation involved.