

**TWO-FACED ELOQUENCE.**  
**A BRIEF NOTE TOWARDS RE-EVALUATING**  
**THE TROUBADOUR CRUSADE CORPUS, 1187-1200**

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For the inhabitants of the very late twelfth century “Plantagenet space” (for the purposes of this brief text let us say around 1187-1200, from the fall of Jerusalem until the last years of Richard I’s reign, which ended with his unexpected death in 1199), crusading propaganda was part of the immediate cultural climate. Beyond the ecclesiastical discourse on the subject, more unusual questions might reach one’s ears; certainly the ears more than the eyes, through the sound of music. Among them, one key question, or at least the most shocking: does it make any sense at all to go on crusade? And related to this one, several others could likewise be voiced. Is it better to go to the defence of Outremer, or one will do better to stay in the arms of a lover? More extravagantly: being too fat is an advantage or a disadvantage in the fight against the infidel? Is the person who follows the call of God an unmitigated fool? Are eating and drinking abundantly better or worse than fighting for Christ? All of these questions are voiced by several of the troubadours writing in Occitan at the heyday of crusade recruitment; in my opinion, no thorough consideration of the evolution of crusading ideology is possible without taking this into account.

The historical place and function of the troubadour “crusade songs” is still taken, to a large extent, as a given: a material that is ritually quoted, occasionally commented in one or another aspect of its iterations, but also one that is left under-analysed as an evolving phenomenon. As of today (late 2013), there is still no complete, exhaustive edition of the whole lyric and musical *corpus* in Occitan on the crusades, nor even a complete agreement on exactly what materials make up this corpus. In 1988, Cathrynke Dijkstra proposed that the main definition of crusade songs should be not literary at all, but contextual: a crusade song is a text “which owes its existence to the presence of the *extra-textual* context of the crusades, and which requires this context for its proper interpretation” (Dijkstra, 1988, p. 174, emphasis mine). This definition has been revised and widened in

these last years thanks to the work of Linda Paterson (along with her research project at the University of Warwick), especially in 2005 and 2011. For Paterson, what matters is not so much genre definition but referentiality: in her work, it is the whole of the troubadour material related to the crusades that is analysed, beyond and across genre denominations centring on the self-defined *canso de crotzada* (even though these genre variants —*tenso*, *sirventes*, etc.— are considered in her specific discussion on the texts). In this way, what emerges is not so much a corpus of “crusade songs” but an Occitan perspective on the Holy Land that can be traced along a wide network of poems, 28 of them concerning Richard I’s crusade (our immediate thematic concern) and a sum total of 131 for the whole development of the movement, through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In my own view, it is within that very inclusive perspective that the various transformations of the dominant discourse, and especially the most apparently outlandish, can be best analysed.

It thus becomes visible that the *translatio* from the ecclesiastical sphere to the secularised perspective of the troubadour environment opens the ideological construct to inversion, to gaming and finally to the grotesque. It cannot be coincidental that this should begin to occur between the third and the fourth crusades, as a growing sense of failure and skepticism on the whole enterprise began to take shape. But I would also submit that a stronger cause is the shift from the doctrinal sphere to a strongly secularised space, with its own poetic rules. We must not forget that, after all, the whole of the troubadour corpus “coruscates with contrary meanings, or baffles by allowing rival meanings simultaneously” (Kay, 1990, p. 18, in a passage in which she comments on the pioneering work of Simon Gaunt on these aspects, Gaunt, 1989); it is only to be expected that such a sense of contrariness should threaten the supposedly dignified areas of religious and military language. Within this field, crusading discourse would imply seriousness and solemnity, but only to a certain extent; at one point or another, it would have to incorporate the playfulness, humour and sarcasm that are essential parts of troubadour *eloquentia*. In consequence, there are historical reasons for this development, but mostly poetic reasons, for which the label of “crusade songs” can certainly not account.

The space limitations in the present volume will only allow me to give a few examples. Bertran de Born, for instance, was immediately ready to pour ridicule on both Richard of England and Philip Augustus as they hesitated on leaving for the crusade between 1190 and 91. In his three songs on this historical impasse, he wishes them to be bound in chains by Saladin, insists repeatedly on their fear of one another. But in a sudden and surprising turn he quickly admits that he, the poet, will only leave if his lady wants him to go:

Quan seras lai, no t'ennoia!  
 Tu li diras que s'ar no·ill vaill al bran  
 E·il valrai tost, si·ll rei no·m van bausan.  
 Mas ben es vers qu'a tal domna·m coman  
 Se·l passatge no ill platz, non crei que·i an  
 (ed. Paden, Stankovich, Stablein, 1986, p. 421).

Tell him (Conrad of Montferrat) that if I am no help fighting, I will be there soon, if the kings do not prevent me! But it is true that I am pledged to such a lady that, if the trip does not please her, I do not think I will go (*Translation mine*).

The critical intention, the anger for the loss of worth or *pretz*, is turned ironically on the speaker himself, who seems to relativise for a moment, in his own *persona*, the value of the whole enterprise. This sense of irony seems to go hand in hand (not by coincidence) with the complete absence of any deep religious intention in the crusade poems by this author (we must remember, incidentally, that the historical Bertran de Born had neither the will nor the economic capacity to join the expedition). In a *tensó* by Peirol, *Quant Amors trobet partit*, written precisely around the same dates as Bertran's aforementioned songs, the voice of Love advises the poet not to leave for the Holy Land: why go, after all, if the kings are not going? Far better to remain; far better to dedicate oneself to music and to love:

Peirols, turc ni arabit  
 Ges per vostr'envazimen  
 No laissaran Tor Davit.  
 Bon cosselh vos don e gen:  
 Amatz e chantatz soven.  
 Iretz vos, e·l rey no·i van ?  
 Veiatz las guerras que fan;  
 Et esguardatz dels baros  
 Cossi trobon ochaizos  
 (ed. Riquer, 1975, p. 1122).

Peirol, neither the turks nor the arabs are going to leave the tower of David because of your invasion. I will give you a good and adequate advice: love and sing quite frequently. Will you go there, while the kings do not go? See the wars they do, and observe the noble-men as they keep finding excuses (*Translation mine*).

The debate is left unresolved at the end of the *tensó*; if the poet leaves, he will certainly do it very unwillingly. The critical stance is voiced not only against procrastinating kings, but against the nobility, the *baros* (the representatives of

the decadent feudal system which is so often attacked also by Bertran de Born). In itself this is not strange; what is remarkable is the ambiguity of the *tensó* and how that ambiguity projects itself over the very obligation of crusading. We are already very far away from the recruiting intention of Marcabré, some four decades before.

The motivations and the intention of the crusaders themselves can now, on the threshold of the third crusade, be seen as questionable and venal, even within texts that outspokenly defend the interventions in Outremer. Giraut de Bornelh can move from religious exaltation to biting sarcasm within the same stanza, indeed within the same sentence:

Dieus aienz  
Ogan nostre caudal  
E·l nos enanz! [...]  
Ni non fai a doptar  
Lo comenzars,  
Que Gascons e Navars,  
Si lor aond'avars,  
Aduira·l bos espers  
E Dieu ira denan  
Los nostres chapdelan!  
(ed. Sharman, 1989, pp. 295-96)

May our victory please God and may he bring it closer! [...] Nor is the setting out to be feared, for fine hope will bring the Gascons and men of Navarre, as long as there is good money in it for them, and God will go out in front, protecting our men!

The assertion here is, through the quick and very intentional demarcation of two groups within the crusaders (the gascons and the navarrese) that for these the *bos espers* is nothing else but looting; and yet the stanza finishes in a spirit of celebration, with God leading the Christian warriors, that would have satisfied St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In the wink of an eye, the poem shifts from exaltation to a sarcastic side-comment. As for the communal crusading “we” that is the ostensive subject of the poem, it is contaminated, even for a moment, by the implication of corruption. Giraut is a master when it comes to damning entire collectives in a second, here and in his other crusade texts, with a devious and elusive strategy that reaches far beyond what his contemporary fame as a moralist, as the *poeta rectitudinis*, would have suggested.

As soon as the implications of mundane desire make themselves present, absurdity and the grotesque are sure to follow; and this is where the carnivalesque appears, not only in the voices of the poets, but in the images that they invoke.

Gaucelm Faidit, who is perhaps one of the most rigorous apologists of the holy war in the wake of 1187, author of major recruitment songs, can be turned into the ridiculous image of a boastful has-been, after his return from the crusade. In a *tensó* with Elias d'Ussel, the latter presents Gaucelm through the figure of *sarcasmos* as a ridiculous warrior, whose excess of weight certainly did not help him when fighting in Outremer. Gaucelm rises to the challenge and accepts the point; for him, it is better to be fat than to be poor:

(Elias): Manens fora-l francs pelegris,  
 Mas son aver mes al Sancto,  
 Molt lai estet a grant honor.  
 Per so, si ac dan Saladis.  
 E si no fos lo granz ventres que-ill pen,  
 Car compraron li Turc son hardimen!

(Gaucelm): Non [...] qar parlet de graissa, fez no-sen:  
 Q'amdui em gros, mas el o es, cho-m par,  
 De clara fam, et eu per pro manjar  
 (ed. Mouzat, 1965, p. 479)

(Elias): The good pilgrim would be rich, had he not offered his goods to the Sepulchre; this has brought great honour, and great harm upon Saladin. If not because of the great belly that hangs from him, the turks would have paid his bravery dearly!

(Gaucelm): When (Elias) spoke of fatness, he did it absurdly, for both of us are fat, but in his case this is because hunger, and in mine because of eating too much (*Translation mine*).

It is also in a comic *tensó* that a wider skepticism on the very concept of the Crusade was voiced clearly by another poet, the monk of Montaudon, following the imprisonment of Richard of England at the hands of the emperor Henry VI between 1193-94. This occurs in an imagined conversation between the Monk and God himself, a God whose very basic traits seem translated to a secularised space, a God who openly recommends laughter, enjoyment and fine music over prayer and enclosure, and who enjoins the monk to go and visit Richard, to benefit from his *largesa* or generosity, in his return from the Holy Land. And the monk answers back in a tone of disdain, placing the blame back on the Creator. This is a major text not in spite of its humorous tone, but because of it, the jocular irreverence of the poem justifying its final outburst, which here seems to point towards a deeper, more extended sense of failure and frustration:

(Dieus): Monge, be mal o fezis  
 Quart tost non aniest coitos

Al rey cuy es Olairos,  
Que tant era tos amis [...].

(*Monge*): Senher... Mas la naus dels sarrazis  
No·us membra ges cossi-s banha?  
Quar, si dins Acre-s culhis,  
Pro i agr'enquer turcx felos.  
Folhs es qui·us sec en mesclanha.

(ed. Routledge, 1977, p. 106).

(*God*): Monk, you acted wrongly when you did not go quickly to see the king who owns Oleron, and who was such a friend to you [...].

(*Monk*): Lord... Don't you remember how the ship of the Saracens sails on? For if that ship landed in Acre, many evil turks would remain. He is a fool who follows you into battle!

These examples could (and hopefully, in the near future, will) be complemented with several others across the whole *corpus* of troubadour songs from this specific juncture. The most relevant aspect, however, is the absence of a firm and stable core of ideological critique; fragmentation, is in fact, the key aspect here. The gaming on crusading discourse, or its relativisation, is not (at least between 1187 and 1200) systematic, and precisely because it is not, it is highly significant. Historically, it coincides with a first crisis of the ideology of Holy War, and to a certain extent expresses this crisis; but it coexists easily with the reassertion of this discourse in other texts by these same authors, not at other moments of time, but within the same years of production. Because of its *translatio* into the troubadour space and of the demands of the latter, the crusading discourse could generate distorted and parodic versions of itself that could exist side by side with its serious doctrinal formulation, incorporating the serious and the ironic within itself, in a Janus-like way, just as the poetic *persona* of Gaucelm Faidit could turn in no time from a committed crusader to a jester.

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