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SAGGI E MEMORIE

Giraut de Borneil's
Sobre-Totz and *Be m'era bels chantars*
(BdT 242,20-21)

The *razo* for BdT 242,73, *Si per mon Sobre-Totz no fos*, transmitted by N2 and Sg, identifies *Sobre-Totz* as Raimon Bernart de Rovinha, a Gascon and a friend of Giraut's close enough for the two to call each other by this most complimentary of reciprocal *senhals*; it fits very well with Giraut's later reputation as *maestre dels trobadors* and suggests that the other man was similarly distinguished¹. Although the identification was accepted by Kolsen, it has enjoyed little currency among later scholars and was rapidly dismissed by Giraut's most recent editor, Ruth Sharman². While the poet uses the *senhal* some nineteen times in his surviving corpus, Sharman saw nothing in Giraut's work to substantiate the identification and she suggested that *Sobre-Totz* may equally well have been a nickname for another of the important figures Giraut frequented, such as Count Aimar V of Limoges or King Alfonso II of Aragon³. This study aims to situate the *razo*'s claim in the context of recent work which underlines Raimon Bernart's polit-

¹ See J. BOUTIÈRE – A.H. SCHUTZ, *Biographies des troubadours: textes provençaux des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, second edition by J. BOUTIÈRE and I.-M. CLUZEL, Paris 1973, pp. 53 (*razo*) and 39 (*vida*). On reciprocal *senhals*, see S. STROŃSKI, *Notes de littérature provençale. V. Les pseudonymes réciproques*, in «Annales du Midi», 25 (1913), pp. 288-297; E. VALLET, *Il "senhal" nella lirica trobadorica (con alcune note su "Bel / Bon Esper" in Gaucelm Faidit)*, 2a parte, in «Rivista di Studi Testuali», VI-VII (2004-2005), pp. 281-325, pp. 291-292. I should like to thank Christopher Harper-Bill for his assistance with aspects of this article.

² A. KOLSEN, *Sämtliche Lieder des Trobadors Giraut de Bornelh*, 2 vols, Halle 1910-1935, II, *Glossary*, though with the support of a dubious conjectural emendation to BdT 242,32, 51, where neither ms reads *rovinhas*, as Sharman points out (see R.V. SHARMAN, *The "cansos" and "sirventes" of the troubadour Giraut de Borneil: a critical edition*, Cambridge 1989, p. 7). Quotations are from Sharman's edition, unless otherwise stated.

³ Or the husband of the lady Giraut refers to as *Bel Senhor* or *Mon Senhor*, see SHARMAN, *The "cansos" and "sirventes"* cit., pp. 7-8. Cf. B. PANVINI, *Girardo di Bornelh, trovatore del sec. XII*, Catania 1949, p. 40, and SHARMAN, *The "cansos" and "sirventes"* cit., p. 25 on the mistaken attribution of BdT 242,7 *Al plus leu* to Giraut.

ical importance in Angevin Gascony, and to sketch a narrative of some of the events in which Raimon Bernart was caught up and which may help to shed light on one of Giraut's more startling and puzzling references to towns in northern France (BdT 242,20/21; ll. 85-86).

All that troubadour scholarship has had to say about Raimon Bernart derives apparently from the *Histoire Générale du Languedoc* where Chabaneau notes that this is «sans doute» the man who, along with his son Centulle, in 1197 granted an Abbot William exemption from the payment of *péage*⁴. Boutière and Schutz add that Rovinha is Rouvenac, «canton de Quillan, arr. Limoux»⁵. Recent historical work points, however, to the probability that it is with the Agenais, rather than with the Aude, that Raimon Bernart should be associated. In her study of heresy and politics in the Agenais, Claire Taylor identifies Raimon Bernart de Ravignan, or Rovinha, as lord of Tonneins-Dessus and Auterive and a close relative of Hugh de Ravignan, lord of Casse-neuil, and his brother Arnaut, bishop of Agen (1206-1228)⁶.

As Nicholas Vincent and Frédéric Boutoulle have lately shown⁷, the city of Agen and the Agenais were places of far greater significance for Henry II and his successors than scholarly consensus had hitherto suspected. Its crucial importance for them may initially be seen in the context of their conflict with the counts of Toulouse⁸, but it was not limited to that: as a site of ducal authority, Agen held at least as

⁴ See C. DE VIC – J.J. VAISSETTE, *Histoire générale du Languedoc*, Toulouse 1872-1904, 16 vols, facsimile reprint Osnabrück 1973 (henceforth *HGL*), X, 233, n. 3; the document is summarised in *HGL*, VIII, 1849: this is most probably the abbot of Grandselve, see C. TAYLOR, *Heresy in Medieval France. Dualism in Aquitaine and the Agenais, 1000-1249*, Woodbridge 2005, p. 166 and n. 57.

⁵ BOUTIÈRE – SCHUTZ, *Biographies* cit., p. 54; see also SHARMAN, *The “cansos” and “sirventes”* cit., p. 7.

⁶ TAYLOR, *Heresy* cit., pp. 165-166; see also N. VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais (1150-1250)*, in *Les Seigneuries dans l'espace Plantagenêt (c. 1150-c. 1250)*, ed. M. Aurell – F. Boutoulle, Bordeaux 2009, pp. 417-456, p. 440.

⁷ VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 437; F. BOUTOULLE, *La Gascogne sous les premiers Plantagenêts (1154-1199)*, in *Plantagenêts et Capétiens. Confrontations et héritages*, ed. M. Aurell – N.-Y. Tonnerre, Turnhout 2006, pp. 285-317.

⁸ On which see R. BENJAMIN, *A Forty Years War: Toulouse and the Plantagenêts, 1156-96*, in «Historical Research», 61 (1988), pp. 270-285; J. MARTINDALE, «An Unfinished Business»: *Angevin Politics and the Siege of Toulouse, 1159*, in «Anglo-Norman Studies», 23 (2001), pp. 115-154.

much interest for the Plantagenets as Bordeaux or even Poitiers⁹. The evidence these historians have examined points to Agen being a strategic centre and a key source of revenue where, by the 1180s, Richard had instituted an effective local administration¹⁰. His seigneurial rights there included *péages* on the Garonne, control over the trade and transport of salt and grain, and over payments of grain from mills at Agen, the latter being among the privileges Richard ceded to Bishop Bertran of Agen¹¹.

These grants by Count Richard to the bishop were witnessed by Raimon Bernart de Rovinha. This man also appears as a witness, together with Stephen de Caumont and Philip de Colombes, in an act of Count Richard made at Agen in favour of the abbey of Candeil¹². Stephen de Caumont, Philip de Colombes, Guilhem Raimon de Pins and Raimon Bernart were among the witnesses to the treaty Richard made with King Alfonso II of Aragon at Najac-en-Rouergue in April 1186, and in various combinations these four men are to be found in several of Richard's other documents from Gascony¹³.

While Raimon Bernart de Rovinha does not seem to have been with King Richard at the momentous meeting at La Réole in February 1190 where details of Richard's marriage to Berengaria of Navarre and the future of Gascony were apparently decided¹⁴, «this Plantagen-

⁹ See VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., pp. 427, 437, 442; BOUTOULLE, *La Gascogne* cit., pp. 313-314.

¹⁰ VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 431.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 444-446, nos 2 and 3 (1181 x 1189 near Agen); see also no. 4 (1181-1198 at Agen).

¹² *HGL*, VIII, 388: *Racinto* [sic] *Bernart de Roviniano*, given as *Ramon Bernard de Rouinnera* in N. VINCENT – J. EVERARD – J.C. HOLT, *The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine and of Richard duke of Aquitaine*, Oxford forthcoming. I am very grateful to Nicholas Vincent for allowing me access to his work in advance of publication.

¹³ The act is dated 14 April 1185 but given Duke Richard's circumstances this is much more likely to be 1186, see the arguments in BENJAMIN, *A Forty Years War* cit., p. 279; cf. VINCENT *et al.*, *The Letters* cit.; on the lords, see VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 439.

¹⁴ L. LONDON, *The Itinerary of King Richard I*, London 1935, p. 25; J. GILLINGHAM, *Richard I and Berengaria of Navarre*, in «Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research», 53 (1980), pp. 157-173, repr. in J. GILLINGHAM, *Richard Cœur de Lion. Kingship, Chivalry and War in the Twelfth Century*, London 1994, pp. 119-139, to which I refer here, pp. 124-125; BOUTOULLE, *La Gascogne* cit., p. 307 and map, p. 317.

et servant»¹⁵ was seneschal of Gascony at the time of Richard's sudden death in early April 1199 and he was still filling that role at the start of July when Eleanor visited Bordeaux¹⁶. By 25 July, however, Raimon Bernart had travelled a long way from home: he was in attendance on King John at Verneuil in Normandy when the new king rewarded the services of Viscount Arnaut Raimon of Tartas with privileges attaching to the bridge of Saint Pantaléon¹⁷. The new king and duke of Aquitaine was clearly then dealing with strategic business concerning the fidelity of key players in his southern lands, for the Charter Rolls also record on the same day his confirmation of his mother Eleanor's grant of privileges to the town of Oléron¹⁸.

By January 1200, these lands were in turmoil. Dispatching envoys *ad pacificandam Vasconie*, John then sent them and other significant Gascon lords, including Raimon Bernart de Ravignan, notice of his assurance that he would not come to any peace agreement with Gaston of Béarn which excluded or sidelined Gaston's enemy and John's ally, Viscount Arnaut Raimon of Tartas¹⁹. Royal letters show that, during the turbulent period 1202-1203, Raimon Bernart continued to play an important role, this time in diplomatic negotiations between the count of Toulouse and King John. It was he who had transmitted Count Raimon VI's grievances to the king, but in his letters to the bishopric and city of Agen John also notes that the count had then allied him-

¹⁵ BENJAMIN, *A Forty Years War* cit., p. 284, n. 81.

¹⁶ BOUTOULLE, *La Gascogne* cit., pp. 311-312 gives Raimon Bernart as seneschal between 31 March 1199 and 1 July 1199, the earlier date based on the dating clause to an agreement of Saint Seurin (ed. J.A. BRUTAILS, *Cartulaire de l'église collégiale Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux*, Bordeaux 1897, pp. 127-128: *R. B. de Rozinan senescalco Vasconie*), the latter on a document by Eleanor in favour of La Sauve-Majeure, see BOUTOULLE, *La Gascogne* cit., p. 307, n. 142; also VINCENT *et al.*, *The Letters* cit.: Raimond Bernard de Rouman / Rouinan, seneschal.

¹⁷ Specifically, the half of the bridge presently in John's hands; presumably the viscount already held the other half, cf. T.D. HARDY, *Rotuli chartarum in turri Londinensi asservati*, vol. 1, pars 1, anno 1199-1226, London 1837, p. 5b.

¹⁸ HARDY, *Chartarum* cit., p. 5b.

¹⁹ 29 January 1200: «Reimundo Bernard de Ruman» (with a titulus over the last 'n'), cf. HARDY, *Chartarum*, p. 58 cit., where the seneschal is named as Brandin; BOUTOULLE, *La Gascogne* cit., p. 308; VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 440, n. 80. The next day, he sent word to his Gascon agents and allies to wait for the instructions that the seneschal was bringing them, cf. HARDY, *Chartarum* cit., p. 58b.

self with «our enemies» and he urges the clergy, barons and knights of the Agenais to return to his service «as they should», for which they will be well rewarded²⁰. The Patent Rolls record that in January 1203, similar letters were sent to Raimon Bernart de Ravignan, Stephen and Anisent de Caumont, Vital de Chaiseneuve and Guilhem Raimon de Pins²¹. In the early months of 1203, then, not only was Toulouse a threat once again²², but King John needed to get «his» Agenais back on side²³. A loan to finance the king's business in Gascony was raised from the Norman tenants-in-chief in 1203²⁴. Later marks of royal favour suggest Raimon Bernart did return to the fold: it is very likely that he was the same Raimon Bernart who was promised a subsidy of a thousand marks from England in April 1204²⁵, and in December 1207 he was «in possession of 100 livres of land in the ducal domaine near Bordeaux granted away by John»²⁶. In acting consistently as one of John's *fideles*, Raimon Bernart resembles another prominent Gascon nobleman, the man of letters, Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan, who was similarly one of Richard's loyal local allies and attended on him when he was in his southern duchy²⁷.

²⁰ VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., pp. 449-452, docs 8-10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 452, doc 11.

²² The peace of 1196 had not lasted, cf. BENJAMIN, *A Forty Years War* cit., p. 282. F.M. POWICKE, *The Loss of Normandy*, Manchester 1960², p. 235, understands Raimon to have subsequently allied himself with Philip of France; see also J. GILLINGHAM, *The Angevin Empire*, London 1984, repr. in *Richard Cœur de Lion* cit., pp. 1-91, to which I refer here, p. 68.

²³ See VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 438 for evidence that John had far from abandoned his claims after 1196.

²⁴ T. STAPLETON, *Magni rotuli scaccarii Normanniae sub regibus angliae*, London 1840-1844, II, 545; T.D. HARDY, *Rotuli Normanniae in turri Londinensi asservati: Johanne et Henrico Quinto*, London 1835, p. 92; POWICKE, *Loss* cit., p. 228.

²⁵ T.D. HARDY, *Rotuli litterarum patentium in turri Londinensi asservati*, London 1835, p. 40b; see VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 440, n. 80; the distinctively Occitan combination of these names is telling.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 440; HARDY, *Chartarum* cit., p. 173b. On doubts over Raimon Bernart's later orthodoxy, see VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 440, on a royal safe-conduct issued in 1215, and TAYLOR, *Heresy* cit., p. 233 on treaty of January 1224 and the restitution of his lands (*HGL*, VIII, 779-780).

²⁷ Compare S. GUIDA, *Cartulari e trovatori*, in «Cultura Neolatina», LIX (1999), pp. 71-127, pp. 77-86 on Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan.

According to the *razo*, Giraut de Borneil was overcome by grief at Richard's untimely death in April 1199²⁸, and *Si per mon Sobre-Totz non fos* (BdT 242,73) presents the encouragement of Raimon Bernard de Rovinha as the sole reason the poet continues to sing and be cheerful (ll. 1-6). Since the world is in decline and the moral order turned upsidedown (stanzas I-III), Giraut resolves not to endorse any *ric ... que trop mal seignorei* (ll. 15-16) and he explicitly buttonholes his audience to demand

E vos, car non penssatz
si·s taing q'om pretz autrei
cellui que lait feunei?
(LXXV, ll. 30-32)²⁹

And you: why do you give no thought to whether it is fitting to accord value to a man who commits ugly and treacherous acts?

If the valiant king who inspired fear beyond Edessa is now dead and mourned (stanzas V-VI³⁰), Giraut has plenty of criticisms to make of those still alive and in power, especially in stanza III. The great lords of the highest rank have ruled unjustly, betraying or behaving treacherously, «for now someone is seizing the *onor* from the man who was rightfully enfeoffed with it». Railing against this is useless and would be countered by the assertion that all is as it should be, because an individual whom Giraut openly refuses to name «will be better armed»:

E moc la colpa dels aussors,
quan devers brezillet ni frais;
qu'era, non sai per cui³¹,
tol hom l'onor cellui
qe n'er a dreich casatz.
E si·us encorillatz,
dirant que ben estai,

²⁸ See SHARMAN, *The "cansos" and "sirventes"* cit., p. 479; KOLSEN, *Sämtliche Lieder* cit., II, p. 126.

²⁹ Text Sharman; for the translation of this piece, however, I mainly follow Paterson on Rialto: see <http://www.rialto.unina.it/GrBorn/242.73%28Sharman%29.htm>

³⁰ Although not by everyone: *Er aug del rei ... / que si lo plaignon dui, / lo tertz lor o destrui* (ll. 65, 71-72: "I hear it said ... that if two mourn him, the third blackens his name").

³¹ Sharman: *non sai per cui* "to give to someone or other". This sense is not impossible, but not very likely in the context.

car cel q'ieu non dirai
 sera mieiller armatz,
 e pois si-us enbariatz
 de pretz ni de dompnei,
 mes avetz el correi!
 (ll. 37-48)

The highest-ranking men were to blame for this when duty broke and shattered for now, on whose authority I know not, someone is stealing the land of the one who was rightfully enfeoffed with it. And if you complain, they will say it is right and proper, for the one whom I will not name will be better armed, and then if you get involved in matters of reputation or courting, you will have a harvest [of troubles] in your own field³².

Sharman interprets ll. 44-45 as denoting the Devil and *armatz* as «possessing greater powers of persuasion than any who argue for right and justice», but there is no compelling reason to see an allegory here; rather, it is much simpler to read these lines as a reference to a contemporary political dispute, with one party possessing superior force which will trump any arguments or claims. The remarks are quite pointed. Giraut is apparently evoking figures and a situation well-known to all his listeners, for he ostentatiously flags up his reticence to name names (l. 44). In an analogous poetic move, Richard is evoked in this song by the detail surrounding the figure of «the king» (l. 65) but, while the *rei* is not named, the reference to his fame and achievements *part Roais ... entrels paians galiadors* (ll. 83-85) offers a specific purchase in the real world of shared knowledge and experience which confirms the audience's identification.

Many were those who, in the uproar which followed Richard's death, could have been considered to have been robbed of the *onor* which was rightfully theirs: it all depended on your point of view. To cite but three (intertwined) cases: in January 1200, John recognised Uc de Lusignan's claim to the county of La Marche, but less than a year later the king had confiscated both this and Uc's brother's lands and stolen Uc's fiancée, and the Lusignans appealed to the French king's court, which in 1202 confiscated all John's fiefs in France³³.

³² Like Paterson, I follow Sharman's conjectured interpretation of lines 46-48.

³³ The inclusion of *dompnei* in Giraut's lines might perhaps suggest a woman played a role somewhere in these feudal conflicts: perhaps an allusion to Isabella of Angoulême?

Those fiefs had been disputed by the French king: when Richard died, King Philip immediately seized the opportunity to lay hands on Normandy and by mid-July 1199 the whole of the east of the duchy was under his sway³⁴. If the treaty of Le Goulet (January - May 1200) then confirmed John's rights to the Angevin succession, these were only to be denied again in April 1202 when Arthur, no doubt arguing that he, not John, was Richard's rightful heir and was being dispossessed by John, did homage to Philip and held his lands from him³⁵.

If the immediate audience of *Si per mon Sobre-Totz non fos* was well placed to read between the lines, the terms in which the poet evokes these injustices are perhaps too allusive to enable a modern reader confidently to attach Giraut's laments to any particular one of these or other crises of the time. *Be m'era bels chantars* (XLVII), on the other hand, contains some precious clues in the form of proper names which can assist both sorts of *destinataire*. While dealing in very similar reproaches to the first, the second song strikes a very specific note through its singular allusions to northern France in stanza VII.

Giraut angrily criticises both great and lesser lords, the *menutz e·l·z fortz* (l. 16), and inveighs in particular against a lord and leader who is now unreliable³⁶; he «forgets that which (or “the person who”) once brought him honour and turns elsewhere» and is no longer concerned with being true to himself; «he now grows despicable when he takes a course of action which will not bring peace and leaves leaderless those whom he had taken under his protection»:

q'er segnier ni cabdeus
fai tan qe lieus;
qe so qe·il er'onors
oblid'e·s vir'aillors³⁷

³⁴ See D. POWER, *The Norman Frontier in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries*, Cambridge 2004, p. 424.

³⁵ See outline summary in GILLINGHAM, *The Angevin Empire* cit., pp. 66-76. There was also the matter of who was lord in the Agenais and Quercy, see n. 23 above, also pp. 18-19 below.

³⁶ Sharman, l. 20: “acts as if he were quite heedless of his responsibilities”, citing as a parallel *faire que fols* “faire ce que ferait un homme fou, agir follement”, cf. SHARMAN, *The “cansos” and “sirventes”* cit., p. 282.

³⁷ Sharman's *so qe*, l. 21, may equally represent “the person who”; she translates *·s vir'aillors* “and turns to other pursuits”.

e no·s gara verais;
 q'adonc si met savais
 can pren chaptein don non amena patz
 e descapte cels q'avi'amparatz.

(XLVII, ll. 19-26)

This *canso-sirventes* is a denunciation of the decline of courtly values and the perfidious behaviour of the nobility, spliced together with a complaint about Love and about the poet's lady who made him happy but also played him false. Stanzas I-III characterise a world out of joint and corrupt; stanza IV presents a speaker who accuses *fortz seigniors* to his own detriment, for this brings about for him «a certain degradation» or loss (*uns desenanz*, l. 43); stanzas V-VI change the focus to love which has gone awry and become venal, and the poet's experience at the hands of an unreliable lady who made him promises of pleasures, but then withdrew them (ll. 75-76), swore she would be true (ll. 77-78), but then is revealed to have tricked and betrayed him after all (ll. 89-90).

The last full stanza of the piece is by implication addressed to his *joglar*³⁸ as the poet switches from the *vos* of the lady's direct speech to the lover in ll. 77-78 to second person singular forms in stanza VII directed at the one who will spread his complaint about his lady among lovers in three locations:

E donc si galiars
 t'es bels ni l'acomortz,
 greu sera que no·n portz
 las penas e·ls afanz,
 per qe n'ira mos chanz,
 Amics, si be l'espeus,
 part los Manseus
 e de Paris a Tors,
 mostran als amadors
 co·m galiet e·m trais
 lo jorn q'ella m'estrais!

(ll. 79-89)

³⁸ See SHARMAN, *The "cansos" and "sirventes"* cit., p. 283, note to l. 79 ff.

So if you like trickery and wrangling, you won't escape the pain and suffering which come as a result, for my song – if, *Amic*, you succeed in spreading it around – will pass beyond Le Mans and its inhabitants and go from Paris to Tours, telling lovers how she tricked me and played me false the day she dismissed me!

The structure of the song sets up parallels between the political and the amorous, between a lord being untrue, switching allegiance and abandoning his followers (III) and a deceitful *dompna* who tricks hers (VI-VII). This lyric elaboration on the themes of fidelity and truth, betrayal and deceit is punctuated by references to the legal perspective: the poet concludes stanza VII by recalling a time when such an offence would have been brought to trial in a court of law³⁹, echoing the legal notions of *apel* and *clam*, defending oneself and being judged, *dreig* and *tort* which featured in stanza IV⁴⁰. The parallels are further underlined by Giraut's emphasis on the use of words, evocations of speeches of accusation and defence, and his insistent repetition of the term *Amic*: the lady addresses him as *Amic* as she gives him *bos prec*s (l. 75) and verbal assurances that he will never be deceived by her (l. 76); he calls his *joglar* *Amic* as he outlines how the words of his song will reveal how she did deceive him; and in the second *tornada*⁴¹, he states how *Sobre-Totz* had proclaimed himself his 'friend', but now it is clear «that he would let me take my chance», and has in fact abandoned Girart:

E'n Sobre-Totz se n'er' ami clamatz,
mas er ai vist qe·m laissari'als datz.
(ll. 96-97)

Seen in this way, this patron and protector appears as glib as the lady in his assurances, as changeable as her in letting Girart down, and not dissimilar to the leader of stanza III who takes no care to be true and abandons his own men.

³⁹ *E fo ia·l temps c'om er'a det mostratz / per aital plag, qe fos en cort proatz!*, ll. 90-91.

⁴⁰ *E mos apeus, / car es ab fortz seigniors, / no·m fai mas desonors; / car si·m clam ni m'irais, / eu·m toil mon dreig e·l bais / e seretz fols si ia raizon comtatz / lai on sabres c'a tort seres iutgatz*, ll. 46-52.

⁴¹ Present in 10 of the 13 mss., which belong to both the main ms. traditions identified by SHARMAN, *The "cansos" and "sirventes"* cit., pp. 349-350.

It is likely that the poet is using here a technique similar to the one he exploited in *Quan lo fregz e-l glatz e la neus* (BdT 242,60) which, as Pietro Beltrami has shown, may also be read on an allegorical level which «celi sotto la superficie del discorso amoroso un discorso politico»⁴². In the present *canso-sirventes*, the amorous is interwoven with and bolsters the political theme and discourse so that to single out these three places where the song should instruct its listeners is also to allude to circumstances which would be at the forefront of the attention of an Occitan troubadour and his audience.

But why would the citizens of Le Mans be singled out in connection with the contents of this mixed complaint? In practical terms, rare were the troubadours who ventured this far north themselves⁴³ – about as rare as the Occitan barons who appeared at the royal court when it was north of the Loire, that is, «barely a handful»⁴⁴. Le Mans, Tours and Paris would usually lie well outside the reach of the *langue d'oc*, and yet the poet envisages his words finding an audience there. The force of his declaration may well be ironic as well as hypothetical, since *si ben* + indicative (l. 84) is used with an adversative meaning, serving to mark a contrast: “even if”⁴⁵. It is reasonable to deduce that the main, Occitan, public and patron to whom Giraut was directing *Be m'era bels chantars* lay elsewhere and that such an audience would be

⁴² P.G. BELTRAMI, *Giraut de Borneil “Quan lo fregz e-l glatz e la neus”* (BdT 242,60), in «Lecturæ tropatorum», 4 (2011), pp. 1-36, p. 10, accessed 22 July 2013 at: <http://www.lt.unina.it/Beltrami-2011.pdf>.

⁴³ The three examples commonly cited in this regard are Bertran de Born at the Norman court of Argentan, Bernart de Ventadorn who crossed the Channel, and Savaric de Mauléon in his imprisonment in Corfe Castle, see for example, G. GOUIRAN, *L'Amour et la guerre. L'œuvre de Bertran de Born*, Aix-en-Provence 1985, III, pp. 49-60; S. PEZZIMENTI, *Bernart de Ventadorn e Rodolfo di Faya: due “pittavini” alla corte di Enrico ed Eleonora*, in *Culture, livelli di cultura e ambienti nel Medioevo occidentale*, ed. F. Benozzo et al., Roma 2012, pp. 817-842; M. CÃO CARMICHAEL DE BAIGLIE, *Savary de Mauléon (c.1180-1233), chevalier-troubadour poitevin: traïtrise et société aristocratique*, in «Le Moyen Âge», CV (1999), pp. 269-306, pp. 274-275.

⁴⁴ N. VINCENT, *King Henry II and the Poitevins*, in *La Cour Plantagenêt (1154-1204)*, ed. M. Aurell, Poitiers 2000, pp. 103-135, p. 113: the remark holds good for Henry's two successors. The handful concerned are those who had business of their own with the king or were representatives of Plantagenet government in the south.

⁴⁵ See F. JENSEN, *Syntaxe de l'ancien occitan*, Tübingen 1994, § 764 on *même si*, contrastive.

concerned with Maine, Touraine and the Ile-de-France, in this combination, because they were in the news and were the sites of associated events of far-reaching significance which affected southerners.

Which events might these have been, and what are the implications for the date of the piece? There is more than one possibility. *Be m'era bels chantars* could possibly have been composed as early as June-July 1189 when, in the last conflict between Henry II and one of his sons, Le Mans burned and Tours fell to the combined assault of Richard, who had changed sides to ally himself with the French king against his father, and Philip Augustus, who had swept down from Paris⁴⁶; Giraut was already active as a poet at this date and the deeds of the duke of Aquitaine would have touched him and his public⁴⁷. An earlier stage in the conflict with France had seen Philip offering to trade his conquests in Berry against a return of Quercy, which Richard had conquered, to Raimon of Toulouse⁴⁸. But that had been the previous year; by the time Le Mans came to prominence, the focus had broadened to include the weighty issue of whether King Henry would designate Richard as his heir to both England and all his continental lands⁴⁹.

A more likely context for *Be m'era bels chantars* is perhaps supplied by the early months of 1203, and King John's letters to his men in the Agenais provide encouragement and support for this view. They concern Raimon Bernart de Ravignan in two ways. Firstly, according to this source, the lord of Tonneins-Dessus was playing an active and very important role at this time. He had transmitted the count of Toulouse's grievances to John, acting as the intermediary in diplomatic negotiations between Raimon VI and the overlord the count had acknowledged in 1196 when he married Joan, the sister of Richard and John, and received Quercy and the Agenais as part of her dow-

⁴⁶ W.L. WARREN, *Henry II*, New Haven and London 2000², p. 623; GILLINGHAM, *Richard I* cit., pp. 98-99.

⁴⁷ BELTRAMI, *Giraut de Borneil* cit., pp. 5-10 on arguments for dating *Quan lo fregz* before Richard's succession to the throne.

⁴⁸ See the summary in GILLINGHAM, *Richard I* cit., pp. 90-94.

⁴⁹ Or could Giraut perhaps be referring to the events around the siege of Mirebeau in summer 1202 which also attracted the comment of Gaucelm Faidit? See R. HARVEY, *On the date of Gaucelm Faidit's dialogue with Albertet (BdT 16.16) with a note on "Ara nos sia guitz"*, in «Cultura Neolatina», LXXI (2011), pp. 49-61.

ry⁵⁰. Secondly, Raimon Bernart is one of the addressees of these letters which signal the «disloyalty» of the count of Toulouse as he switched his allegiance to Philip Augustus⁵¹, and which urge the Agenais barons to return to the fidelity of the legitimate suzerain of their now-untrue overlord. The role of the count of Toulouse in this development would fit the song's condemnation of a faithless *fortz seignior* who *·s vir'aillors* very well. The letters were dispatched from Le Mans where John was staying, for the last time, as it turned out, before Maine and then Normandy itself fell to the advances of the French king. By mid-April John had retreated to Normandy and was writing to the citizens of Le Mans (compare *los Manseus*, in line 85 of the song?) to beg them to withstand the king of France⁵². Days later, Le Mans fell to William des Roches, one of the many important «turncoats» who between 1200-1203 had deserted Philip for John and then John for Philip again, and it was from a Le Mans in French hands that Philip issued a charter at the end of that month⁵³. The French campaign in Maine was accompanied by one in the Loire valley: at the start of April 1203, Philip sailed down the river to Saumur; in 1203-1204 he was «mopping up Angevin strongholds in the Loire region», although the garrison at Tours itself held out to the bitter end in late summer 1204⁵⁴.

If these events correspond to the significant places mentioned in Giraut's song, with Paris standing for Philip Augustus, in the years 1200-1204 there was no shortage of barons intent on «tricking their

⁵⁰ HGL, VI, 174; L. MACÉ, *Catalogues raimondins (1112-1229)*, Toulouse 2008, no. 298: homage in 1200 to the king of England for lands held in the Agenais; W. STUBBS, *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Hovedene*, 4 vols, London 1868-1871, IV, pp. 124-125.

⁵¹ Thus historians interpret «the king's enemies», see POWICKE, *Loss* cit., p. 235; GILLINGHAM, *The Angevin Empire* cit., p. 74; cf. VINCENT, *The Plantagenets and the Agenais* cit., p. 439 who also suggests the kings of Aragon and Castile for this role.

⁵² POWICKE, *Loss* cit., pp. 235-236; HARDY, *Rotuli litterarum patentium* cit., p. 28; A. CARTELLIERI, *Phillip II. August, König von Frankreich*, 4 vols, Leipzig 1899-1922, IV, 1, p. 152, n. 5.

⁵³ On the side-switchers (*li torné*), see A.J. HOLDEN – S. GREGORY – D. CROUCH, *History of William Marshal*, 3 vols, London 2002-2006, II, ll. 12557-12574; for the charter, cf. H.F. DELABORDE *et al.*, *Recueil des actes de Philippe Auguste, roi de France*, 4 vols, Paris 1916-1979, II, no. 753.

⁵⁴ See J. BRADBURY, *Philip Augustus, King of France, 1180-1223*, London 1998, pp. 153-154; L. HALPHEN, *Annales de Saint-Aubin*, in *Recueil d'annales angevines et vendômoises*, Paris 1903, p. 21; GILLINGHAM, *The Angevin Empire* cit., p. 70.

own lord and attracting the alliance of foreign lordships», by which the author of the *History of William Marshal* means those who were going over to the king of France⁵⁵. Throughout John's lands, the air was thick with betrayal and treachery: in Anjou (William des Roches, for example); in Poitou (the viscount of Thouars, for example)⁵⁶; in the Angoumois (the alienated Lusignans); in the Limousin (Viscount Gui of Limoges: 1199)⁵⁷; and then there was the count of Toulouse himself. Further south, Alfonso VIII of Castile had become King Philip's ally and in 1204, when the death of Eleanor of Aquitaine activated Alfonso's claim to his wife's dowry of Gascony, he took most of the major Gascon lords with him⁵⁸, although not those of the Agenais. «The list of deserters is almost endless»⁵⁹: contemporary events furnished enough material to give real substance to a poet's laments that the world is in decline and the nobility no longer uphold honour, duty and loyalty. In such a climate, even *Sobre-Totz* might find himself manoeuvred into a less than ideal position as protector.

As with other of Giraut's songs, it seems that the information supplied by the *razo* to *Be m'era bels chantars* has been too lightly dismissed. As John Gillingham and I have argued elsewhere, the author of the *razo* to *Non puesc sofrir q'a la dolor* (BdT 242,51) may well have been correct in claiming the troubadour spent a winter (that of 1190-1191?) at the court of Antioch⁶⁰, and Saverio Guida has suggested that the identification of *n'Alamanda* as a member of the Estanc family from Gascony (as claimed in *razo* C) may have a seri-

⁵⁵ In this case, the men of Poitou: *lor seingnor boisier e traire / vers els estranges seignorages*, see HOLDEN – GREGORY – CROUCH, *History* cit., ll. 12548-12549.

⁵⁶ See J.-P. COLLET, *Le combat politique des Plantagenêt en Aquitaine: l'exemple des vicomtes de Thouars (1158-1199)*, in *Noblesses de l'espace Plantagenêt (1154-1224)*, ed. M. Aurell, Poitiers 2001, pp. 139-164, pp. 160-162.

⁵⁷ See N. VINCENT, *Isabella of Angoulême, John's Jezebel*, in *King John. New Interpretations*, ed. S. Church, Woodbridge 1999, pp. 165-219, pp. 160-70; GILLINGHAM, *The unromantic death of Richard I*, in «Speculum», 54 (1979), pp. 18-41, repr. in *Richard Cœur de Lion* cit., pp. 155-80, to which I refer here, pp. 176-77; DELABORDE, *Recueil* cit., II, no. 634.

⁵⁸ See GILLINGHAM, *The Angevin Empire* cit., p. 74 for summary and *Berengaria* cit., pp. 124-125 for the terms of the 1170 marriage treaty of the young Eleanor.

⁵⁹ BRADBURY, *Philip Augustus* cit., p. 157.

⁶⁰ J. GILLINGHAM – R. HARVEY, *Le troubadour Giraut de Borneil et la troisième croisade*, in «Rivista di Studi Testuali», V (2003), pp. 51-72, pp. 58-70.

ous foundation⁶¹: William d'Estanc was also a faithful companion of Richard I⁶², and like Raimon Bernart de Rovinha, he appears at the side of King John after Richard's death⁶³. As regards *Sobre-Totz* and Raimon Bernart de Rovinha, the link made by the *razo* may be exactly the opposite of that supposed by Giraut's most recent editor: rather than one fanciful "myth" about Gascony generating and supporting another, the *razos* may reflect a much more acute grasp of the milieu. The importance of Gascony to the Plantagenets is a recently acknowledged fact which underpins the prominence of Gascon lords in literary circles and one which adds credibility to the identification of *Sobre-Totz* with Raimon Bernart de Rovinha, *trop valens hom de Gascoinga*.

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⁶¹ See S. GUIDA, "Trobairitz" fantomatiche? *I casi Alamanda ed Escaronha*, in *Le Rayonnement de la civilisation occitane à l'aube d'un nouveau millénaire*. Actes du 6^e congrès international de l'A.I.E.O., ed. G. Kremnitz et al., Wien 2001, pp. 411-433, pp. 421-425 (on Estanc, lower Armagnac).

⁶² See GUIDA, "Trobairitz" fantomatiche? cit., pp. 421-422; GILLINGHAM, *Richard I* cit., pp. 215, 232; in September 1199, John confirmed the gifts in Normandy which Richard had given to William, cf. HARDY, *Chartarum* cit., p. 16b.

⁶³ See for example HARDY, *Chartarum* cit., pp. 12, 24, 33, 97b and 58b-59.

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