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A Galician about the Valiant Conqueror of Valencia – Praise of James I the Conqueror in the Song of Pero da Ponte

Abstract:

In this paper we present an analysis of the song *O que Valença conquereu* by the Galician-Portuguese troubadour, Pero da Ponte, dedicated to King of Aragon, James I the Conqueror, composed on the occasion of his conquest of Valencia in 1238. Within the Galician-Portuguese poetic tradition, references to the Crown of Aragon were not frequent, and when they did appear it was usually in a satirical/humorous context. In this article we present the state of research on Pero da Ponte's potential links with the Aragonese court, and we situate his work in relation to the realities of both the Galician-Portuguese and Occitan poetic traditions. We present a detailed genre analysis of the song, pointing out the need to unify the genealogical terminology and offering a different perspective on the formal layer of the composition we are studying. We also make a comparison between how the Occitan-speaking troubadours portrayed James I in their works and how Pero da Ponte did, showing how the content of the work, the poetic devices used by the troubadour and the overall tone of the song place it in the group of poems dedicated to King of Aragon.

Keywords: Galician-Portuguese lyric, troubadours, Crown of Aragon, Catalonia, James I the Conqueror, Pero da Ponte, conquest of Valencia, *O que Valença conquereu*

The Crown of Aragon and Galician-Portuguese Lyricism

References to the Crown of Aragon – or Catalonia, which was a part of it from 1137 – are not frequent in Galician-Portuguese poetry. The latter is only mentioned in two songs. One of them is *O meu amig', amiga, que me gram bem fazia*¹ written by Pero Mafaldo² and belonging to the genre of *cantiga de amigo*, which is a record of the grievances of a girl who complains that her beloved deceived her and left unannounced for Catalonia. It seems that this reference is not accidental and relates to the actual journey made by the troubadour, as proved by Beltran, who identifies the minstrel Pedro mentioned in the *Repertiment de València* as Pero Mafaldo, who, according to the same researcher, would have left for Catalonia. He supposedly departed from Castile around 1248 and stayed at the court of James I the Conqueror (Beltran, 2005: 269), and later also contacted poets residing at the court of Peter III the Great (Beltran, 2005: 271-273). Although Beltran's arguments seem convincing, it is worth remembering that Pedro, mentioned in the *Repertiment*, need not be Pero Mafaldo at all. López Elum believes that these mentions refer to two individuals, one receiving grants between 1238 and 1249 and the other between 1262 and 1276 (López Elum, 1972: 252). For the first period, he cites the research of Menéndez Pidal, according to whom this minstrel Pedro would be identical with Pero da Ponte, due to the reference to the conquest of Valencia in the song that is the subject of this article (López Elum, 1972: 252). The question of the troubadour's presence at the time of this event will be addressed later, but at this moment we just want to point out that Menéndez Pidal's observations seem to be inaccurate, since the information in the *Repertiment* of 1238-1239 refers

¹ All quotations and incipits from Galician-Portuguese songs are taken from the *Cantigas Medievais Galego-Portuguesas* (CMGP) text corpus. Relevant references can be found in the bibliography.

² For the purpose of consistency, all the names of Galician-Portuguese troubadours are written in their original form, as presented in the corpus *Base de dados da Lírica Profana Galego-Portuguesa* (MedDB). For relevant references, see the bibliography.

specifically to a certain Pedro de Vera, a native of Barcelona (López Elum, 1972: 249-250), while Pero da Ponte is considered a Galician (Ron Fernández, 2005: 179).

However, let us return to the poetic links between Catalonia and Galicia. The second song mentioning Catalonia was written by Caldeiron, a minstrel about whose life virtually nothing is known and only one composition of his has survived, which begins with the words: *Os d'Aragom, que soem donear*. The composition belongs to the genre of *cantiga de escárnio e maldizer* and focuses on a malicious rebuke of the people of Catalonia and the Crown of Aragon, who prefer to deal with war instead of adoring beautiful women. At the same time, as Videira Lopes notes, the song emphasizes the opposition between being a knight and participating in courtly love, concepts which for Galician-Portuguese poets were opposed to each other, while for Occitan poets (and by extension Aragonese and Catalan, due to strong cultural influences) they almost constituted a unity (Videira Lopes, 1994: 63).³

Both ways of representing Catalonia can be translated to describe the presence of the Crown of Aragon in Galician-Portuguese lyricism. In other words, it appears either as a toponym, a certain reference point on the map of the events described, or it is present in works of a satirical nature, criticizing the attitudes and behavior of people that originated from there. Nevertheless, only a few compositions of either type have survived, and references to Aragon are few and of marginal importance in the context of the entire output of Galician-Portuguese troubadours. This makes it even more remarkable that a Galician poet, associated for majority of his lifetime with the Castilian court, wrote a song of praise (*cantiga encomiástica*) in tribute to King James I the Conqueror. Two questions are worth asking: "On what occasion was the song written?" and "Why did Pero da Ponte write it in particular?"

³ A detailed analysis of Caldeiron's two songs was made by Vatteroni: Vatteroni, S. (1988), 'Appunti sul testo delle due cantigas di Caldeyron,' *Studi Mediolatini e Volgari*, 34, pp. 155-181.

The Conquest of Valencia

The first question can be answered without much difficulty by reading the incipit of the troubadour's song: *O que Valença conquereu*, meaning "He who conquered Valencia." In his song, Pero da Ponte commemorates the conquest of one of the most important cities, still in Muslim hands at the beginning of the 13th century. Between 1232 and 1238, James I the Conqueror carried out a series of military operations, subjugating successive *taifas* surrounding Valencia, and finally, on 28 September 1238, he took the city, following the capitulation of King Zayyan ibn Mardanish. During the campaign, the Christians took advantage of the fragmentation of the Muslim forces, their internal divisions and disputes, the economic collapse, and the general reluctance, or perhaps restraint, towards the idea of holy war (*jihad*). James I also struggled, including resistance from the noblemen, but, as Ladero Quesada (2019: 365) notes, the success of the combined Aragonese-Catalan forces was determined by the desire to seize lands for settlement and colonization, the desire for huge loot and, secondarily, the promotion of the war campaign as a crusade against the Muslims. Even Pope Gregory IX became involved with the king's actions and, in 1237, recommended that a crusade be proclaimed in the metropolis of Tarragona, but the warfare then being waged was not very successful.

The problem was the small number of those willing to fight on the Christian side, whom James I, with much better results, persuaded to help him with numerous endowments they were to receive after the war (Ladero Quesada, 2019: 368). The aforementioned king of Valencia, Zayyan, tried to bribe the king of Aragon in a desperate attempt to retain his domains, but the offer was rejected, and James I began a siege of Valencia in April 1238, which ended, as already stated, with the capitulation on 28 September of the same year.

Genre

Pero da Ponte's composition belongs to the *cantiga encomiástica*⁴ genre, which is extremely rare in secular *cancioneros* that collect Galician-Portuguese poetry. Two other songs of praise have survived to the

⁴ The question of the genre classification of this and the other two similar songs in the Galician-Portuguese corpus is extremely problematic. In *Arte de Trovar* we find no information about songs of this type. The CMGP proposes the introduction of a category of *cantiga de loor*, defined as *cantiga de louvor a alguém* (Lopes [et al.], 2011-), and all songs of a panegyric nature addressed to kings (James I the Conqueror, Ferdinand III and Alfonso IV) and two songs of praise to Virgin Mary, by Alfonso X the Wise, are included within this category. This term, *cantiga de loor*, was introduced already in troubadour times and was used by the *cancioneros* precisely in reference to the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, to distinguish songs of praise from those recounting miracles. However, the CMGP classification has not been adopted by all researchers. The MedDB corpus uses the category *cantiga encomiástica* for 'secular' panegyrics and *laudas marianas* (placed in the *Outras* section) to describe Marian songs. The term *cantiga encomiástica* is also used by Montero Santalha (to describe the song *A sa vida seja muita* by Johan) (Montero Santalha, 2004: 2) and by Beltran, in reference to the Pero da Ponte's song that is discussed by us (Beltran, 2005: 184-185). Panunzio, on the other hand, in his edition of the works by the same troubadour, does not specify the genre of *O que Valença conqueureu* and states that it is a *cantiga de mestria*, adding only: *Trátase dunha poesía en loor de Jaume I de Aragón [...]* (Panunzio, 1967: 124).

However, it is worth considering how panegyric songs were perceived in Occitan poetry. Their role was fulfilled by *sirventés*, as we learn, for example, from the *Doctrina de compondre dictats*, which, while defining the genre, draws attention to its eulogistic function: *Si vols far sirventez, deus parlar de fayt d'armes, e senyalladament o de lausor de senyor o de maldit [...]* (Marshall, 1974: 95). Such a version of *sirventés* is found, for example, in Bertran de Born, who in *Ar ve la coindeta sazoz* praises Richard the Lionheart returning from captivity and believes that the king will take revenge on his vassals who attempted to seize his territories (Riquer, 2019: 731). An even better example of the panegyric form of *sirventés* is observed in by Aimeric de Peghuilhan's *En aquelh temps que l reys mori N'Amfos*, in which the troubadour praises Emperor Frederick II, calling him a physician (*metge*) who will cure the world of all diseases, and even constructs a wordplay based on his name (*Fre de ric* translates as "reins of the noblemen") (Riquer, 2019: 974). Galician-Portuguese songs of praise are, as it were, a continuation of this tradition and appeared, as it seems not coincidentally, in Alfonso X's

present day: *O mui bom rei que conquis a fronteira*, also by Pero da Ponte, in which he praises Ferdinand III the Saint after he conquered Sevilla. The third *cantiga encomiástica*, which is also chronologically the latest, is the only one without any connection to the Castilian court, and was composed by Johan, a minstrel from Leon, who dedicates *A sa vida seja muita* to Alfonso IV the Brave, King of Portugal, also mentioning and praising Pedro, Count of Barcelos (famous troubadour from the late period) and Prince Pedro, later known as Peter I the Just (Montero Santalha, 2004: 1). It is for this reason that Pero da Ponte's song is so unique, especially since it was more common in Galician-Portuguese poetry to insult or mock someone than to praise them.

If we look at the author's work in its entirety, we see that he was almost a complete troubadour, or in other words, he wrote not only within the three basic genres (*cantiga de amigo*, *cantiga amor*, *cantiga de escárnio e maldizer*), but he also composed *prantos* (mourning songs)⁵

poetic circle, where strong Occitan influences are evident. Perhaps we should consider treating these texts precisely as *sirventés*, given their strong conceptual and thematic links with the Occitan troubadour tradition. More specifically, it seems that the texts classified as *cantiga encomiástica* fall within the thematic variant of the genre described by Martín de Riquer, that is, *sirventés político* (Riquer, 2019: 56). However, we do not feel in position to resolve this issue hereby, instead we wish to draw attention to the need to reconsider the genre of the panegyric songs in Galician-Portuguese tradition. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, in this article we will use the term *cantiga encomiástica* to refer to Pero da Ponte's song, as this is the term most widely recognized among scholars.

⁵ It is worth mentioning that of the five surviving *prantos*, as many as four were written by Pero da Ponte. The fifth was composed by the aforementioned minstrel Johan on the occasion of the death of King Dionysius of Portugal (called Don Denis by the *cancioneiros*) in 1325. Pero da Ponte's 'funerary' oeuvre can be extended with one more song if we consider the proposal from the CMGP corpus, which classifies *Mort' é Dom Martim Marcos, ai Deus! Se é verdade* as a *pranto de escárnio* (i.e., a satirical variant of a mourning song), to be accurate. Nevertheless, by MedDB this song is classified as *cantiga de escárnio e maldizer* in its *escárnio personal* variant.

and *tensões*.⁶ Of all the genres practiced during his lifetime, Pero da Ponte only did not write any *sirventés moral* (a poem of a moralistic nature, based on Occitan category by the same name) or *pastorela* (song about encounter between a knight and a shepherdess). Nevertheless, it can be clearly noticed that he was in fact a versatile poet who mastered various forms achieving a certain degree of perfection, and his works are among the best preserved in all Galician-Portuguese poetry. Beltran even claims that the mourning song and the praise song are genres introduced by the poet into Galician-Portuguese poetry (Beltran, 2005: 184-185).

Form

While in terms of genre the song *O que Valença conqueceu* is a peculiar phenomenon, from a formal standpoint it does not introduce anything new to Galician-Portuguese poetry. Pero da Ponte uses the seven-verse stanza, which is the most frequently used by the Galician-Portuguese troubadours, since as many as 63% of all songs consist of such stanzas, while, as far as the rhyme scheme is concerned, having

⁶ In case of Pero da Ponte's *tenções*, there are also some classification discrepancies. The CMGP states that he co-authored three songs in this genre: *Pero da Ponte*, *e[m] um vosso cantar*; *Pero da Ponte*, *ou eu nom vejo bem* (preserved fragmentarily) and *Dom Garcia Martiins*, *saber*. The latter is considered a variant of the *tenção*, known as *tenção de amor*, mentioned by *Arte de Trovar* in *Capitolo vij*: *Estas [tenções] se podem fazer d'amor ou d'amigo ou d'escarnho ou de mal-dizer; pero que devem de seer de me<stria>* (Tavani, 2002: 43). The MedDB, on the other hand, states that Pero da Ponte is the author of only two texts that can be classified as *tenção* (*tenzón*) and omits *Pero da Ponte*, *ou eu nom vejo bem*, since only an incomplete first stanza has survived, and Pero da Ponte does not actually speak in it at all. *Dom Garcia Martiins saber*, on the other hand, is classified as a *tenzón partimen*, due to the fact that its construction is similar to the Occitan genre of poetic debate, *partimen*. A complex discussion of this classification can be found, for example, in studies: Corral Díaz, E., (2012), "La tradición del "partimen" gallego-portugués y la lírica románica," *Revista de Literatura Medieval*, pp. 41-62 or Vázquez García, T., Corral Díaz, E., (2012), *Os xéneros dialogados na lírica románica medieval*, Universidad Santiago de Compostela, Santiago de Compostela.

the form ababccb, it can be found in only 3.5% of the songs (Meléndez Cabo y Vega Vázquez, 2010: 11-13). The whole composition is crowned by a *finda*, which, unusually, shows a direct connection with the second rather than the third stanza, as it repeats its last three rhymes (-em, -em, -am). However, it seems unlikely that this fact is due to a copyist's mistake since there is a direct semantic and syntactic connection between the last stanza and the *finda*.

The UC and MedDB corpora state that the *finda* repeats rhymes from the second stanza, but this seems unlikely. In his fifty-three surviving songs, Pero da Ponte uses *findas* in fifteen, and composes eighteen of them in total. Within this group, as many as fourteen are three-verse *findas*, and among them only one (except for the text we are discussing here) contains any formal 'shortcomings' with respect to the commonly accepted scheme, that is, it does not repeat the last three rhymes of the last stanza. In one of his *prantos*, *Que bem se sob'acompanhar*, mourning the death of Ferdinand III, the troubadour has written as many as three *findas*, composed of three, three and one lines.⁷ The first is perfect (cca), while the second repeats the rhymes a and b from the last stanza (bba). The third consists of just one verse, completely unrelated to the metrics of the song and consisting of an exclamation: "*Amen! Aleluia!*" Why would a troubadour with such a 'classical' approach to *finda* agree its rhymes to the second stanza, instead of the third?

Panunzio seems to be correct when he claims that the *finda* in *O que Valença conquireu* indeed takes its two rhymes (-em, -em) from the last stanza, but it is difficult to believe, from a researcher's perspective, that the rhyme in the last line comes from the second stanza (Panunzio, 1967: 124). In Galician-Portuguese poetry, *finda* can rhyme with the last stanza by assonance, as we also observe in several cases, for example in the song *A Dom Foam quer'eu gram mal*, whose author is Johan Garcia de Guilhade, where there is an assonance between the last three lines of the third stanza (-or, -or, -ar) and the *finda* (-om, -om,

⁷ Metrical structure of this song's stanzas is: a10, b10, b10, a10, c10, c10, a10.

-al).⁸ Thus, taking into account the structural complexity of *findas* and the number of possible combinations, we can also assume that in the conclusion of his song, Pero da Ponte reuses rhyme *a* from the last stanza (-em, -em), and that the last line (-am) rhymes assonantly with the last line of the third stanza (-ar). Based on the above observations, the metric of the whole poem may be as follows: S: a8, b8, a8, b8, c8, c8, b8; F: 3a8, 3a8, 3b8-.⁹ However, we must admit that the presence of assonance in Pero da Ponte's song seems equally mysterious, since the poet was always concerned with the perfection of his rhymes.

Poetic Devices and Content

The basis of the song is a play on words between two meanings of the word *valença*, which is used by the poet as a toponym and as a noun meaning 'courage' or 'bravery.' It should be noted, however, that this word appears, in the whole corpus of texts, only in this song, while in other poems the word *valentia* or the adjective *valente* is used (Ferreiro, 2014-). If we search for the term 'valença' in the *Dicionario de Dicionarios do Galego Medieval* (Seoane, 2006-2022), we find that in this form the word refers primarily to the name of the city, while only in Pero da Ponte's song it is used in the sense of *valentia*.¹⁰ So where did Pero da Ponte's *valença* come from? It is difficult to establish this with absolute certainty, but it seems that the troubadour took for his song a word from the Catalan language, which, according to *Diccio-*

⁸ According to MedDB, the rhyme scheme in *finda* is as follows: dda. The last rhyme would be the same as the rhyme *a* which, according to the authors of the corpus who agree with Tavani on this matter, is *rima unissona*.

⁹ We use a dash to indicate assonance.

¹⁰ DDGM cites two dictionaries: Nunes, J.J. (1928), *Cantigas d'amigo dos trovadores galego-portugueses*. Vol. III (Glossary). Coimbra: University Press; Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, C. (1920), *Glossário do Cancioneiro da Ajuda*, Revista Lusitana, 23, pp. 1-95., in which we can find those definitions respectively: Nunes (1928): s. f. *valentia* (biog. de Pero da Ponte); subst. p. cidade de Espanha, id. (Cantigas d'amigo). Vasconcelos (1920): (*valentia*, deriv. de *valente*, as *patience* de *patient*, etc.) 10351. Na Cantiga 466, a que pertence o verso indicado, joga-se com o apelativo abstracto e o nome próprio da cidade de Valença do Cid.

nari català-valencià-balear (Alcover y Moll, 1930-1962), means, in addition to the old linguistic form of the city's name: *Valor; preu; allò en què és estimada o apreuada una cosa*. It was already used in the time of James I, as the same dictionary gives as an example of the use of the phrase *més valença* a quotation from *Llibre dels fets*, whose author was the king himself: *Mostrats me la més ualença e puy sentendré-ho* (Alcover y Moll, 1930-1962).

Bearing in mind that the works of medieval court poets only functioned in public space in sung form, we can see Pero da Ponte's artistry and poetic dexterity, as in almost every verse *valença* can have both meanings. This definitely makes the editing of the song and its transcription more difficult, which is why in commentary to this song done by the corpus CMGP we read: *Na edição proposta, fazemos a distinção, grafando ora com maiúscula, ora com minúscula; mas repare-se que o equívoco é permanente e quase todos os versos são passíveis de duas leituras* (Lopes [et al.], 2011-). It is worth looking at how this *equivocatio*¹¹ works in practice. For example, at the end of the first stanza we read:

E de Valença é senhor,
pois el mantém prez e loor
e prês Valença por valer.

This passage can be understood in two ways. The first translation, based on Lopes' proposals, would read as follows: "And he is lord of Valencia, since he maintains fame and glory and has taken over Valencia to increase his value." However, if we assume that *valença* does not refer to the city at all, we get the following sense: "And he

¹¹ Similar wordplays appear in *Arte de Trovar* in relation to *cantigas de escárnio* (*Capítulo quinto*) and are called '*hequivocatio*' (Tavani, 2002: 42), but, following Mercenaro, in this instance we are faced with *equivocatio in verbis singularis*, i.e., which: *concretiza a través del empleo de palabras homógrafas y/u homófonas con dos o más sentidos (dilogía)* (Mercenaro, 2009: 166).

is lord of bravery, since he maintains fame and glory, and was brave because he is a great [man]" (Lopes [et al.], 2011-).¹²

Similar wordplays constitute the strength of Galician-Portuguese lyricism, within which the poets very often operated on ambiguities and understatements, which makes their songs difficult to translate and to interpret unequivocally. It should be remembered, however, that similar poetic procedures were, for the most part, the domain of *cantigas de escárnio e maldizer*. The use of wordplay in a non-ridiculous context is quite an innovation, although Pero da Ponte's style distinguishes itself by a kind of genre syncretism.¹³ The poet often uses elements characteristic for several genres in his songs, resulting, for example, in love songs with a slight satirical tinge, such as *Agora me part'eu mui sem meu grado* in which, while addressing his beloved in terms typical for *cantiga de amor*, he states that after he dies of love, having been killed by his *senhor*, his family should claim compensation from her for the loss suffered, in accordance with the existing law (Lopes [et al.], 2011-).¹⁴

In the context of the commented wordplay, a very interesting observation is added by Riquer Permanyer, who notes that the ambiguity of the word *valença* was used on yet another occasion, in a long poem entitled *Maldit Bendit*, written by Cerverí de Girona (2011: 205). In

¹² *Universo Cantigas* corpus translates those same verses as: *e de Valencia é señor, pois el mantén a fama e o valor e tomou Valencia por valía* (Ferreiro, 2014-).

¹³ *Equivocatio* appears primarily in satirical songs, not only in *cantigas de escárnio* as we read in *Arte de Trovar* and not only in obscene contexts, but it is important to note that it also appears in various forms in other genres, such as *cantigas de amigo* and *cantigas morais* (Mercenaro, 2009: 164). Nevertheless, the presence of *equivocatio* is not evenly distributed in the corpus of Galician-Portuguese lyrics and therefore, in our opinion, Pero da Ponte's example still represents a unique way of using it not only outside the obscene context, but also outside the satirical one.

¹⁴ Beltran believes that the song is a parody of a composition by a well-known troubadour who was a guest at the court of Alfonso X the Wise at the time, whose incipit is *Fis e verays e pus fermes, que no suelh*, and that Pero da Ponte is mocking the vision of love presented by the troubadour from Narbonne (2005: 167-171).

this text, the troubadour also extols the great deeds of James I, but in addition to the conquest of Valencia, he also mentions the conquest of Majorca, which ended in 1232 (Ladero Quesada, 2019: 357). Despite the fact that, according to the findings of scholars, and the composition of the poem being dated 10 March 1271 (Cantavella, 1988: 8), it is difficult to say whether the wordplay used by Cerverí was inspired in any way by Pero da Ponte's song, or whether the two poets simply made a similar linguistic observation. Given its simplicity, the second option seems more likely, but it should not be forgotten that there are pieces in the Catalan troubadour's oeuvre that appear to have been inspired by the Galician-Portuguese tradition, such as *No l prenatz lo fals marit* which explores themes characteristic for *cantiga de escárnio* in form clearly inspired by *cantigas de amigo* (Riquer, 2019: 1565).

However, apart from the wordplay just discussed, it is hard to find other original elements in the panegyric in honor of James I. The song lacks any reference to the great deeds that the king performed, there is no mention of the conquest of Majorca or the problems with the noblemen that were overcome, the king's generosity is not celebrated, and Pero da Ponte uses only general concepts that can be applied in the context of praising any other man. Moreover, not once does the text mention the name of the ruler, and the lyrical subject only uses terms such as: *rei de Valença* or *rei d'Aragom*. This is particularly interesting if we pay attention to the second *cantiga encomiástica* of Pero da Ponte, where in the first stanza it is explicitly mentioned that the work concerns Ferdinand III: *rei dom Fernando, bom rei que conquis terra de mouros*. The panegyric for James I is also much less "personal," in other words, it consists only of empty epithets celebrating the qualities of the ruler, while writing about the conquest of Sevilla by the king of Castile, Pero da Ponte emphasizes, for example, that the victory also had the dimension of a triumph of the Christian religion over Islam.

It is still necessary to return to the previously discussed *finda*, in which we read that James I is:

rei de razom, rei de bom sem,
 rei de prez, rei de todo bem
 est, e rei d'Aragon, de pram!

One can see a striking similarity between the quoted enumeration and the one found in the song of the Provençal minstrel and troubadour Pistoleta *Ai! Tan sospir mi venon noit e dia* (Lopes [et al.], 2011). In this song, which belongs to the *cansó* genre, in the final, fifth stanza, the poet sends his song to King of Aragon, although not to James I, but to his predecessor, Peter II the Catholic (Riquer, 2012: 1164). Practically the entire stanza is devoted to listing the king's qualities and praising his virtues. As Pistoleta's poetic activity is dated between 1205 and 1228 (Riquer, 2012: 1164), it cannot be excluded that it served as an inspiration for Pero da Ponte, but there is also insufficient evidence to confirm with certainty the validity of this thesis.

James I the Conqueror and the Poetry of the Troubadours

Before moving on to discuss the relationship (or lack thereof) between Pero da Ponte and James I the Conqueror, it would be worthwhile, if only briefly, to comment on the place of the Galician troubadour's work in the context of songs dedicated to the king by other troubadours. In other words, we will pay attention to how other poets described the ruler and how they commented on his actions. However, we will not look at all the references because, as Cabré notes: *El Conqueridor és esmentat per un nombre considerable de trobadors, des del tolosà Guilhèm de Montanhagòl al llenguadocià Bernart de Rovenac (que després servirà al vescomte de Cardona), i a Sordello, mantuà establert a Provença* (Cabré, 2011: 924). Within the scope of this article, we will only discuss the most important and, in our opinion, useful references to James I that will allow us to relate Pero da Ponte's song in some way to Occitan poetry.

Some of the earliest references to the person of the ruler appear in the *sirventés* of Tomier and Palaizi, troubadours who appear in medieval *cancioneros* as poets who wrote together and, in their poems,

mainly encouraged the Occitan noblemen to fight against the French from the north during the twenty-year long crusade against the Cathars (Riquer, 2019: 1154). At that time, as their *Vida* mentions, they wrote songs about the king of Aragon, mentioning Peter the Catholic and James I. In the song *De chantar farai* the troubadours bitterly comment on the lack of commitment to help the Provençals by the Crown of Aragon and Catalonia, which is yet again mentioned separately:

Els Arragones
 Ai perdut ma poigna
 e mon sirventes,
 et en Cathaloigna;
 e·l reis qu'es ioves
 no·l troba q'i·l poigna (Riquer, 2019: 1155).

The *sirventés* was written in June of 1226 (Riquer, 2019: 1155), when James I was struggling with an uprising of noblemen and was in no way able to assist the Provençal people asking him for help.

Another request for assistance for Provence, a dozen years later, was composed by Guilhem de Montanhagol, whose links with James I were much more direct, as this troubadour appears in the *Repartiment* already mentioned several times, where he is given lands in Palla, near Figuer and in Boatella (Riquer, 2019: 1429). In his song, *Ges, per malvastat qu'er veyá*, written between 1246 and 1249, he encourages both the king of Aragon and the count of Toulouse to start a war with France, after Provence became the property of Charles of Anjou, thanks to his marriage with the countess Beatrice (Riquer, 2019: 1429-1430). Cabré sees in this song a clear example of how troubadours viewed James I's war expeditions, which took place under the Crusade banner. In other words, the poets argued that these were 'vicarious' expeditions, and that the real duty of the king of the Crown of Aragon was to wage war against the French (Cabré, 2011: 925).

The examples discussed so far, although critical and bitter in their tone, are by no means humorous, and were intended to comment on the king's actions or to express opinions on what he should have done. Some poets also happened to write more satirical or even malicious

pieces, which, apart from their value as political commentary, had a mocking function. Bernart de Rovenac composed the sirventes *Ja no vuelh do ni esmenda* around 1242, in which he not only criticizes the passivity of James I and Henry III, King of England, whose Occitan territories were in the hands of Louis IX the Saint (Riquer, 2019: 1370), but also seeks reasons for the lack of any action from the Aragonese ruler in his name. The poet notes that the king is rightly called James, or *Jacme* in Occitan, since this word not only refers to the name but is viewed as two separate words, *jac* and *me*, means *acuéstome* or *duérmome* (Riquer, 2019: 1370). The same troubadour, in another of his songs, *D'un sirventes m'es grans volontatz preza*, gets angry at the same monarchs for not taking back their lands while the king of France is imprisoned in the Holy Land (Riquer, 2019: 1371).

Nevertheless, James I was not only criticized by poets, but there were also those who praised him. We have already mentioned earlier Cerverí's poem, which features a wordplay based on the double meaning of the word *valença*, nonetheless the troubadour also wrote about James I in his other works. In *En breu sazo aura l jora pretenori* he asks the king to go on crusade to Jerusalem (Riquer, 2019: 1558), and a very similar song, also in a tone of praise for the king, highlighting his many conquests and the fact that he would easily manage to retake the Holy City, was composed by Olivier lo Templier (Riquer, 2019: 1473-1475). In addition, Cerverí composed a *planh* in 1276, the incipit of which is *Si per tristor, per dol ne per cossir*, where he praises James I and at the same time laments the death of the ruler (Riquer, 1945: 114-116). Curiously, the troubadour says in the fourth stanza that the only thing that stops him from taking his life or simply die is that James' successor, Peter the Great, is as virtuous as his father (Riquer, 1945: 115). Compared to another mourning poem written by Cerverí after the death of Ramon Folc V de Cardona, the *planh* in memory of James I is much less personal (Riquer, 2019: 1560) and, as in the case of Pero da Ponte, the fact that the poet feels more emotionally attached to another ruler seems obvious. Nevertheless, in mourning poems it does happen that the troubadour mentions, in order to console himself, the successor to the throne, as is the case, for example,

in Pero da Ponte's *pranto*, *Que bem se soub'acompanhar*, dedicated to Ferdinand III, where in the third stanza it is stated that God, having taken away a great king, left an excellent heir – Alfonso X. Yet, neither in the funeral songs of Pero da Ponte, nor in similar compositions of other poets, is this mention of successor so expressive and vivid.

Matieu de Caersi also composed a *planh*, in which he praises the deceased James I with great enthusiasm and grief, even going so far as to compare the respected ruler to the legendary King Arthur, stating that just as Britain still weeps due to death of its ruler, so should Aragon, Catalonia, Cerdaña and Lérida lament eternally (Riquer, 2019: 1541-1542). The troubadour's style is particularly emotional, and we can observe the exceptionally strong bond he had with the monarch when he emphasizes, in the first *tornada*, that it was right for the king to be named James because God had placed him in the team of Saint James, as the ruler died the day after the celebration of the feast associated with him (Riquer, 2019: 1544).

There is a certain uniqueness to the Galician-Portuguese text that comes to the fore at this stage. Cabré notes that most troubadours who speak of the king *esmenten el rei Jaume I per exigir-li determinades accions polítiques o per retreure-li que no les dugui a terme (la majoria dels esments, cal remarcar-ho, són en to francament crític)* [...] (Cabré, 2011: 924). Thus, already at this stage, the text appears unusual in that it does not criticize James I but praises him. Nevertheless, it is perfectly clear that Pero da Ponte's piece is a product of convention, and the troubadour unfortunately does not share his thoughts on the king's political-military decisions, which could have been extremely interesting and informative given that he could have looked at many issues from the perspective of a man not involved in the king's endeavors. Furthermore, Galician-Portuguese song, as we have already stressed above, uses general phrases, and, as can be seen from the example of Matieu de Caersi, even when praising the king one can resort to more sophisticated expressions, more thoughtful comparisons, metaphors, or, most generally speaking, more elaborated concepts.

Pero da Ponte and James the Conqueror

Given all that has been said so far about the song and the figure of Pero da Ponte, we should repeat the question from the beginning: “Why did a Galician poet, much more connected to the Castilian court, write a song of praise in honor of James I?” At the beginning, we mentioned Menendez Pidal’s thesis according to which minstrel Pedro appearing in the *Repartiment* is identical with Pero da Ponte, but, as we have previously shown, it seems that such identification is incorrect. Beltran seems to argue similarly, even going so far as to claim that Pero da Ponte probably never left the Castilian court, but merely wrote a *cantiga encomiástica* in honor of James I, as part of the friendly relations and alliance between the Kingdom of Castile and the Crown of Aragon (Beltran, 2005: 265). However, Ron Fernández noted the presence of a certain P. de Ponte in the *Repartiment de regne de Valencia* (Ron Fernández, 2005: 180). Moreover, this P. de Ponte appears on the list surrounded by many minstrels such as *Fernando Ioculatori*, *Pintiner iuglar*, or *P. juglar*, and Occitan troubadours such as Arnaut Catalan, Bertran Carbonell, and Gulhem Ademar, among others (Ron Fernández, 2005: 181). In addition, in the same documents, we find a certain P.G. de Burgos, whom the same researcher links with a troubadour writing in Galician-Portuguese, Pero Garcia Buralês, and also someone named Calderon is spotted, identified with the aforementioned Calderon (Ron Fernández, 2005: 181). It can therefore be assumed that Pero da Ponte took part, unfortunately unspecified, in the conquest of Valencia and was the beneficiary of royal grants, and that as a token of gratitude for the goods received, he decided to “return the favor” by composing a song in honor of James I. It is worth bearing in mind that Pero da Ponte was a *segral* (Lorenzo in Lanciani y Tavani, 1993: 537), and in the song – *Vistes, madr’, o escudeiro que m’houver ‘a levar sigo?*, he identifies himself as an *escudeiro*, which later is confirmed in the *tenção* between our poet and Afons’Eanes do Coton (– *Pero da Pont’, e[m] um vosso cantar*). Perhaps it is due to this reason that his piece is of a more generic nature, as the author himself was not a nobleman and king’s political decisions did not affect him directly, so in order to thank him for his gifts or wishing to

ask the monarch for something more, he composed a song of pure praise without any major poetic and political ambitions.

Although the presented hypothesis seems to explain everything, it should be remembered that the identification of persons from the document with particular troubadours, as Ron Fernández himself notes, may be erroneous, and the similarity of names may be due to a mere coincidence, nevertheless, bearing in mind the song composed by Pero da Ponte, it is difficult to deny it a certain degree of validity and accuracy.

Conclusion

As can be seen, Pero da Ponte's piece has a dual nature. On the one hand, it is innovative and was probably the first, or one of the first (if we take into consideration those poems that have possibly not survived) *cantiga encomiástica* composed in Galician-Portuguese. The exceptionally thoughtful and interesting wordplay employed by the poet attests to his craftsmanship, his dexterity with words. On the other hand, in terms of content, the work seems to present nothing original, which can only be justified by the lack of panegyric tradition in the Galician-Portuguese cultural circle and the absence of a strong connection with James I the Conqueror. It must not be forgotten that the song was probably written either as a thank-you piece to the king or as a manifestation of Castilian-Aragonese friendship. Both these sides of the commented song perfectly illustrate the specificity of the work of troubadours, especially those writing in Galician-Portuguese.

It is also worth bearing in mind the relationship between Pero da Ponte's song and the poetry written in Occitan, which is much more critical of James I personally, and it is even more evident that the poet had no political connection with the king and that he was not concerned in any way with his politics. The song of Pero da Ponte, however unique in the context of Galician-Portuguese lyric poetry, does not carry any interesting historical and social information, nor does it allow us to become acquainted with the opinion of an 'outsider' on the

monarch and his deeds, which could provide an interesting contrast to the compositions of the Occitan-speaking poets.

O que Valença conquereu – Pero da Ponte¹⁵

O que Valença conquereu
por sempre mais valenç'haver,
Valença se quer manteer
e sempr'em valença enteaueu.
E de Valença é senhor,
pois el mantém prez e loor
e prês Valença por valer.

E per valença sempre obrou
por haver Valença, de pram;
e por valença lhi diram
que bem Valença gaanhou.
E o bom rei Valença tem
que, pois prez e valor mantém,
rei de Valença lhi diram.

Ca Deus lhi deu esforç'e sem
por sobre Valença reinar,
e lhi fez Valença acabar
com quanta valença convém.
El rei que Valença conquis,
que de valença est bem fiz
e per valença quer obrar,

rei de razom, rei de bom sem,
rei de prez, rei de todo bem
est, e rei d'Aragon, de pram!

¹⁵ Edition from CMGP.

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