CATALAN AND OCCITAN TROUBADOURS
AT THE COURT OF ALFONSO VIII

Antonio Sánchez Jiménez
Miami University

A Jesús Rodríguez Velasco, por su paciente e inteligente ayuda

It is relatively unrecognized that it was a Catalan troubadour, Raimón Vidal de Besalú, who penned one of the most attractive and vivid descriptions of Alfonso VIII’s court in the Castia Gilos. The text belongs to the narrative genre known as novas (Suzanne Fleischman 169),¹ and begins by depicting a literary soirée in which the royal patrons, Alfonso VIII the Noble, “N-Anfós” (Manuel Milà i Fontanals 125), and his queen Eleonor of Aquitaine, “la reyn’ Elionors” (Milà i Fontanals 126), listen attentively to the Catalan’s poem. Raimon Vidal de Besalú dedicates the first fifteen lines of the Castia Gilos to praising Alfonso as a model of courtesy, and then proceeds to describe the graceful and beautiful queen and her rich garments:

Estrecha venc en un mantel
D’ un drap de seda bon e bel
Que hom apela sislató
Vermelhs ab lista d’ argen fo
E y hac un levon d’ aur devís. (Milà i Fontanals 126)

The Castia Gilos depicts how a Catalan troubadour visits the Castilian court and narrates to the king and his courtiers a poem in Provençal

¹ The Castia Gilos, a long narrative poem in octosyllabic verses, is best described as belonging to the novas genre. Nevertheless, critics have used different words to describe the genre of the poem: Irénée Cluzel referred to it as a "fabliau", and Martín de Riquer called it "una novella" (Història 116).
about the Aragonese vassal 'N-Ángós de Barbastre (Mílà i Fontanals 127). Beside Vidal, many other Catalan and Occitanian troubadours portrayed Alfonso’s court as a golden age of courtesy and patronage, providing a wealth of information about the Castilian court during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Some of these troubadours were born in areas that we now consider part of the països catalans, which at the time belonged to the king of Aragón, count of Barcelona. Others were natives of small fiefs in the Aquitaine, a territory that lay within Aragón’s sphere of political and economical expansion until the disastrous battle of Muret in 1213. Although they lived in a region not normally associated with Castilian culture, they obviously took an interest in Alfonso’s court. This paper explores exactly which troubadours, Catalan and Occitan, visited Alfonso VIII de Castilla’s court, and why these troubadours would be interested in Alfonso’s virtues and the characteristics of his reign. This literary connection demonstrates Castilian-Aragonese cultural and political ties during the early thirteenth century.

Specialists in medieval history and culture celebrate Alfonso VIII de Castilla (1155-1214)² for his many achievements and enterprises, both political and cultural. Alfonso’s armies seized the provinces of Álava and Guipúzcoa from the kingdom of Navarre between 1198 and 1200, and revitalized the Reconquista by defeating the Almohad Empire in the decisive battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. Alfonso also accomplished some impressive diplomatic triumphs: he engineered the definitive union of the kingdoms of Castilla and León, and played a decisive role in the peace and prosperity of the Christian regions of Western and Central Iberia. In addition to these political achievements, Alfonso’s reign saw many cultural advancements as well. The twelfth-century Renaissance reached Castilla during Alfonso’s rule (José Ángel García de Cortázar 167): circa 1212, Alfonso founded the Peninsula’s

² The count-kings dominated the land of the troubadours for a long time, and their influence peaked in Alfonso VIII’s life. In 1167, Alfonso II de Aragón (Alfons I in Cataluña) inherited the County of Provence, and in 1172 he received the County of Roussillon. He also managed to obtain nearby Béarn’s and Bigorre’s homage in 1187. His son, Pedro II (Pere I in Cataluña), sought to secure his Occitanian possessions through a series of dynastic marriages, but his premature death at Muret frustrated the Aragonese plans in Occitania (H.J. Chaytor 68). Despite Peter’s failure, culture united the Catalan empire thanks to the almost identical language spoken in Barcelona, Toulouse, Montpellier, and Provence, and thanks to their common troubadour lyric (J. Lee Shneidman 2: 298).

³ Gonzalo Martínez Díez points out that Alfonso VIII was born on Saint Martin’s day, 1155 (”Curia y cortes” 133).
first university in Palencia (Amaia Arizaleta 214; Adéline Rucquoi). He also encouraged his subjects to adopt the new Gothic style in architecture (Clementina Julia Aras Gil 21) by building the royal pantheon at Las Huelgas in Burgos, and the palace of Galiana in Toledo. In addition, Alfonso promoted Roman law (García de Cortázar 169), and minted the first Christian golden currency — the gold maravedí — on the peninsula (171), imitating the famous and prestigious Almoravid dinar to prove his own political and economical status. Alfonso also pursued an international policy that made his name famous from Portugal and Aragón to the lands of the Holy Roman Empire building family alliances with the most powerful dynasties of his time, the Plantagenets of England and the Hohenstaufen of the Holy Roman Empire (Martínez Díez, Alfonso VIII 43-47).

The visiting troubadours themselves constituted another powerful cultural attraction of Alfonso's court. At a personal level, Alfonso must have loved troubadour poetry to host so many poets in Castilla, but he also inherited his role as a patron of troubadours from two different political sources, from his wife's family, the Plantagenets, and from his Castilian and Leonese ancestors. Alfonso's "reyn' Eliorors" was the daughter of King Henry II of England and the famous Eleonor of Aquitaine, and grew up in a pan-European court that possessed lands in England and Southern France. Many troubadours visited and performed at the Plantagenet court, contributing to its unique atmosphere and intense literary life. Some of Henry and Eleanor's children pursued literary interests themselves, either directly or through patronage: Richard the Lionheart wrote his own troubadour poetry, and Marie of Champagne headed a court whose literary life rivaled her parents', boasting such figures as Chrétien de Troyes (John F. Benton; D.D.R. Owen). The troubadours repaid the Plantagenets' generous patronage by spreading their fame throughout Christendom, and by confirming them as one of the most prestigious families of their time. All of Europe knew and respected the Plantagenets and had heard the troubadours sing their praises, as did Alfonso and his Castilian advisers. When the king chose a bride from outside the Peninsula and married Eleonor, he probably coveted her family's reputation and their close relationship with their tuneful publicists. After the wedding, the ties to French culture drew many poets to Alfonso's court offering to elevate Alfonso's fame to comparable levels. In fact, this queen was not the only attraction that Castilla presented for the troubadours, since the Castilian and Leonese kings Alfonso VI and Alfonso VII the Emperor had generously protected some of these same these poets
long before (Joseph T. Snow 273). Alfonso VIII cultivated this traditional relationship with the troubadours (Albert Gier 156), and radically intensified it, hosting many more poets than his predecessors. In short, Alfonso VIII inherited and revitalized these two traditions, and the troubadours obligingly contributed to his reputation as one of the most illustrious kings of his time.

Despite Alfonso's importance as a patron of troubadours, most medievalists have neglected to study his court as a literary institution. On the one hand, the few studies that explore the subject do so in the context of a very general overview of the troubadours in the Iberian Peninsula. These monumental studies, such as those by Manuel Milà i Fontanals, Carlos Alvar, and Riquer's three-volume anthology Los trovadores. Historia literaria y textos, provide easy access to many texts dealing with the Iberian kingdoms, although offering very few literary interpretations. Snow's essay has the advantages of being well-informed and more up-to-date, but does not provide a complete study due to its short length and introductory scope dedicating only four lines to Alfonso VIII's court (273). In addition, these classic studies concentrate either on Alfonso X's court, such as Snow's, or on Catalan and Aragonese courts, as do Milà i Fontanals and Alvar, and they devote considerably less space and investigation to earlier Castilian courts such as Alfonso VIII's. These bibliographical difficulties notwithstanding, I believe it is important to classify and identify Alfonso's troubadours and a corpus of their poems to restore them to their original context and to explore the close relationship between Aragón and Castilla during the time.

When Milà i Fontanals, Alvar, Riquer, and Snow sketched their lists of known poets, they each named eighteen troubadours that praised Alfonso VIII, and concluded that many of them stayed at his court (Snow 273), accepting at face value many vague and problematic allusions to the king celebrated in these verses. For example, many times the poems do not specify if the Alfonso in question reigned in Castilla, and accordingly it is uncertain if the poet is alluding to Alfonso IX de León, Alfonso II de Aragón, or Alfonso VIII de Castilla, all of whom were contemporaries. In other cases when we are sure of the kingdom in question, we are ignorant of the text's precise date of composition, and so there is no telling if the patron praised was Alfonso VII the Emperor, Alfonso VIII, or Alfonso X the Wise, who ruled Castilla almost consecutively. In this study, we will only include troubadours whose presence in Alfonso VIII's court was reasonably certain, such as Raimón Vidal de Besalú, Peire Vidal, and Giraut de Bornelh. Conse-
quently, we exclude some quite well-known troubadours that Milà i Fontanals and Alvar ascribe to Alfonso VIII's court, such as the famous Bertran de Born, who in 1203 dedicated his sirventes⁴ “Miez sirventes vueilh far dels reis amdos” to Alfonso. In this poem, Bertran de Born encouraged the Castilian king to intervene in the war between Richard the Lionheart and Phillip Augustus of France, and praised Alfonso as the “valen rei de Castella’N Anfós” (Milà i Fontanals 113). However, Bertran de Born was a nobleman, as one of his Vidas⁵ certifies (Biographies des Troubadours 65), and several historical documents further confirm his economic solvency, which makes it unlikely that he ever received monetary patronage from Alfonso. Furthermore, no documents prove that Bertran de Born ever visited Castilla or, indeed, met Alfonso in person. Bertran de Born did know Alfonso’s wife, Eleonor Plantagenet, but he had encountered her in Henry II’s court, before she married Alfonso (Riquer, Los trovadores 2: 680). The sole mention of Alfonso VIII in Bertran de Born’s work appears in “Miez sirventes vueilh far dels reis amdos”, a poem that deals with the politics of the English and Occitanian courts more than with Iberia. Although Bertran de Born enjoyed such international fame that Alfonso’s courtiers must have known at least some of his songs, for all the above reasons our corpus excludes him.

The famous Folquet de Marselha is also off our list, because he came from a well-to-do family, being a son of a rich merchant from Marseille. Basing himself on Folquet’s background, Riquer considered that Folquet “nó es el típico trovador que recorre las cortes ejerciendo su oficio y en demanda de recompensas” (Los trovadores 1: 585), making it unlikely that he visited Castilla or received any gifts from Alfonso. In spite of this, Milà i Fontanals regarded Folquet as a close friend of Alfonso’s (114), because the troubadour wrote a song asking Provençal knights to help Alfonso VIII after the Almohads defeated him at Alarcos in 1195. Although Folquet did in fact write that song, we must reconsider its context in order to decide if he composed it for Alfonso. Folquet's Vida provides much of that context, since it specifies that after his defeat Alfonso had asked the Pope for help from France, England, Aragón, and Toulouse (Milà i Fontanals 114). The Pope obliged,

⁴ The troubadours used the genre they called vers or sirventes as a vehicle for social or literary satire (Amelia E. Van Vleck 27).

⁵ We conserve approximately twenty thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts containing troubadour poetry in addition to the prose vidas and razos. The vidas narrate the troubadour’s life, and serve as an introduction to a set of his songs, while the razos explain the context of a particular song (Elizabeth W. Poe 187).
and wrote an appeal for a Crusade in Spain to the realms Alfonso indicated. It was probably this papal appeal, more than a direct letter from Alfonso, what inspired Folquet to write his canso. In fact, Folquet dedicated the song to “Azimán”, not to Alfonso, and since “Azimán” was the senhal, or literary name, of Barral, lord of Marseille (Milà i Fontanals 113), this reference further strengthens the canso’s relationship with Southern France. Critics have even identified Folquet de Marselha as the famous Fulco, bishop of Toulouse from 1205 until 1231, who organized the crusade against the Albigensians (Chaytor 78; Riquer. Los trovadores 1: 583). The same crusading spirit that fueled Folquet in this religious enterprise must have encouraged him to appeal to his compatriots to help the Castilian king against the Almohads. In short, we exclude Bertran de Born and Folquet from our corpus for very similar reasons: although they mention Alfonso VIII in a few poems, we cannot prove that they visited his court, or that Alfonso requested them directly to compose songs in reference to his personage.

The list of Alfonso’s troubadours begins with a native of Southern France, Peire d’Alverinha (flourished 1149-1168), although some critics dispute that he ever visited Alfonso VIII’s court. According to Riquer, Peire d’Alverinha started his career by imitating the famous troubadour Marcabrú (Los trovadores 1: 311), and enjoyed some celebrity and patronage in the Castilian court of Sancho III, Alfonso’s father. He dedicated “Bel m’es, quan la roza florís” to Sancho, encouraging the monarch to fight the Moors in the same fashion as his father, Alfonso VII the Emperor. Peire d’Alverinha’s travels in the Peninsula took him from Castilla to the Catalan court of Alfonso II de Aragón (Riquer, Los trovadores 1: 311-12), a friend and ally of Alfonso VIII. His Vida provides further information about his visit to Spain:

Peire d’Alverne si fo de l’evesquat de Clarmon. Savis homs fo e ben letratz, e fo fils d’un borges. Bels et avinens fo de la persona. E trobet ben e cantet ben, e fo lo premiers bons trobarie que fon outra mon7 et aquel que fez los meillors sons de vers que anc fosson faichs.... Canson no fetz, qe non era adoncs negus cantars appellatz cansos, mas vers; qu’En Guirautz de Borneill fetz la premeira canson que anc fos faita. Mout fo

---

6 Unless otherwise specified, this study follows Riquer’s Los trovadores dates for the life span of the troubadours.
7 “Beyond the mountains”, that is, on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees.
onratz e grasitz per totz los valenz barons que adonc eran e
per totas las valenz domnas, et era tengutz per lo meillor
trobador del mon, tro que venc Guirautz de Borneill. (*Biogra-
phies 263*)

Peire d’Alverinha’s *Vida* associates him closely with Giraut de Bornelh,
the “maestre dels trovadors”: Peire enjoyed such high education (“Savis
homs fo e ben letraz”) that the *Vida* calls him the “maistre de totz”,
and compares him twice to Giraut.8 We have reasonable proof that
Giraut de Bornelh spent some time in Alfonso VIII’s court, and may
speculate that the two troubadours met there, or that one recom-
manded the court to the other. In any case, we can deduce from Peire
d’Alverinha’s poetry that he visited the court of Sancho III de Castilla,
and that he was familiar with Alfonso VII’s reputation. Moreover, his
historically reliable *Vida* associates him with Giraut de Bornelh, who
certainly wrote for Alfonso VIII.

To clarify if Peire d’Alverinha worked for Alfonso as well, we must
turn to Peire’s most interesting poem, the *sirventes* “Chantarai d’aquestz
trobadors”. This lively satire presents a caricature of several contem-
porary troubadours, including Peire himself: the verse declaring Peire
the “maistre de totz” that the *Vida* quoted belongs to this poem. The
*sirventes* includes a self-satire consistent with the playful and amiable
tone of the poem. Given this general mood, Peire probably wrote
“Chantarai d’aquestz trobadors” for some festive occasion in which all
or most of the troubadours he mocks sat together. The last two verses
of the poem seem to confirm this interpretation: “XV Lo vers fo faitz
Probably the convivial meeting (“tot jogan rizen”) actually took
place, because Peire d’Alverinha names a specific location (“Puoich-
vert”). This clue hints at the nature of the occasion, which we can
discern by focusing on two troubadours that appear in the satire, “Peire
de Monzo” and “Gonzalgo Roitz”:

VIII Ab Peire de Monzo so set,
pos lo coms de Tolosa-l det,
chantan, un sonet avinen,
e cel fon cortes qe-l rauget,

---

8 Also Petrarch, perhaps basing himself on this *Vida*, associated Peire d’Alverinha and
Giraut de Bornelh: “e l vecchio Pier d’Alvernha con Giraldo” (quoted in Riquer, *Los
trovadores* 1: 314).
e mal o fes car no'il trenquet
aqel pe que porta penden. (Riquer, *Los trovadores* 1: 337)

XII E l'onzes, Gonzalgo Roitz,
qe'es fai de son chant trop formitz,
per q'en cavallaria's fen;
et anc per lui non fo feritz
bos colps, tant ben non fo garnitz,
si doncs no'l trobet en flegen. (Riquer, *Los trovadores* 1: 338-39)

The names of these troubadours suggest that the two poets may have hailed from Castilla: "Gonzalgo Roitz" corresponds to Gonzalo Ruiz, and "Peire de Monzo" to Pedro de Monzón, if we interpret that "Monzo" refers to Monzón de Campos, in Castilla, rather that to Monzón de Cinca, in the Catalan speaking Franja de Ponent, in Aragón. Taking these two names into account, the critics believe that Peire d'Alvernia wrote the *sirventes* during the trip that the illustrious Castilian retinue took to Bordeaux in 1170, in search of Alfonso VIII's wife and queen Eleonor (Julio González 1: 188-90). Thomas Pattison ("The Background": "The Troubadours") and Ramón Menéndez Pidal (114) share this opinion, one that only Rita Lejeune has disputed so far, rejecting Pattison's itinerary, and sustaining that Peire d'Alvernia could have written his poem in Cataluña, without any relationship whatsoever to Eleonor's retinue. Nevertheless, we do have the name of the main Castilian ambassador to Bordeaux, Gonzalo Ruiz de Azagra, a Navarrese who became a vassal and courtier to Alfonso VIII (Riquer, *Los trovadores* 1: 339). This information solves the problem of "Gonzalgo Roitz"'s identity, and unquestionably links the *sirventes* and Peire d'Alvernia to Alfonso VIII de Castilla: Peire wrote "Chantarai d'aquets troubadors" for and during Gonzalo Ruiz and Eleonor's trip to Castilla.

Without a doubt, the festive occasion justifies the satire's cheerful and convivial mood, as well as the presence of so many troubadours: a royal wedding between the open handed Plantagenet clan and the powerful king of Castilla promised lavish patronage. The celebration attracted famous troubadours such as Giraut de Bornelh, Peire d'Alverna, and Peire de Monzo, who probably came from the court of Alfonso II de Aragón, since this monarch intervened decisively in the wedding's organization (Riquer, *Los trovadores* 1: 335). Alfonso VIII presumably rewarded all the troubadours in attendance regardless of where they came from, and through this generosity he laid the basis for his fame as a munificent patron. Peire d'Alverna and his comrades obliged him, and thereafter celebrated Alfonso's virtues in their
songs. In conclusion, Peire d’Alvernia’s poetry proves that he had close relations with the Castilian court under Sancho III, and later under Alfonso VIII himself.

The same applies to Guillem de Berguedà (flourished 1138-1192), a noble Catalan who was the first son of the viscount of Berguedà, in the Cerdanya. Despite his noble birth, his Vida narrates that Guillem lost his land, inheritance, and social status due to a strange adventure:

Guillems de Bergedan si fo us gentils bars de Cataloiigna, vescoms de Bergedan e seigner de Madorna e de Riechs. Bons cavalliers fo e bon gerriers, et ac gerra ab Raimon Folc de Cardona, q’era plus rics e plus grans que el. Et avenc se q’un jorn el se trobet ab Raimon Folc et aucis lo malamens; e per la mort d’En Raimon Folc el fo deseretatz. Longa sazon lo mantengront siei paren e siei amic; mas pois l’abandoneron tuih per so qe totz los escogosset e de las moillers e de las fillas e de las serors, que anc non fo neguns qe’l mantengues, mas N’Arnautz de Castelbon, q’era uns valens gentils hom d’aquella encontrada. (Riquer, Los trovadores 1: 523)

The Vida asserts in crude language that Guillem killed a powerful man, and then lost all support from his own relatives due to his inordinate and inappropriate desire for their “moillers”, “fillas” and “serors”. During his years of exile, in 1190, Guillem de Berguedà visited Alfonso VIII’s court, perhaps together with Aimeric de Peguilhan (Riquer, Los trovadores 1: 520), a visit we will refer to later. In fact, in the fifth stanza of “Un sirventes ai en cor a bastir”, Guillem addresses Alfonso VIII explicitly, when he announces that he will visit the monarch in his court:

V Reis castellans, vas vos mi volv e’m vir,
car so dauratz c’autra poestatz stagna,
e pot vos hom per lo meillor chausir
q’es dal Peiron tro sus en Alamaigna;
car lai etz pros on autre reis s’esmaia
e valetz mai on hom plus vos asaia,
c’a tot lo mon tenetz donar ubert,
e qui mais val, mais de bes l’en revert. (Riquer, Los trovadores 1: 540)

We have no reason to doubt that Guillem did in fact travel to Castilla in search of Alfonso’s golden patronage (“car so dauratz c’autra poestatz
stagna"), as he promises in this poem, and so we can safely include him in our corpus.

We have extensive information about our third poet, Giraut de Bornelh (flourished 1162-1199), from his Vida, six razos, and several internal references in Giraut's own poetry. The Vida assures us that this famous troubadour came originally from a low family near Limoges: "si fo de Limozi, de l'encontrada d'Esiduoill, d'un ric castel del viscomte de Lemoges. E fo hom de bas afar" (Biographies 39). It also depicts him as a learned man ("savis hom fo de letras e de sen natural") who spent his winters in school ("tot l'invern estava en escola et aprendia letras") and his summers traveling to different courts ("tota la estat anava per cortz", Biographies 39). During such trips, he probably visited far away regions like Cataluña and Castilla, whose respective kings he mentions in his poems. In fact, his Razo F comments on one of Giraut's songs, "Lo dous chant[z] d'un ausel", explaining that some Navarrese bandits had stripped the troubadour of all the gifts he had obtained from the "bon rei Anfos de Castella" (Biographies 55).

Sharman questions the razo's veracity and Giraut's stay in Castilla, arguing that the razo misinterprets a line from "Lo dous chant[z] d'un ausel" contending that although the razo states that the king of Navarra robbed Giraut, in reality a Navarrese nobleman, and not the king, was responsible for the assault (20). But we cannot dismiss the entire razo on the grounds of this small imprecision, especially if we take into account that "Lo dous chant[z] d'un ausel" does not mention Alfonso VIII. This disparity suggests that the razo used sources other than the poem and should not necessarily be dismissed as a historical fabrication. Furthermore, Giraut does refer to Alfonso VIII in "Ges de sobrevoler no m tuioll" and also, according to Ernest Hoepfner (208-09), in verse 81 of "Quar non ai" (Bornelh 208). These allusions confirm Giraut's Vida: the troubadour did travel widely during the summer, and among the courts he visited we can include Alfonso VIII's.

---

9 Ruth Verity Sharman rejects Riquer's dates. In her opinion, Giraut de Bornelh was born around 1140, and wrote from circa 1160 until circa 1200, gaining fame around 1170 (Bornelh 1).

10 Bruno Panvini (100-02) and Adolf Kolsen (78) posit that Giraut worked in a school as a teacher of rhetoric, as the troubadour's poem "Can branca'ls brondels e rama" suggests (Bornelh 228).

11 With much hesitation and without any concrete evidence, Sharman suggests that this "reis N'Amfo" could perhaps refer to the Aragonese king Alfonso II (20). Nevertheless, Riquer sustains that the poem concerns Alfonso VIII, because it mentions him alongside Fernando II de León, the "reis Ferans" (Los trovadores 1: 465).
The Vida and razos of our fourth troubadour, Peire Vidal of Toulouse (flourished 1183-1204), do not provide any reliable information about his life, but rather supply many misinformed literal readings of his poems and famous playful compositions of bragging, or gabs. The Vida describes Peire Vidal as the “meiller cavallier del mon” and claims that he was the Byzantine emperor (Biographies 351).\(^{12}\) It also tells us how a jealous knight cut off his tongue (Biographies 351) and how some hunting dogs attacked him when he was disguised as a wolf to show his love for a lady called Loba (Biographies 368). These fanciful tales in no way contribute to our understanding of who Peire Vidal was in life and which courts he visited. We can only find facts about Peire Vidal’s life in his compositions, and these confirm that the poet had a close relationship with Alfonso VIII, whom he praises in “Plus que'l pabres, quan jai el ric ostal” and “Mout es bona terr’ Espanha”. From these poems, we may deduce that Peire Vidal visited Alfonso’s court around 1187 or 1188 (Riquer, Los trovadores 2: 862), and possibly again between 1198 and 1204, when he dedicated the canso “Car’amiga dols’e franca” to a lady from the powerful Lara family (Milà i Fontanals 131). In short, Peire Vidal sojourned at least twice at Alfonso VIII’s court, and clearly belongs in our list.

We have brief but unshakable evidence that three other troubadours, Guillem de Cabestany (flourished 1212), Guiraut de Calanson (flourished 1202-1212), and Raimon Vidal de Besalú (flourished 1216) visited Alfonso’s court. Guillem de Cabestany’s Vida proves as unreliable as that of Peire Vidal, because it features one of the most famous Ovid-inspired troubadour legends: the Vida describes how a jealous husband murdered Guillem and served his heart, that he had made “raustir e far a pebrada” to the unfaithful lady (Biographies 531). We do know that Guillem de Cabestany hailed from Cabestany, in the Roussillon, and that he participated in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, together with other Catalan knights. Both Pere Tomich, in the fifteenth century, and Pero Antón Beuther, in his 1563 Primera parte de la Corónica general de toda España, name Guillem de Cabestany among the Catalan crusaders who helped Alfonso VIII against the Almohads (Arthus Langfors xvi; Riquer, Los trovadores 2: 1064). Alfonso received the foreign crusaders warmly, and lodged them in Toledo for a few months, while they waited for King Pedro de Aragón, who finally arrived with his army eight days before Pentecost in 1212 (Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae 260). In the beautiful royal

\(^{12}\) Peire’s Vida probably took the troubadour’s jokes and comical exaggerations literally.
governed by the Tajo river. Guillem de Cabestany, and possibly other Catalan poets, in all likelihood performed for their Castilian allies and the kings of Castilla and Aragón. The foreign army numbered 2,000 knights with their numerous servants, 10,000 horsemen, and 50,000 foot soldiers, (Martínez Díez, Alfonso VIII 182), most of whom hailed from Aquitaine and shared a common knowledge and appreciation for the troubadour poetry that Guillem and his partners composed.

Like many 1212 crusaders, the troubadour Guiraut de Calanson was a native of "Gascoinga" according to his Vida (Biographies 217). We also know that in 1211 he wrote a famous planh ("Belh senher Dieus, quo pot esser sufritz") to mourn the death of Alfonso's male heir, don Fernando de Castilla (Martínez Díez, Alfonso VIII 52-53). This poem's subject suggests that Guiraut knew Alfonso and his son, and that he received Castilian patronage. As for Raimon Vidal de Besalú, although J. Massó-Torrents ventures that Raimon was born around 1160 (Cluzel 11), we only have two dates about his life, and these confirm that he could have visited Alfonso's court. In the poem "Abril issi e mais intrava", Raimon specified that the Aragonese King Pedro II still lived (Cluzel 12), a reference that dates the text before the year 1213, when Pedro died in the battle of Muret. In the Castia Gilos Raimon also speaks about Alfonso VIII de Castilla as if he were already dead, dating the poem after 1214, the year Alfonso died. Even though we know little about Raimon Vidal's life, these dates confirm what we already gathered from the detailed descriptions of the Castia Gilos: like Guillem de Cabestany and Guiraut de Calanson, Raimon visited Alfonso's court and personally knew the monarch.

The eighth figure on our list of troubadours is Guilhem Ademar (flourished 1195-1217), a native of Gavaudan in southern France, who, according to his Vida, worked as a joglar and joined the order of Grandmont later in life (Biographies 349)14. Apart from these facts, we know from Guilhem Ademar's sirventes "Non pot esser sofert ni atendut" that he had a relationship with Alfonso VIII:

---

13 Alfonso received Guillem de Cabestany and his partners quite generously. In fact, the king went into serious debt, and had to ask for money from the Castilian clergy, who customarily did not contribute to the royal finances (Crónica latina [1984] 28; Spanish translation, Crónica latina [1999] 49; English translation, The Latin Chronicle 44).

14 Kurt Almqvist points out that "l'ordre de Grammon" the Vida mentions was a Benedictine abbey in the Limousin that Guilhem's contemporaries knew because of its austere regulations. Grandmont Abbey became one of the most powerful in the Midi, especially during the twelfth century. Another troubadour, Peire Rogier, joined the abbey during these same years (Ademar14).
Si-l, cui dopton li masmut,
e-l meiller coms de la crestiantat
mandavon ost, puois ben son remasut,
e nom de Dieu, farion gran bontat
sobre'ls [. . .]. (Riquer, Los trovadores 2: 1100)

The *sirventes* probably dates from around 1190, since it seems to respond to Caliph Abu Yusuf’s call for a jihad: to counteract the Muslim holy war, Guilhem Ademar urges two Christian leaders to gather their “ost” against the treacherous Saracens (“pagans sarrazins traitors”). Riquer (Los trovadores II, 1101) posits that the phrase “cui dopton li masmut” refers to Alfonso VIII, who continually fought the Muslims and became their most feared enemy. Almqvist confirms that this “reis N’Amfos” cannot allude to either Alfonso IX de León or Alfonso II de Aragón. His reasoning is that the Muslims did not fear the former, because Alfonso IX had allied himself with the Almohads against the king of Castilla on several occasions. As for the latter, Alfonso de Aragón was not raising an army against Al-Andalus in the period bracketing 1190 (Ademar 29). But Alfonso VIII de Castilla does fit the description: he almost single-handedly sustained the Peninsular Christians’ war against the Almohads, and actually did march against them in 1195 and 1212. Almqvist believes that the poem’s “ost” alludes to the war effort that culminated in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (29-30), although it seems most likely that it refers to the defeat of 1195 at Alarcos. In fact, the “meiller coms de la crestiantat” that the poem mentions must speak of Raymond VI of Toulouse, whom Alfonso VIII tried to convince to join his crusade against the Almohads (30). According to this interpretation, Guilhem Ademar wrote his *sirventes* to help Alfonso either to prepare the mood before the battle in his own court or to convince Raymond VI, or perhaps to achieve both purposes. In any case, Guilhem addresses Alfonso in a familiar way, which indicates that the troubadour stayed in the Castilian court at least once (35). What is more, Almqvist has found a reference to Alfonso’s grandson, Fernando III, in another of Guilhem’s poems, “S’ieu conognes qu’em fos enans” (21-23), further confirming his relationship with Alfonso VIII and the Castilian court.

Aimeric de Peguilhan (flourished 1190-1221), a native of Toulouse, also visited Alfonso, as his historically accurate *Vida* confirms (Riquer, Los trovadores II, 963):

E'N Guillems de Berguedan si l'auculli; et enansset lui en son trobar, en la primera canson qu'el avia faita. E fetz lo joglar,
qu'el li det son pallafre e son vestirs. E presentet lo al rei Anfos de Castella, que'l crec d'arnes e d'onor. Et estet en aquellas encontradas lonc temps. (Biographies 967)

After having spent some time in Cataluña, Aimeric met Guillem de Berguedà, who brought him to Castella and introduced him to Alfonso VIII. Since Aimeric dedicated three songs to Alfonso (Riquer, Los trovadores II, 963), his poems confirm that he did in fact dwell in the noble king's court for some time ("Et estet en aquellas encontradas lonc temps"). Moreover, he remembered Alfonso fondly during his Italian exile, in his nostalgic song "En aquell temps que'l reys mori N'Amfos". In short, these testimonies confirm that Aimeric de Peguillian enjoyed Alfonso VIII's patronage, probably for a "lonc temps", as his Vida attests.

This list of nine important troubadours suggests that Alfonso VIII's court enjoyed a cultural life that greatly profited from one of the golden ages of Catalan literature. This literary connection paralleled the close political relationship between the kingdoms of Castilla and Aragón. While Alfonso waged almost continuous war against his western and southern neighbors—the kingdom of León (Jiménez de Rada, Historia de rebus 236) and the Muslims from Al-Andalus—his armies and those of Aragón fought as allies in practically every military campaign. Alfonso VIII sided with Alfonso II de Aragón in 1172, when the two kings attacked the kingdom of Navarra together (Martínez Díez, Alfonso VIII 85). Castilla and Aragón also faced the Almohads together on several occasions. Alfonso II de Aragón helped Alfonso VIII take Cuenca in 1177 (Jiménez de Rada, Historia de rebus Hispaniae 249), and Pedro II cooperated with his uncle Alfonso in the crusade of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. Alfonso rewarded the Aragonese loyalty with two very significant gestures: in 1177, Alfonso declared Aragón free of Castilian vassalage, and in the 1179 treaty of Gazola he conceded to Aragón the rights to conquer the kingdoms of Valencia, Xátiva, and Denia from the Muslims. The Aragonese kings maintained this friend-

15 This song also mentions Alfonso VIII's unfortunate son, don Fernando.
16 Navarra had separated from Aragón after Alfonso the Battler's death and had extended its boundaries at the expense of Aragón (Chaytor 66). Alfonso II stopped the Navarrese development using his Castilian allies: the two kings divided Navarra among themselves in a 1179 secret treaty that Alfonso VIII fulfilled in 1198, when his and Peter II of Aragón's armies entered Navarra simultaneously (Martínez Díez, Alfonso VIII 227-29).
17 Nominally, Castilla held Aragón in fiefdom since Alfonso VII's times.
ship, and helped Alfonso VIII in his most difficult hour, when a combined Leonese-Almohad force entered Castilla in 1196. Peter II loaned his Castilian uncle a thousand knights, and he himself marched at Alfonso’s side to attack the capital city of León.

The troubadours played an important role to strengthen the ties between the two neighboring kingdoms: the Catalan-Aragonese probably viewed Alfonso VIII’s marriage to a Plantagenet as a great opportunity to forge a formidable alliance of troubadour kingdoms of the Plantagenets, the Castilians, and the Aragonese, which would protect their common interests in southern France against the expansion of the northern Capetian monarchs (Thomas T.N. Bisson 37). With the powerful armies of Castilla to their west (Alfonso VIII had received Gascony as part of Eleanor’s dowry), and the prestigious Plantagenets to the north (Richard the Lionheart, the troubadour king and Eleanor’s brother, possessed Aquitaine and the Poitou), the Aragonese kings could feel that their Occitanian lands stayed out of the king of France’s reach. Because of their strong relationship with Aragón, the Castilians secured the Aragonese kings’ help in the Reconquest and in their quarrels with León, as well as in their claim to Gascony. Famous troubadours such as the ones in our list traveled busily from Alfonso II’s court in Aragón and Cataluña to Castilla, and back to the Plantagenet domains, making the allies aware of their ties and reinforcing their common front against the ambitious French kings in the north.

The Castilian-Aragonese friendship fomented a continuous flux of troubadours from Cataluña and other areas of Aragonese influence, a cultural exchange that affected Castilian literature as strongly as it impacted its politics. Since the frequent interaction between the Castilians and the troubadours revealed to the former the power and prestige of the latter’s vernacular literature, Castilian scholars could reconsider the necessity of writing in Latin. We already know that Alfonso VIII received many more troubadours than any other Castilian king before him. Alfonso, who continually listened to these vernacular songs, signed the first important document ever written in Castilian, the Cabreros treaty, in March 26, 1206 (Fernando Gómez Redondo 20). Other diplomatic texts written in the vernacular followed this treaty in the subsequent years of Alfonso’s reign; this prepared the path for Alfonso X, who commissioned many legal, historical, and scientific prose works in Castilian. Moreover, the founding work of

18 During Alfonso VIII’s reign, Castilla and Aragón only fought a brief war in 1191 (Martínez Díez, Alfonso VIII 281).
Castilian literature, the *Cantar de mio Cid*, also dates from 1207, well into Alfonso VIII’s reign (José Fradejas Lebrero 52; Nilda Guglielmi 148; Peter E. Russell 344; Antonio Ubieto Arreta 188-89). The successful example of troubadour poetry inclined Alfonso to promote literary texts in the Castilian vernacular. When deciding what vernacular language in which to write, Alfonso would have had to consider several options. Provençal offered too many stylistic difficulties for Castilians, who very rarely wrote poetry in this language. As for Galician-Portuguese, it possessed a powerful tradition as the lyric language of the western Iberian Peninsula, but it represented a close association with León, Castilla’s relentless rival during Alfonso VIII’s time: Castilians wrote lyric poetry in Galician-Portuguese when the kingdoms of Castilla and León formed a single crown, but never during their separation, as under Sancho III, Alfonso VIII, and Enrique I. If Alfonso VIII desired a vernacular literature that praised him as effectively as the troubadour lyric, he was left with one logical choice: Castilian, the language of traditional epic poetry.

Like the troubadour songs that had come before, the *Cantar de mio Cid* addressed Alfonso’s key political issues: the Reconquest (Fradejas Lebrero 63), Castilian leadership (María Eugenia Lacarra 172), courtesy, and even family and dynastic situations. For example, the poem’s villains, the Vani-Gómez family, belonged to the powerful Castro clan, who had betrayed Alfonso by siding with León and the Almohads. As for the poem’s hero, Rodrigo Díaz was Alfonso VIII’s ancestor (Lacarra 147-59). We may speculate that one of the Cid’s most peculiar characteristics, his *mesura* (Francisco Rico xl), reached the Castilla of the *Cantar de mio Cid* by way of troubadour poetry. The *Cantar de mio Cid* presented Rodrigo Díaz as an essentially moderate hero from the character’s first utterance, when he stoically comments on his unfair exile:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sospiró mio Cid,} & \quad \text{ca mucho avié grandes cuidados,} \\
\text{fabló mio Cid} & \quad \text{bien e tan mesurado:} \\
\text{“¡Grado a tí, Señor,} & \quad \text{Padre que estás en alto!} \\
\text{¡Esto me an buelto} & \quad \text{mios enemigos malos!” (vv. 6-9)}
\end{align*}
\]

We cannot encounter this *mesura* in the *Cantar de mio Cid*’s probable sources, but the poetry of Alfonso VIII’s troubadours did promote *mesura* as a fundamental quality: Guiraut de Bornelh upheld the ideal lover’s “mesura” in three different *cansos* (154; 236; 237), as did Peire Vidal, who suggested that the lover be “amezurat” (Riquer, *Los trovadores* 2: 913). Guillem Ademar’s lady also shows *mesura* (Ademar 126), and
Raimon Vidal de Besalú celebrated the virtue twice in his “Abril iss’e mais intravá” (Castigos para celosos 183; 205). In short, one of the Cantar de mio Cid’s most distinctive characteristics may originate in troubadour poetry and Alfonso VIII’s Aragonese policy. Joseph J. Duggan suggests that the Aragonese influenced the Cantar de mio Cid even further: he sustains that the poem was performed at the Cistercian abbey of Santa María de la Huerta, on the border between Castilla and Aragón, to celebrate a summit that reunited the monarchs of the neighboring kingdoms (106). Through their troubadours or their physical presence, the Aragonese count-kings definitely shaped early Castilian literature.

Even without Duggan’s argument, the facts suggest that the troubadour lyric led Alfonso VIII to support the Castilian vernacular. Alfonso married a Plantagenet, hosted many more troubadours than any other Castilian king, and pursued a policy of steady alliance with his Aragonese neighbors. Nine important troubadours visited Alfonso’s court and enjoyed his generous patronage, and other Occitanian poets, such as Bertran de Born, who presumably never met him, enthusiastically praised his name. The troubadours strengthened Castilian ties with their Plantagenet and Aragonese allies, and widely celebrated Alfonso as a defender of Christendom, and as a generous and courtly king. The troubadours warned Christian lords to respect and fear Alfonso, and in other occasions encouraged them to join his crusade against the Almohads. Alfonso realized that the troubadour lyric served as effective propaganda, and decided to promote the Castilian vernacular both in political and literary contexts.

Works Cited


