

Song against the King of Alemaigne

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Any chance to hear the authentic voice of ordinary people is rather exceptional for the early and mid medieval period – but here's one example. It's a political song of triumph from the Battle of Lewes in 1264. This is an event with explicit undertones of social radicalism, where the royalist side is faced by an opponent that draws genuine strength from the support of classes other than the barons.

You can't help thinking that if more songs had survived you would find a lot of examples of this sort of abuse – but of course no baron had any interest in writing down the thoughts of the great unwashed, unless they came through his courts so he could make a bit of money at it.

A few bits of background. The Richard referred to is the king's brother, the Earl of Cornwall but also the King of the Romans. The title king of the Romans was supposed to be the ante room to the title Holy Roman Emperor, but Richard failed to make the stick. The Holy Roman Emperor was basically the king of the Germans, hence his popular title here.

Before the battle of Lewes Simon de Montfort had offered Richard 30,000 marks to procure a peace. In the 1st stanza this is alluded to, but it has to be said in a rather one-eyed sort of way, since it's claimed to have been Richard's exorbitant demand. Probably also worth noting that Windsor castle is a key Royal castle and hangout, hence the constant reference to it.

Below is the translation, and then there's the original in English.

A Modern Translation

Sit still and listen to me
The king of Alemaigne by my loyalty
30,000 pounds he asked
To make peace in the country
And so he did more

Richard you were ever a traitor You will deceive no more

Richard of Alemaigne, when he was king
He spent all his money on good living
Have he not of Wallingford one furlong?
Let him have, as he brews, evil to drink
In spite of Windsor

Song against the King of Alemaigne

Richard you were ever a traitor

You will deceive no more

The king of Germany thought to do very well
They seized the mill to make a castle
With their sharp swords they ground the steel
They though the sails could be Mangonels
To help Windsor

Richard you were ever a traitor

You will deceive no more

The king of Germany gathered his host
He made a castle of a millpost
He went with his pride and his great boast
And brought from Germany many a wretched soul
To garrison Windsor

Richard you were ever a traitor

You will deceive no more

My God above us he did a great sin
Who let the Earl of Warenne pass over the sea
He robbed England, the moor and the fen,
Of the gold and the silver and carried them away
For the love of Windsor

Richard you were ever a traitor

You will deceive no more

Sir Simon de Montfort has sworn by his chin
Had he now here the Earl of Warenne
He should never come to his house
Neither with shield nor with spear nor any other kit
To help Windsor

Richard you were ever a traitor

You will deceive no more

Song against the King of Alemaigne

Sir Simon de Montfort had sworn by his head
Had he now here Sir Hugh Bigod
He should pay here a twelvemonth's scot
He should never more march on his feet
To help Windsor

Richard you were ever a traitor
You will deceive no more

Be it agreeable to thee or disagreeable, Sir Edward
Though shalt ride spurless on your hack
All the straight road towards Dover
Thou shalt never more break covenant
And that sore rueth thee
Edward though didst like a shrew
Forsooketh thine Uncle's teaching

Richard you were ever a traitor
You will deceive no more

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The song in its original version

SITTETH alle stille, ant herkneth to me;
The Kyng of Alemaigne, bi mi leaute,
Thritti thousent pound askede he
For te make the pees in the countre,
Ant so he dude more.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

Richard of Alemaigne, whil that he wes trying,
He spende al is tresour opon swyvyng,
Haveth he nout of Walingford oferlyng,
Let him habbe, ase he brew, bale to dryng,
Maugre Wyndesore.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

The Kyng of Alemaigne wende do ful wel,
He saisede the mulne for a castel,
With hare sharpe swerdes he grounde the stel,
He wende that the sayles were mangonel
To helpe Wyndesore.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

The Kyng of Alemaigne gederede ys host,
Makede him a castel of a mulne post,
Wende with is prude, ant is muchele bost,
Brohte from Alemayne mony sori gost
To store Wyndesore.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

By God, that is aboven ous, he dude much synne,
That lette passen over see the Erl of Warynne:
He hath robbed Engelond, the mores, ant the fenne,
The gold, ant the selver, and y-boren henne,
For love of Wyndesore.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

Song against the King of Alemaigne

Sire Simond de Mountfort hath suore bi ys chyn,
Hevede he nou here the Erl of Waryn,
Shuld he never more come to is yn,
Ne with sheld, ne with spere, ne with other gyn,
To help of Wyndesore.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

Sire Simon de Montfort hath suore bi ys cop,
Hevede he nou here Sire Hue de Bigot:
Al he shulde grante here twelfmoneth scot
Shulde he never more with his sot pot
To helpe Wyndesore.

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.

Be the luef, be the loht, Sire Edward,
Thou shalt ride sporteles o thy lyard
Al the ryhte way to Dover-ward,
Shalt thou never more breke foreward;
Ant that reweth sore
Edward, thou ddest as a shreward,
Forsoke thyn emes lore

Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Tricthen shalt thou never more.