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## **Flamenca: a wake for a dying civilization**

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## *Flamenca*: a wake for a dying civilization?

Henri Jeanjean

*Le Roman de Flamenca*, a mutilated anonymous manuscript discovered by chance in Carcassonne in 1834 by Raynouard, (who gave it the name of its heroine) and first translated by M. P. Meyer in 1865, has become one of the most written about works in Occitan. Its graceful style has been noted<sup>1</sup> and its psychology and realism have been commented upon by Nelli and Lavaud, who stress that this poem had a fundamental role in the development of French literature as the Occitan romances (*Jaufre* and *Flamenca*) started the long tradition which lead to Marcel Proust via the *Princesse de Clèves*<sup>2</sup>.

All comic forms are to be found in *Flamenca*—comedy of situation, play on words, understatements—and all critics who have studied *Flamenca* from various perspectives agree that one of its special qualities is its humour. Whilst some of the comic elements may appear timeless, inasmuch as they pertain to a tradition which existed prior to the 13th century and continued until the present, we may wonder if some aspects of this humour do not offer a reflection on the social and political upheaval occurring during that period. The combination of direct intervention by the author, and comic exaggeration, may well be the key to understanding the author's deep intentions which can only be fully understood if the socio-political framework within which the work was written is first taken into account.

1 A. Jeanroy, *Histoire sommaire de la poésie Occitane*, (Toulouse: Privat, 1945) p.96.  
2 R. Lavaud et R. Nelli, *Les Troubadours*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960) p.632.

Scholars have tried to determine both the name of the author and the date of composition. C. Chabaneau<sup>3</sup> saw in lines 1722-1736<sup>4</sup> a specific indication about the author whose name could have been Bernadet, a protégé of a member of the Roquefeuil household, the seigneur d'Alga, while other scholars think that the vagueness of those lines does not seem to warrant such a conclusion.

Charles Grimm<sup>5</sup> claimed that *Flamenca* could only have been written after 1272 but his analysis, based on the description of the arms of Archambaut de Bourbon, appears unreliable to most literary critics. Robert Lafont<sup>6</sup> and René Nelli<sup>7</sup> both agree with Alfred Jeanroy who asserted that the work was written in Rouergue around 1240 - 1250<sup>8</sup> and Charles Langlois concurs by stating that *Flamenca* is an incomparable source for the history of feelings and of customs towards the time of Louis IX's accession to the throne<sup>9</sup>.

As early as 1209, the year the Crusade against the Albigenses had started, Occitania was stunned by the ruthlessness of the invasion. In Béziers, the first town to fall to the crusaders, the entire population, estimated between 10,000 and 24,000, was systematically slaughtered, including the thousands—mainly women and children—who were burnt alive in the church where they had taken refuge. The impact of the Crusade was felt by all and the troubadours were not immune from the upheaval. An immediate effect of the Crusade was to halt the development of *trobar*<sup>10</sup> and a new literature of resistance emerged. 'L'idée de résistance s'enrichit très vite d'une contestation des fausses valeurs que représente l'ordre installé par les Français et le Clergé'.<sup>11</sup> This was mostly evident through the *sirventes*<sup>12</sup> campaign against the Crusade which lasted from 1210 to around 1270, sharpening the Occitan society's already well-formulated public moral conviction. Some of these poems had lasting popular success: a bourgeois from Toulouse was interrogated by the

3 C. Chabaneau, in *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 4e série II, 1888, p.103.

4 Verse numbers correspond to the text established by J-C Huchet, *Flamenca, Roman occitan du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 10/18, 1988).

5 C. Grimm, *Étude sur le Roman de Flamenca*, Thèse d'Université (Paris: 1930).

6 R. Lafont, et C. Anatole, *Nouvelle Histoire de la littérature Occitane*, (Paris: PUF, 1970).

7 Lavaud et Nelli, *Les Troubadours*.

8 Jeanroy, *Histoire sommaire*, p. 96.

9 C. Langlois, *La société française au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris: Hachette, 1904) p.632.

10 Lafont et Anatole, *Nouvelle Histoire*, p.132.

11 *Ibid.*, p.150: "The idea of resistance was rapidly enriched by the questioning of the false values represented by the order put in place by the French and the Clergy." (my translation as are all subsequent translations from French and Occitan).

12 The *sirventes* were poems, often satirical, which dealt with historical or current affairs events in terms of ethics and had become a 'grand genre' thanks to Bertrand de Born in the 1180s.

Inquisition in 1274 for singing a *sirventes* written a full fifty years before by a Toulouse *Faidit*, Guilhem Figuèira.<sup>13</sup> This particular work was famous because it attacked Rome directly, pointing out the Pope's responsibility in the war. These poems were not written by Cathars or other heretics, but from a Catholic point of view. They attacked the hypocrisy of 'l'impérialisme de la foi, allié d'un nouveau type d'impérialisme étatique'<sup>14</sup> which had become evident as early as 1212. That year, Simon de Montfort, the military leader of the Crusade, believing his victory to be almost complete, organised a meeting in Pamiers of handpicked followers to give a new set of laws to the conquered region. The Statutes of Pamiers, promulgated on December 1, set out the new order, determining the roles of the Clergy, the Nobility and the Third Estate. But the only nobles given any power were the conquerors, whilst the indigenous nobles were pushed aside and deliberately kept away from all aspects of public life, political, administrative or military. This legislation was intended to 'ordonner la vie des diverses couches de la société dans le cadre nouveau qui était né de la conquête'<sup>15</sup>, thereby destroying the very fabric of the Occitan civilization.

For Charles Camproux, the essential characteristics of this civilization lay in the natural facility of the Occitan population to accept the coexistence of multiple opinions and of diverse groups in their midst.<sup>16</sup> According to the troubadours, the spirit of this society was best described by the term *paratge*. This word meant:

honneur, droiture, égalité, négation du droit du plus fort,  
respect de la personne humaine pour soi et pour les autres.  
Le *paratge* s'applique dans tous les domaines, politique,  
religieux, sentimental<sup>17</sup>.

This respect for human beings was also applied to Jews and at the Council of Saint Gilles, Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse, and twelve of his major vassals had to swear they would stop giving official positions to Jews.<sup>18</sup> This

- 13 A. Dupuy, *Histoire de la Civilisation Occitane*, t. 1 (Lunel: Dupuy, 1980) p.143.
- 14 Lafont et Anatole, *Nouvelle Histoire*, p. 151; 'the imperialism of the Faith allied with a new kind of imperialism of the State.'
- 15 M. Roquebert, *L'Épopée Cathare*, t. 1 (Toulouse: Privat, 1970) p. 498; 'to regulate the life of the various strata of the society within the new framework born of the conquest.'
- 16 C. Camproux, *Le Joy d'Amour des Troubadours*, (Montpellier: IEO, 1965).
- 17 F. Niel, *Albigéois et Cathares*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974) p. 67; 'honour, rectitude, equality, negation of the right of the strongest, respect for human beings, for oneself and for others. It was to be applied in all domains, political, religious and amorous.'
- 18 G. Saige, *Les Juifs du Languedoc*, (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1881) p. 19.

religious tolerance which allowed the Cathar religion to flourish was a tradition dating back to occupation by the Visigoths who, being too few to impose their Arian religion on their subjects, had had to rule in collaboration with the Catholic bishops. Hence,

quelques siècles plus tard, le phénomène de princes occitans gouvernant et protégeant des sujets de religions diverses ne sera point un fait nouveau et inouï, passible de l'excommunication....ce qui sera nouveau chez les peuples d'oc, ce sera précisément l'attitude des Croisés de Simon de Montfort<sup>19</sup>

—their intolerance.

After his victory against England in 1214 at Bouvines, Philippe-Auguste agreed to take part in the Crusade because the Occitan social system of independent cities and a relatively large proportion of communal land, represented a threat to the increasingly stratified feudal society in the north. The treaty of Meaux in 1229, although restating the religious principles which had been previously enunciated, stressed the new political aspect of the Crusade. By this treaty Jeanne, Raimon's only daughter, was to marry Alphonse de Poitiers (brother of Louis IX). In the event that the couple had no children the domains of the count would directly be attached to the kingdom, even if Raimon VII were to have a son. The Occitan nobility was to be integrated into the French feudal system: castles not taken over directly by the king were to be destroyed as were the town fortifications, and Occitan noblewomen could no longer marry Occitan noblemen without the king's approval.

A few more key events, occurring at the time *Flamenca* was most probably written, need to be mentioned. In 1233 the first inquisition was ordered and in 1240 the young Trancavel<sup>20</sup> asked all his father's vassals to join him in an insurrection. As Jacques Madaule notes: 'L'Eglise cathare n'a jamais été plus active qu'en ces années 1240-1244'<sup>21</sup> which saw the fall of Montségur, the fortress which had become—and still is—the symbol of the whole Cathar resistance.

19 C. Camproux, *Histoire de la Littérature Occitane*, (Paris: Payot, 1971) p. 13; 'a few centuries later, the phenomenon of Occitan princes ruling and protecting their subjects belonging to various religions, was not something new, unbelievable and liable to excommunication: what was new for the Occitans, was the attitude of Simon de Montfort's crusaders.'

20 The Trancavels, viscounts of Béziers and Carcassonne, were the second most powerful family in the region after the counts of Toulouse.

21 Jacques Madaule, *Le drame albigeois et l'unité française*, (Paris: Idées/Gallimard, 1973) p. 160; 'The Cathar Church was never as active as during the period 1240-1244'.

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The Auvergne, where the author of *Flamenca* possibly lived, had also been given to Alphonse, and when Raimon Berenger V of Provence died in 1245, the Pope and the king of France put pressure on his daughter to marry Charles d'Anjou, another brother of Louis IX. The Occitan aristocracy was ruined or had been replaced, and was no longer able to offer any resistance.

The whole Crusade against the Albigenses is important to note as there was a symbiosis between the Cathars and the troubadours who shared the same audience. The Perfects preached to the same public for whom the Catholic troubadours sang. This is particularly evident in a beautiful poem by Peire Vidal, the troubadour feted in various courts such as Aragon, Provence and Lombardy, in which he described what was, for him, his paradise of love, of *Fin'Amor*. His garden of Eden encompasses the castles of Fanjeaux, Laurac, Gaillac, Saissac, those around Carcassonne and Albi: in fact

le pays qui est paradis de courtoisie, le cercle des cours où  
l'amour est roi, c'est en fait l'exact pays défini comme  
l'épicentre de l'hérésie en Languedoc: les données du poème  
d'amour recouvrent parfaitement les données des registres  
d'Inquisition, comme celui de Bernard de Caux et Jean de  
St Pierre (1245-1246).<sup>22</sup>

Although there is an apparent contradiction between the two, Anne Brenon points out that 'les deux phénomènes, le religieux et le social, l'ascétique et l'érotique, apparaissent pourtant comme deux éléments constitutifs de la même grande civilisation médiévale occitane'.<sup>23</sup>

The ideal *Fin'Amor* demanded that love be sincere, mutual, and freely agreed to; this helped discredit marriages, that were a pure product of economic or political forces, and into which individuals were often coerced. The Cathar religion, too, discredited marriage as an institution: sexual intercourse was as bad within marriage as outside it and no sacrament could legitimise it. Therefore Catharism

22 Anne Brenon, 'Sur les marges de l'Etat toulousain, Fin'Amor et catharisme: Peire Vidal et Raimon de Miraval entre Laurac et Cabaret' in *l'Etat toulousain avant la Croisade*, (Centre d'Etude de la Littérature Occitane: William Blake, 1994) p. 144; 'the places where courtly love was supreme are contained in the exact region defined as the epicentre of the heresy in Languedoc: the data of the love poem cover exactly the data in the registers of the Inquisition such as the register of Bernard de Caux and Jean de St Pierre (1245-1246).'

23 *Ibid.*, p.140; 'the two phenomena, the religious and the social, the ascetic and the erotic seem to be two constituent elements of the great medieval Occitan civilization.'

donnait bonne conscience à l'union libre, dans le même temps que les troubadours exaltaient les vertus de l'adultère...et il est évident que le catharisme trouvait dans les milieux courtois un terrain tout préparé pour une doctrine qui niait la valeur du sacrement du mariage.<sup>24</sup>

Georges Duby has pointed out the dual nature of the Occitan poetry which both contributed to and reflected the social norms.<sup>25</sup> *Flamenca* mirrored the upheaval which was sweeping or had swept aside the Cathar movement, the courtly ideals, and the independence of Occitania. The plot of the romance is simple. In order to punish her husband (Archambaud) who, because of his morbid jealousy, locked her up in a tower, Flamenca betrays him with Guillem, the Knight who frees her. Their relationship develops, during religious offices, in the course of carefully planned encounters in the Church where Guillem has taken the place of the cleric. Their illicit love is consummated at the baths where Flamenca goes for health reasons, Guillem having dug a tunnel to join her there.

Flamenca has sometimes been portrayed as a symbol of the Cathar religion. Olson stated that:

What evidence there is would seem to indicate that the first part of the tournament is a miniature picture of the spread of heretical inclinations among the southern lords who kneel before Flamenca when they are conquered by the knight.<sup>26</sup>

Whilst the numerous erotic elements in the book would preclude brandishing it as a Cathar-inspired work, the whole poem is nonetheless an all-out attack on the Catholic Church.

Firstly, the church as a place of worship is desacralised: Flamenca spits in the church and though Nelli states that this gesture was natural for a woman in the 12th century<sup>27</sup>, would that also be true in a church? This may be only a small detail but the church, throughout the poem, is never anything other than

24 Roquebert, *L'Épopée Cathare*, p. 124; 'gave good conscience to free love when the troubadours extolled the virtues of adultery...and it is evident that catharism could find fertile ground in the courtly love environment for a doctrine which negated the value of the sacrament of marriage.'

25 G. Duby, *Mâle Moyen-Age; de l'amour et autres essais*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1988) p. 74.

26 P. Olson, 'Le Roman de Flamenca', *Studies in Philology*, 55 (1958), p. 20.

27 Lavaud et Nelli, *Les Troubadours.*, p. 804, note a.

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the place in which Guillem can seduce Flamenca. This seduction is conducted according to the Church calendar since Archambaut allows his wife to attend only on Sundays and major religious feasts. Furthermore, Guillem must pretend to be a cleric as the only way he can communicate with Flamenca is to bring her the psalm book used to 'give the peace'. Not only is Guillem's wooing physically tied to the celebration of the Mass,<sup>28</sup> but the ceremony itself also reminds the reader of a Cathar ritual. As Anne Brenon describes two women Perfects receiving their *consolamentum*, 'le diacre et son compagnon les saluèrent de la façon rituelle et leur transmirent, par l'intermédiaire du livre, le baiser de paix de l'Eglise. De Parfait à Parfaite, de Parfaite à Parfaite, la paix de Dieu se propagea à travers toute l'assistance.'<sup>29</sup>

Every single church scene only shows us one aspect of the ceremonies, the happiness or the frustrations they bring to Guillem. Even before his first mention in the text, religious ceremonies were mentioned in a context which had nothing to do with devotion. Archambaut curses the long duration of the marriage ceremony which delays its consummation and for the same reason calls for early vespers to the sorrow of the ladies who would rather watch the exploits of the knights at the unfinished tourney:

So marit perda qui la va  
 Quandis cavalliers i biort!  
 Ja per vespras nom perdam cort. (v.924-6)<sup>30</sup>

They then walk to the church talking about love.

Religious festivities, because they provide her the opportunity of meeting Guillem, have given back Flamenca her taste for life but it is not God she thanks for it. Alis, her lady-in-waiting, sums up Flamenca's and her two lady attendants' feelings when she complains that the personified religious feast days boded evil for them: these days are too few now that the women want them, whereas, earlier on in the year, when the women could not care less about them, they seemed to return every day

28 P. Damon, 'Courtesy and Comedy in Le Roman de Flamenca' in *Romance Philology*, XVII (1963-64) pp. 608-615.

29 A. Brenon, *Les femmes cathares*, (Paris: Perrin, 1992) p. 17; 'the deacon and his companion saluted them in the ritual manner and conveyed to them, through the Book, the peace kiss of the Church. From Perfect to Perfect, God's peace was propagated throughout the congregation.'

30 'May the woman who goes (to Vespers) while a knight still jousts lose her husband! We will not abandon the Court for vespers!'

Ben pauc ne son,  
 Domna, de festas vas que solon;  
 certas, eu cug que mal nos volon.  
 L'an, el mei an, can pron non tenon,  
 van tot jorn las festas e venon; (v. 4794-8)<sup>31</sup>

Priesthood does not fare any better: to thank the priest who had tonsured him, Guillem gave him a beautiful gold goblet, telling him that one has to pay one's barber

Sener, tenes vostre loguier,  
 que pagar deyu hom son barbier (v.3597-8).<sup>32</sup>

Whilst the tonsure is the symbol of the priest's chastity, Guillem gets his only to seduce Flamenca.

After Guillem has left Bourbon to search for fame, through her husband he sends to Flamenca an illuminated poem. The description of the drawing, representing Guillem and Flamenca, reminds us of the scene of the Annunciation as shown by numerous artists of the time, and to make sure the reader gets the message, the author spells out the fact that *Fin'Amors* looks like an angel:

en forma d'angel, fin'Amors (v. 7111).

The Cathars did not believe in the Incarnation, since anything corporeal could only be the work of the Devil. The scene is transformed into an erotic one since, when the manuscript is folded, the two figures depicted of Flamenca and Guillem are in an embrace.

The Scriptures are not safe from irony. When the gospel for the day is read during Mass, Guillem wishes it would last for ever because he can then catch a glimpse of Flamenca standing up. Instead it appears to be as short as New Year's, the shortest of all

mais tam petitet l'a durat  
 que cel d'an nòu l'a ressemblat (v.2527-8).

31 'There are now very few feast days; I think they wish us evil. In the beginning and in the middle of the year, when they were useless to us, they came and went all the time.'

32 'Sir, here is your fee: one must always pay one's barber.'

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When *Flamenca* and her attendants, Marguerite and Alis, repeat the first words exchanged between the two lovers: 'Ailas', 'Que plans', the author tells us that they did remember this 'lesson' very well (v. 4493) but the Occitan word *lisson* was used ironically as it also referred to a text of the morning service in the breviary.<sup>33</sup>

Guillem pledges to God an income if He grants him *Flamenca*, and to build Him churches. Making such vows might have been normal at the time, but here, Guillem is making a commercial deal, with the apostles and the Saints as guarantors (v. 5056-5070).

*Flamenca*'s oath to her husband to guard herself as well as he had guarded her

marves sobre sanz juraria,  
vezent mas donçellas, ades,  
qu'en aissi tostems mi gardes  
co vos m'aves saïns garada; (v. 6686-9)<sup>34</sup>

might have been technically correct, but René Nelli points out how blasphemous it really was.<sup>35</sup>

*Flamenca* mirrors the contempt, felt by a very large majority of the population at the time, for a Church that was victorious only through the help of the Northern armies. The work also comments on the demise of writing in Occitan and the growing ascendancy of langue d'Oïl literature that accompanied Northern military supremacy. It was noted earlier that there were close links between the troubadours and the courts, where the Cathars could find some support. The replacement of the indigenous nobility by a foreign one, and the destruction of the castles, meant that all courtly life disappeared from the South with, obviously, dire consequences for the troubadours and their poetry. Most poets exiled in Italy produced only biographies of their colleagues and their predecessors, and for those remaining in Occitania and still writing, either secular love was replaced by a religious one or they had to follow the French literary model. *Flamenca*, then, can be seen as a reaction against the supplanting of the troubadours by the trouvères.

Guillem studied in Paris where he acquired all his knowledge of love from books, as he had read all the authors who speak of it and are concerned with how lovers should behave (v. 1761-6).

33 Lavaud et Nelli, *Les Troubadours*, p. 876, note b.

34 'I will swear now to all saints, in front of my ladies, that I will guard myself as well as you have guarded me here'.

35 Lavaud et Nelli, *Les Troubadours*, p. 988, note e.

The whole work is clearly referential. For example Guillem's decision to fall in love with Flamenca whom he had never seen, echoes 'l'amors de luènh' (love from afar), which had been sung by Jaufre Rudel a century before. Jealousy, one of the central themes in the book, was already to be found in the fabliaux and within Occitan literature under the name of *Castia-gilós* (punishment of the jealous), notably, as indicated by Pierre Bec, in the *castia-gilós* of Raimon Vidal de Besalú or in the short story of the parrot of Arnaud de Carcassès.<sup>36</sup> But the author demonstrates throughout the work a thorough knowledge of the whole corpus of literature available at the time: French, Occitan, Celtic, Latin or Greek. He mentions a great number of works when he describes them performed by the jongleurs at Archambaut's wedding. He imitates and parodies some of them, and alludes to others throughout his writing. Guillem could be compared to Lancelot inasmuch as both were dominated by love for their woman, but if Chrétien de Troyes seems to mock Lancelot, the author of *Flamenca* goes much further and ridicules Guillem whose manifestations of love indicate that he has completely lost his mind. He mocks all the debates which characterised the literature of the time. Courtly love for example had its rules and its tribunals which debated the merits of each one of those rules. One of the topics was to know which of the body organs was most faithful in love. Was it the eyes, transmitting love directly to the heart, or the mouth, which intercepted some of that love and kept it for itself? The author ridicules this literary fashion by showing us, at length, Guillem's ears talking to his mouth, and the mouth arguing with the heart. (v.4372 - 4462). At the time *Flamenca* was written, around 1250, such theories of love no longer carried as much social weight because of the constant battering they had received from the Catholic Church, reinvigorated by the Crusade. The Catholic Church, always opposed to the adulterous eroticism of the troubadours, influenced the image of women in their poetry as, according to the ideology of the Inquisition, there had to be a strict division between carnal and spiritual love.<sup>37</sup> Whilst the author blends the past and the present it may be, as suggested by René Nelli, because he secretly intended to suggest that Provençal eroticism was still alive and to defend its values, as Peire Cardenal and Montanhagol were doing around the same period<sup>38</sup>.

Another value distinguishing Occitan society and disappearing in the wake of the Crusade was the prominence of women, who were idealised by the troubadours, not only because of their feelings and religious ideas, but

36 P. Bec, *Lyrique Occitane du Moyen-Age*, (Poitiers: Aubanel, 1970) p. 291.

37 R. Nelli, *L'érotisme des Troubadours*, t. 2 (Paris: UGE, 1974) p. 75.

38 R. Nelli, *Le Roman de Flamenca Un art d'aimer occitanien du XIIIe siècle*, (Institut d'Etudes Occitanes/Centre International de Documentation Occitane/Centre National d'Etudes Cathares, 1989).

also because they were the leading element in that society. In *Flamenca* traditional views of women in the Middle Ages may be found. Firstly Flamenca may be seen as the epitome of feminine duplicity, an essential characteristic of the fabliau, and a standard portrayal of women, when, as mentioned earlier, she promised her husband to guard herself as well as he had guarded her, although she had found a way to have regular sexual intercourse with her lover. Secondly she may be perceived as the temptress, as it was she who, even though in a dream, told Guillem the stratagem which was to allow them to communicate. Finally she would appear, at the very beginning of the book, to be merely a normal tool in the political and economic family alliances and strategies. She was the obedient and dutiful daughter who, as was expected of her, accepted her father's decision to marry her to Archambaut. But in this first scene there are elements indicating an important departure from the norm. Flamenca's father asks his wife her opinion about such a marriage and even asks Flamenca herself. Though a subject in her own environment Flamenca is responsible and respected by her family.<sup>39</sup> She has a right to speak, which is important in this civilization of the word, but she is objectified by her husband who denies her the same right; and it is because she is considered as an object by her husband that she gives him a cold reception.<sup>40</sup> The link between the troubadours, the Cathars and the Crusade is again apparent as the lyric poetry of the south was 'révolutionnaire en soi: la valorisation de la femme contredit une idéologie cléricale profondément misogyne'.<sup>41</sup> Catharism and courtly poetry blended to generate a southern civilization where 'l'amour, qu'il fût humain ou divin, était le ciment de l'unité et le secret de la liberté. En ce sens, les femmes incarnent l'Occitanie d'avant la croisade'.<sup>42</sup> and if women were given the right to play a major role in both the area of religious ideas and the area of feeling, it may be simply because they were perhaps the guiding element of the society.<sup>43</sup> Flamenca, although kept in jail by her French husband, is still the dominant character. She tells Guillem how to woo her, then to leave Bourbon in order to accomplish the feats of arms that may make him worthy of her. Women did have to keep a cool head and not only in the conducting of their love affairs (v. 7537 - 7538). The registers of the Inquisition show that, from 1170-1180, Catharism had

39 D. Julien, 'Archambaut lo gelós', *La Revista Occitana* N°3, (Montpellier: 1995) p. 113.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

41 P. Labal, 'L'Eglise de Rome face au catharisme', in R. Pech (ed.), *Les cathares en Occitanie*, (Paris: Fayard, 1982) p. 107; 'revolutionary in itself: the valorization of women contradicted a clerical ideology that was profoundly misogynous.'

42 K. Maurin, *Les Esclarmonde; La femme et la féminité dans l'imaginaire du catharisme*, (Toulouse: Privat, 1995) p. 39; 'love, be it human or divine, was the cement of unity and the secret of liberty. In this way women incarnate the pre-Crusade Occitania.'

43 Roquebert, *L'Épopée Cathare*, p. 125.

become a tradition, and they prove conclusively that the role of women in the making of such family traditions was evident in a society whose matriarchal characteristics were well known.<sup>44</sup>

*Flamenca* is more than the 'romance to end all romances'.<sup>45</sup> It is a parody of all the literary genres known at the time and of the themes studied by the trouvères then in fashion, as it is a parody of intellectual courtly love in general which the author wished to see replaced by a more Ovidian, carnal concept of love, closer to the southern tradition.

Certainly, 'scattered through the text are many allusions to the lowering of the quality of feudal life and courtliness',<sup>46</sup> but this regret for past times and the mockery of the French-inspired literature must be viewed in conjunction with two other elements: the place of women and the attack on the Catholic Church.

The centre character is a woman, Flamenca, not the conquering Knight who, in literature and in real life, had pushed women backstage into a subservient role; and the author appears to be mounting an all-out attack on all the idolatrous fetishist aspects of the Catholic religion.

Whereas Grimm sought to demonstrate the historicity of the work through the proven existence of all the characters mentioned, this very historicity lies in the multi-pronged assault on the imposed colonial society, and in particular in the heretical anti-Catholic establishment militancy, prevalent at the time in the South of France. This could explain what always appeared to be a mystery to all critics: the fact that only a single copy of such a great work was ever found and not a single mention of it anywhere else. In effect, by launching a rearguard offensive against the new social, political and literary order, *Flamenca* could only be seen as directly attacking the Crusade, 'qui allait emporter, dans un même élan, le catharisme, les idéaux courtois et l'indépendance occitane'.<sup>47</sup> Like a wake, it is laughingly bemoaning the passing of a civilization.

Such a book would have been deemed heretical, and the mere possession of it could lead to the stake. Is it then so surprising that just one copy of *Flamenca* survives; and could the lack of popularity of this genre, at the time, be the very reason for the rarity of the text?

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44 M. Roquebert, 'Le catharisme comme tradition dans la "Familia" languedocienne', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* N° 20 (Toulouse: Privat, 1985) p. 233.

45 C. Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957) p. 56.

46 M. Walkley, 'Comic Elements in the Thirteenth-Century Provençal Romance "Flamenca"', *ARTS*, 18 (1996) pp.87-108, p. 87.

47 Roquebert, *L'Épopée Cathare*, p. 126; 'that turmoil which was to sweep away at the same time, catharism, courtly ideals and the Occitan independence.'