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David J. Viera

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FRANCESC EIXIMENIS AND THE ROYAL HOUSE OF ARAGON: A MUTUAL DEPENDENCE

DAVID J. VIERA

Francesc Eiximenis (c. 1327-1409) became a leading author of medieval Catalan literature due to his theological knowledge, his narrative skill, and his political acumen. Scholars, who have studied his works from theological and literary points of view, have neglected his third talent, his knowledge and use of politics, which won him favors from the Catalan royal family and from legislators of Barcelona and *jurats* of Valencia.

Eiximenis had acquired specific ideas on government by reading Augustine, John of Salisbury, Vegetius, Thomas Aquinas, Alvarus Pelagius, Giles of Rome, John of Wales, among others, and commentaries based on these authors. In addition, he admired past kings of Aragon and may even have read the Catalan chronicles. Throughout the *Crestià* and, to a lesser extent, *Llibre de les dones* and *Scala Dei*, Eiximenis used past kings of Aragon, especially Peter II, the Great, and Alfons III, the Benign, as models for the Christian. He wrote more than eleven anecdotes about Peter II and one on Alfons III in the *Crestià* alone.¹ He also knew how to win the favor of the those in power, especially the Catalan royal family. In fact, most documents at the Archives of the Crown of Aragon reveal cordial relations between Eiximenis and the three kings he served: Peter III and his sons John I and Martin I.²

¹ Martí de Barcelona, «Catalunya vista per fra Francesc Eiximenis». *Estudis franciscans* 46 (1934): 81-87.

² Martí de Barcelona, «Fra Francesc Eiximenis, O.M. (1340?-1409?)». *Estudis franciscans* 40 (1928):442-3. Eiximenis also had differences with the royal family, which I discussed in a forthcoming study to appear in *Journal of Medieval History*.

In the early 1370s, when Eiximenis was probably teaching theology in Barcelona, Peter asked the Duke of Anjou on 25 April 1373 to recommend Eiximenis to the University of Toulouse.³ Peter further provided 50 florins of gold, and his wife Leonor provided another 25 florins for Eiximenis' schooling and personal needs (*Doc.*, 1:248). Also, Marta de Armagnac, the first wife of John, then Duke of Girona, wrote the chancellor of the University of Toulouse concerning the friar's credentials and asked that he be given his Master's of Theology as soon as possible because John needed him in Valencia (*Doc.*, 1:254-55). The chancellor granted her request, for Eiximenis received his degree in mid-1374.

Returning to Catalonia, Eiximenis spent 1374 to 1381 at the Franciscan convents of Barcelona and Vic. On 17 May 1381 Peter requested that the superior of the convent of Barcelona keep Eiximenis there until he completed his «*obra*», a term Peter used no doubt referring to the *Crestia* (*Doc.*, 1:292). Peter's wish was granted: Eiximenis remained in Barcelona until 1383, when he moved to Valencia.

Peter's interest in the *Crestia* must have been motivated by his desire to have a leading Catalan theologian produce works like those of Vincent of Beauvais.⁴ Documents written at Peter's request show that the monarch purchased several works by Beauvais, including the *Speculum Historiale*, which he commissioned Jaume Domènec and Antoni de Ginebreda to translate into Catalan (*Doc.*, 1:321, 328, 333, 336, 342). Both Peter and Eiximenis admired Louis IX of France as well as Beauvais, the tutor of Louis' children. In addition, Eiximenis often cited Beauvais' works, including the *De Eruditione Filiorum Nobilium*, which I believe influenced his ideas on the education of youth and

³ Antoni Rubió y Lluch, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana medieval* (Barcelona, 1908-1921), 1: 244-45. Hereafter cited in text as *Doc.*

⁴ David J. Viera, «Les idees pedagògiques de Ramon Llull i de Francesc Eiximenis: Estudi comparatiu», *Estudios Lulianos* 25 (1981-1983): 233

women in the *Primer del Crestià* and the *Llibre de les dones* (1396).⁵ To complete the *Crestià* Peter may have allowed Eiximenis to use his library, which contained many books Eiximenis often quoted. In addition, Peter secured books for court clerics and learned men, including a copy of the *Pugio Fidei*, for a translator of Vincent of Beauvais' work (*Doc.* 1:333-34).

Eiximenis agreed to write the *Primer del Crestià*, admitting in his introduction that Peter had encouraged him to complete the work and that counselors and citizens of Barcelona had assisted him financially.⁶ His mention of Peter's role in the *Primer* is a rare reference in his works to contemporaries. (Like medieval and Spanish Golden-Age authors of moral-didactic treatises, Eiximenis avoided giving the names of the living as examples, except in dedicating a work).⁷ In addition, he put aside the *Terç* and began the *Dotzè*, probably because Peter, who preferred chronicles and works on the king's duties and war strategy, convinced him to do so. And in the *Dotzè* he partially copied from Peter's *Ordinacions*,⁸ a series of rules for court functionaries.

An admirer of Alfonso X the Wise, Peter tried to emulate the learning of Alfonso's court and Alfonso's interest and sponsorship of scientific works and medieval histories. He had the *Historia general de España* and the *Partidas* translated into Catalan.⁹ Royal documents and letters issued from October 1380 to December 1381 reveal that Peter and John I intended to have translated into Catalan astrological works, political treatises, the

⁵ Viera: 230-31, 234.

⁶ *Primer del Crestià* (Valencia, 1483), fol. iv.

⁷ Eiximenis considered religious works, especially the Old Testament, as history. See Antoni Rubió y Lluch, «La cultura catalana en el regnat de Pere III», *Estudis Universitaris Catalans* 8 (1914): 222-25.

⁸ Jill R. Webster, «Francesc Eiximenis on Royal Officials. A View of Fourteenth Century Aragon», *Mediaeval Studies* 31 (1969): 240-49. The sections copied are primarily on the duties of the Constable.

⁹ Ramon d'Abadal, *Pere el Ceremoniós i els inicis de la decadència política de Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1972) : 159.

Bible and the Koran.¹⁰ In addition to spreading scientific and historical knowledge, Peter apparently attempted to create a center of learning in Catalonia. He tried to establish the degree of Master of Theology at the University of Lleida (*Doc.*, 2:LIX-LXXI) and to retain learned men like Eiximenis in Barcelona. Upon his death in 1387, Peter was given two funeral orations on 5 January 1387, one by Eiximenis and another by St. Vincent Ferrer.¹¹

The relationship between Eiximenis and John I (1387-1395), Peter's successor, began favorably. In 1384, the year after Eiximenis moved to Valencia, John made him his confesor (*Doc.*, L:325-26), a position he held for a short time.¹² Peter and John tolerated and even supported the Jewish communities, in part for financial aid, although they disapproved of anti-Christian writings and practices they regarded as sacrilegious. Therefore, a year after the sacking of Valencia's Jewish section, John assigned Eiximenis and two scholars to examine the Hebrew books gathered during the plunder.¹³

After John's death, Maria de Luna ruled the Kingdom because her husband Martin was detained in Sicily. A year later Martin I ascended to the throne. Like John, Martin supported the papal seat of Avignon and asked Eiximenis to help end the Schism. In addition he defended Sicily during a time of rebellion, tried to stop bandit revolts in Valencia, and organized a crusade to eliminate pirate attacks on merchant ships on the

¹⁰ Rubió y Lluch, *Estudis universitaris catalans* 8 (1914): 231, 238-40.

¹¹ Andrés Ivars, «El escritor Fr. Francisco Eximénez en Valencia», *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 15 (1921): 310.

¹² Jose M. Pou, «Visionarios, beguinos y fraticelos catalanes (siglos xiii-xv)». *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 23 (1925): 352.

Ivars, *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 15 (1921): 322. During the ensuing years John wrote Eiximenis asking him for books and a letter. In 1393 John relieved him of custody of books he placed under the friar's protection (*Doc.*, 1:377, 380). Whether these were books John had lent Eiximenis or Hebrew books he had commissioned the Franciscan to investigate is not certain.

Berber coasts. Martin named Eiximenis Apostolic Commissioner of this crusade.¹⁴

Martin seemed to conform to Eiximenis' ideal of the Christian prince. He sought peace among European kingdoms while trying to hold together his Italian Mediterranean possessions.¹⁵ A just and pious ruler who revered his father and the former Catalan kings, Martin enjoyed religious works, many of which Eiximenis cited in his *opus*.

On 15 July 1392, Eiximenis wrote Martin, who was in Sicily handing over this kingdom to his son, Martin the Younger. His letter (*Doc.*, 2:399-403) is for the most part cordial, and ends by praising Maria de Luna, Martin's wife: «dona excellent e savia e de muyller de tan gran senyor, en molta honestat e bonea e per aytal se fa tenir davant Déu e davant homens» (*Doc.*, 2:403).

Maria de Luna, more than any member of the royal family, exemplified Eiximenis' idea of the perfect regent and provided a model for the ideal Christian woman for his treatise *Llibre de les dones* (c. 1391). Maria was simple, religious, and modest.¹⁶ During her one-year regency she defended Martin's right to the throne against the rebellious Count of Foix. With advice from her counselors, Maria supported Martin and helped him to determine policy. Through her concern for merchants and the poor and her defense of Jewish and Moorish minorities, she won their respect. She also tried to reconcile warring factions in Valencia.¹⁷

Maria contributed to the Franciscans and founded several new convents and monasteries. She also donated funds to the Observant house at Murvedre, where Eiximenis was asked to select its personnel and administration.¹⁸ Her preference for the

¹⁴ Ivars, *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 15 (1921), 330-31.

¹⁵ Tasis i Marca, *Joan I, el rei caçador i músic*: 70.

¹⁶ Aurea L. Javierre Mur, *Maria de Luna, reina de Aragón* (Madrid, 1942): 21, 23, 211.

¹⁷ Javierre Mur:103; Ivars, *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 34 (1931): 574-75.

¹⁸ Ivars, *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 34 (1931): 587-94.

Franciscans and Valencia and her fondness for devotional works, especially prayer books, further won her the admiration of Eiximenis, who in his old age preferred writing prayer manuals and ascetic works, including the *Scala Dei*, which he dedicated to Maria, and a volume on the life of Christ.¹⁹ She gave monetary gifts to the poor and to religious orders, especially the Franciscans and Celestines.²⁰ In turn Maria received services from Franciscans and Eiximenis. She accepted spiritual counsel from Joan Eiximeno, her confessor, and from Eiximenis himself, who witnessed her last will and testament in 1407 and comforted her in her dying moments.

The year before Eiximenis died, Pedro de Luna (Benedict XIII) appointed him bishop of Elne and Patriarch of Jerusalem, and he invited him to Perpignan to settle the problem of the Schism.²¹ In addition, Pedro de Luna had granted Eiximenis these titles the year after Maria de Luna died, perhaps because of the friar's dedication to her.

In conclusion, Eiximenis admired past kings of Aragon and praised them in his writings. Documents indicate that a mutual admiration existed between him and the regents he served, especially Maria de Luna, whom Eiximenis held in high regard because of her religiosity. Peter chose him and supported his

¹⁹ Ivars, *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 36 (1933):416-18.

See the introduction by Curt J. Wittlin to: Francesc Eiximenis, *Psalterium alias Laudatorium* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 15-16.

²⁰ Eiximenis insisted in several books that the royal family should perform works of charity to support the mendicant religious orders, especially the Franciscans, and to establish and help build convents and monasteries. In the *Llibre de les dones* (1:43), Eiximenis criticised women who wore long, flowing gowns, stating that the material that dragged along behind them could be better used to clothe the poor or to cover an altar. Maria therefore exemplified Eiximenis' ideal of charity, a virtue he continuously discussed in his major works. For more documents on Maria's generosity to the Franciscans, consult: Jill R. Webster, «Franciscanismo de la reina de Aragón, doña María de Luna (1396-1406)», *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 42 (1982): 81-123.

²¹ *Documentació barcelonina sobre el Cisma d'Occident* (Barcelona, 1979): 54.

writing of lengthy treatises much as Louis IX had chosen and supported Vincent of Beauvais. This respect for Eiximenis continued in 1384 when Peter's heir, John I selected Eiximenis to be his confessor. By this time city officials of Valencia, where Eiximenis lived from 1383-1408, had already become aware of Eiximenis' knowledge of government and began to encourage the publication of the *Crestià*.

In his later years Eiximenis, who found in Maria de Luna an exemplar of his religious ideals, dedicated to her an ascetic work. His service to Maria and their mutual admiration may have convinced her uncle Benedict XIII to confer ecclesiastical honors upon the friar a year before the latter's death.

DAVID J. VIERA

TENNESSEE TECH. UNIVERSITY