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On the King's Chancellor: Chapter 680 of Francesc Eiximenis's Dotzè del Crestià

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ON THE KING'S CHANCELLOR:
CHAPTER 680 OF FRANCESC EIXIMENIS'S
DOTZÈ DEL CRESTIÀ

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Francesc Eiximenis included several chapters in the *Dotzè del Crestià* (ca. 1386) that correspond to the duties of government officials, from the king to municipal law enforcement officers.¹

Chapter 680 begins the section on royal chancellors (chs. 680-697), an office Eiximenis highly regarded from the title he gave to this chapter: "Com lo canceller és lo primer e'l principal official del príncep, e com canceller deu ésser hom esforçat e de vigor e no deu ésser mamot ne badoch ne boch ne bèstia ne ase" [Since the chancellor is the first official of the king, as a chancellor he ought to be courageous and righteous and not be indiscreet, nosy, and uncouth, nor should he act like an animal or an ass] (*Dotzè*, 2.2:13).²

The author first emphasizes the importance of the chancellor as the principal judicial official, and states that this position usually should be given to a clergyman who is knowledgeable, conscientious, and famous. The king must have confidence in his chancellor, who must lead by example and become the "fre del rey e ull del poble, e defensor e escut de la veritat" [bridle of the king, eye of the people, and defender and buckler of truth]. He also compares the chancellor to St. Peter in his rôle as "canceller e vicari de Déu" (*Dotzè* 2.2:13), citing John:1.³

Eiximenis continues using a common practice he followed, that is, stringing together stories and *exempla*, generally in chronological order from the Bible to the dawn of the Middle Ages. He begins "quoting" Policarpus' "*Rudimentarium*," a reference to John of Salisbury, insisting on the chancellor's knowledge of the law, sense of

¹ I quote the edition with which the Universitat de Girona initiated the project of publishing the complete works of Eiximenis. To date only the second part of the *Dotzè* has appeared (chs 468-907). Eiximenis wrote the 907 chapters of the *Dotzè* between 1385-1387. He composed this large volume of chapters so rapidly because he included in the *Dotzè* treatises he had prepared earlier, such as the "Art of War" (chs. 213-337) and the *Regiment de la cosa pública* (chs. 357-395).

² The importance given to this position by the Catalan friar is also evident from the number of chapters and superlatives used to describe the chancellor (Probst 27-28; Webster 240-41).

³ This reference to John:1 is erroneous; perhaps Eiximenis had in mind John 21:15-17. However, the passage that best describes the equation Peter=Chancellor/Vicar is that of Matthew 16:18.

justice, and capability to stand firm for the sake of justice. The remaining narratives include "Nebridius, counselor of the king of France,"⁴ Frederick of Sicily (1272-1337), son of Peter III of Aragon; Blanca of Naples, wife of Jaume II; Margaret of England, whom I will attempt to identify, and Robert I of Naples and Sicily (1309-1343). Given the close relations between the Iberian lands belonging to the Crown of Aragon and Naples and Sicily, Eiximenis often cites royal personages from Italy who offered good and prudent counsel and provided examples of exemplary behavior. For example, Frederick of Sicily appears in the *Dotzè*, 2.1:353, and Robert in the *Primer* 68; *Dotzè* 2.2:120, 2.2, 327-28; *Llibre de les dones* 1:90, in the same role of model ruler. We can identify these royal figures from our knowledge of medieval history. However, the narrative in which Eiximenis places them may or may not have actually taken place, and if it is historical, many details may have been altered. Therefore these stories are generally treated as "literature." But there is one narrative in chapter 680 that Eiximenis sets in a historical framework, within which it becomes puzzling when compared to historical accounts:

Margarita, regina de Anglaterra, sí empetrà ab lo rey que un seu parent, qui era arquebisbe de Conturbera, fos canceller del dit rey. Com, emperò, lo rey hy volgués posar l'arquebisbe de Muntonia, qui era hom esforçat e de gran veritat e justícia e hom just e espatxat, e com ella no poqués per res parir, ans ja agué anat per VII jorns de part, dix-li un sant frare de l'orde del preycadors axí: -Filla, jamás no pariràs, ans morràs del part vuy en aquest dia si no fas ab ton marit que lo damnatge que has dat a la comunitat del regne sia reparat. Tu as fet posar a canceller, per tal quant és ton parent e per tal que u faces a ta guisa, aytal arquebisbe qui és més bèstia que hom, e més fembra que mascle, e badoch e moll e de neguna valor, sots lo qual se perdrà tota la justícia del regne; per què Justícia crida contra tu a Déu continuament. E sàpies que tu és perduda en cos e en ànima si de present no'l ne fas levar e que y faces posar aquell qui y és tan apte. -Per què la dita reyna de present tramès lo dit sant frare al rey e lo rey tantost mudà lo fet axí com la reyna demanà, e de continent ella parí sana e salva. (*Dotzè* 2.2:15)

[Margaret, queen of England, begged her king to appoint as his chancellor one of her relatives who was the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, since

⁴ Although I was not able to locate the source of this story, I found that Nebridius was an eighth-century bishop of Narbonne who modified the liturgy of this city and may have introduced the Roman liturgy into Catalonia. He was never a royal chancellor. However, he was an important person in Charlemagne's court as was his friend, Helisachar (Mundó, 10, 472), Arch-chancellor of Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious, who surrounded himself with educated chuchmen at Aquitaine (Boussard 105). In a letter to Nebridius, Helisachar, who had been an abbot of St. Riquier, discussed liturgical reforms on which he collaborated with Amalaire (Mathon 5: 578-79). Therefore, it would be easy for Eiximenis or his source to confuse the two clergymen.

the king wished to have as his chancellor the Archbishop of Westminster, a courageous, upright, just, and fair man and a doer, and as she could not give birth having endured birth pangs for seven days, a Dominican friar said to her: "My daughter, you will never give birth but will die this very day in childbirth if you do not ask the king to undo the damage you have done to the people of the kingdom. In order to promote your relative and to have your own way, you made him choose that archbishop, who is more an animal than a man, more feminine than masculine, nosy, weak and unworthy, under whom all justice in this kingdom will vanish. As a result, Justice cries out continually to God against you. And do you know that you are condemned both in body and spirit if you do not immediately have him removed and place in his stead he who is so well qualified." As a result, without hesitation the queen sent the saintly friar to the king, who at once changed the appointment as the queen now demanded. Soon after she gave birth without complications to a healthy child.]

Prior to Eiximenis' time a Queen Margaret (1279-1317), the second wife of Edward I, wielded some influence with the king, particularly in matters of charity (Prestwich 129-31). However, none of the remaining details of Eiximenis's narration (i.e. his relationship to the archbishop, identification of the archbishop with a candidate for the chancellorship, etc.) correspond to Edward I's reign. It is possible that an error in the name of the queen was made either in the source used by Eiximenis, by Eiximenis himself, or by an amanuensis.⁵ Assuming this was the case, I turn to a series of studies by John Carmi Parsons ("Mothers," 63-75; *Eleanor* 86-113; *Power* 150-62), who reviewed published works and documents concerning medieval queens of England known for their influence and power. Three names stand out: Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife of Henry II; Eleanor of Provence, who married Henry III, and Eleanor of Castile, first wife of Edward I. In addition, Isabella of France (1292-1358), daughter of Philip IV,⁶ exerted much influence on Edward II. With these four queens in mind let us examine further details in the quoted narrative paragraph of the *Dotzè*.

Eiximenis states that the queen was related to the man she wished

⁵ For example, in the *Dotzè* (ch. 292 [edition from 1484]), Eiximenis wrote that "Artús" (King Arthur) commanded the siege of Berwick instead of Edward III.

⁶ Isabella tried several times to influence both Edward II and pope Clement V regarding ecclesiastical offices in England. Robert de Graystones reported that Isabella insisted on having Louis de Beaumont for bishop of Durham (1316-17) over the king's choice, Thomas de Charlton (Waldo E. L. Smith 23-25) and supported her confessor John de Puteoli, whom she persuaded Edward to support for the see of Rochester (1317) over the king's candidate Hamo Hythe. In 1324 she approved of the papal candidate for the bishopric of Carlisle, John de Ross, over Edward's choice, William of Ayreminne, who renounce all claims to this see (Wright 48-55).

to further. During the reign of Eleanor of Provence, her position helped her uncle, Boniface of Savoy, to obtain the archbishopric of Canterbury (George Smith 2:812; Hook 3:230-33). It is possible that Eleanor tried to persuade Henry III to make Boniface his chancellor.⁷ However, Boniface was a noble and wielded much power as archbishop, and the chancellorship was considered a debasement of the primate of all of England's offices (Painter 95). In fact the succession from archbishop of Canterbury to the king's chancellor occurred only twice prior to the time Eiximenis wrote the *Dotzè*. Walter Hubert became archbishop of Canterbury in 1195 and was later named by John II to be his chancellor (1199). He is regarded by historians as an able administrator. Second, Walter Reynolds, a more controversial and less able figure, rose from the merchant class to become, during Edward II's turbulent reign, one of the most powerful men in England. His election to the archbishopric of Canterbury was contested because the monks of Canterbury had already elected Thomas Cobham. Reynolds later became Edward II's chancellor (Wright 245-59). Given Reynolds' self-seeking character, his reputation as "a mere clerk and scarcely literate" (Hutchison 75), and the abuses he committed while in office, he could well be the object of derogatory remarks Eiximenis hurls at Queen Margaret's inept chancellor.

Another likely candidate is John Peckham, whom the pope had elected to replace Boniface as archbishop of Canterbury and later became Provincial Minister of England. Peckham was a good friend of Margaret, Queen of France (Douie 8, 47-50, 111). He had received support from the pope to obtain the archbishopric over Robert Burnell, a responsible person who became Henry III's chancellor (1274-1292) and bishop of Westminster—the Latin for Westminster is Wintonia, which could easily be changed to Muntonia, especially since the letter W is not known in Romance. He became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1317 due to Henry's influence.

Could Eiximenis have mistaken the chronology of the promotion? Medieval queens of England were more apt to influence the choice of

⁷ Boniface was, however, elected titular head of the Grand Council, a committee the king established (Wilshire 58). He also received extraordinary privileges from the pope. His brother, Philip Bal, received from Rome permission to obtain revenues on produce harvested at Canterbury and Valencia, among other parts of Europe, which were used to aid their niece Beatrice (*Matthaei* 4:404-5, 425-6). Boniface disregarded England, extorted money (5:36-37), and had the woodlands at Canterbury cut down and their revenues distributed to foreigners, which reduced the English residing in the area to poverty (5:221). But the greatest reaction to him came from the English clergy, who felt suppressed by him (5:120-27, 178, 188. All these actions could have created a negative impression on Eiximenis. Shortly after Boniface became archbishop, Eleanor gave birth to Edmund.

archbishops rather than chancellors, who were more under the domain of the king. The monks of Canterbury, the pope, and the French monarchs, in addition, often became involved in choosing the primate of England.

Bearing in mind that misinformation from one or several sources may have affected Eiximenis's narration in which he withholds the names of all its characters except Margarita, let us consider another archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. Surely Eiximenis knew about Becket and, especially while he was a student at Oxford in the 1360s, must have heard and read about him. Henry II selected Becket as his chancellor on the recommendation of Canterbury's previous archbishop. Henry later pressured the reluctant Becket to become archbishop of Canterbury. The election of Becket to Canterbury was not unanimous, as Gilbert Foliot, bishop of Hereford and later of London, was the choice of others, primarily clergymen. Furthermore Foliot consented to Becket's election "upon compulsion" (Hook 2:387). Desmond Seward writes that the relationship between Henry and the then chancellor Becket was so close that the latter was considered "Eleanor's earliest rival in Henry's affections," and that this "brotherly affection" could "only have fueled Eleanor's jealousy and frustration." Seward continues:

[Henry] was a frequent guest [at Becket's home], often arriving without warning. Such competition can hardly have endeared Thomas to the queen. Above all, he had taken the power she wanted for herself—he had usurped her place as the second person in the kingdom ... nevertheless, Eleanor seems to have been too shrewd to show any open enmity toward him. (Seward 95-97)

Concerning Becket's election to Canterbury in May 1162, Owen (50) concludes: "We have no means of knowing Eleanor's inclinations in the matter (the Empress Matilde seems to have disapproved of the step); but her immediate preoccupation was with the birth of another daughter, Eleanor, at Domfront in September."⁸ As we have seen in Eiximenis's passage, the queen was pregnant during the time she opposed the king's choice for chancellor, and when she acquiesced to the king's choice, she gave birth without complications.

Of the four queens I have singled out, Eleanor of Provence seems the most likely to have tried to influence her spouse and king (Howell 65-69, 173-75, 268-69; Parsons, "Queens," 111-12). Eiximenis might have

⁸ Matilda (1102-1167), the only surviving legitimate child of Henry I of England, was the mother of Henry II and therefore the mother-in-law of Eleanor. Chibnall (167) asserts her opposition to Becket on the grounds that he was "too worldly to deserve an archbishopric."

read in a history book at Oxford about Eleanor's "overstepping the king's grant" by having her chaplain, William of London, promoted to rector of the church at Flamstead, without reference to the right in English law of presenting a nominee to a church benefice. This act so angered Henry III that he instructed Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, to place Artaud of St. Romain, his preferred candidate, in the rectorship, a decision that humiliated Eleanor (Howell 64-66).⁹ Eiximenis could have confused Eleanor with her older sister Margaret, wife of Louis IX, as both were queens contemporaneously and both daughters of the count of Provence. Also, Henry sought both women to be his spouse. The fact that Eleanor lost five of her nine children (Biles 113-15) may have been known to Eiximenis and made him mention the difficulty of birthing children. In addition, J. R. Studd (181-83) points out that before Burnell's tenure as chancellor, Henry had for brief periods two chancellors: Michael de Fiennes and Ralph de Donjon. Their tenure corresponds to the time Eleanor began taking a significant role in the government of England (Biles 113-15).

I have reached three conclusions in my analysis of sources for Eiximenis' narration about Queen Margaret: first, identification of persons in the friar's works is often a difficult task; second, this Catalan author did not invent sources or entire narrations as some such as Nicolás Antonio have thought (Grahit 196); third, the name of personages and details of events in his writings may differ from historical accounts. When Eiximenis recounted events involving his contemporaries, he might have changed names and dates (Wittlin, "El rey Pirro"), but he did not, to my knowledge, invent entire stories and attribute them to historical figures. His narration of Margaret's influence does not completely match with the details of any historical figure or event from medieval England I have researched. However, a combination of the historical accounts I have summarized contains the major elements of the friar's brief narrative. What Eiximenis added to the account was the dialogue between the saintly friar and Margaret, an amplification common during his time. Writing the *Dotzè* in his sixties, Eiximenis may have tried to recall stories told to him during his student years in England or a passage he had read. A more likely explanation is that, given his preference for working with *compendia* and encyclopedic works such as Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*, he could have paraphrased a version of the historical fact which had been modified. Copyists may also be responsible for changing names, dates, and locations, especially in the transcription of English into Catalan (e. g. Wuntonia to Muntonia). Above all, what we must

⁹ This information was also chronicled in *Matthaei*, 5:298ff.

remember is that Eiximenis and writers of moral-didactic treatises of the Middle Ages in general did not feel compelled to verify sources as modern researchers do. The moral message conveyed to the reader or listener was essential; the narrative, and the names of historical persons were of secondary importance. However, recognizable names lent "authority" to stories and captured the attention of readers.

Curt Wittlin and the editors of the *Dotzè* wrestled with the identification of some of the many names Eiximenis included in the *Dotzè*. The fact that many figures mentioned have gone unidentified does not distract from the importance of this recent edition. The task of attempting to identify the historical bases of Eiximenis' narrations and of specifying characters whom Eiximenis framed in a historical context illustrates the need for critical editions with paleographic transcriptions of all dubious names of people and places. In addition, scholars must have reference to the friar's complete works, as well as indices and concordances of his works. A compilation of stories in his *opus* should also be available.¹⁰ I therefore urge those at the Col·legi Universitari de Girona in charge of the project to edit and publish Eiximenis' works in such a way that they continue the good quality of work evident in the recent edition of the *Dotzè*.

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¹⁰ An Attempt at collecting Eiximenis's stories and exempla was made by Marçal Olivar, *Contes i faules*. Barcelona: Barcino, 1925. However, this collection contains only a small number of Eiximenis's stories.

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