

Sixth centennial of Francesc Eiximenis

To commemorate the six-hundredth anniversary of the death of the writer Francesc Eiximenis (Girona 1340-Perpignan 1409), the Institut d'Estudis Catalans held a series of nine lectures and a round table on the 16th and 17th of December 2009 on the historical context and oeuvre of this Girona-born Franciscan. Eiximenis graduated and earned his *licencia docendi* in theology from the University of Toulouse in 1374. He lived in the city of Valencia between 1383 and 1408, where he wrote the bulk of his works, which were very famous in his day and translated into numerous languages. He participated in the 1408 Council of Perpignan in the midst of the Western Schism, called there by Aragonese Pope Benedict XIII, whom Eiximenis supported. The pope had previously been the bishop of Perpignan-Elne. Three of the leading Eiximenis experts – Curt Wittlin, Albert Hauf and Xavier Renedo – took part in this lecture series.

Eiximenis' oeuvre is a testimony to the linguistic, cultural and political unity of what we call today the Catalan-speaking lands back in the 14th century. Friar Eiximenis studied in Cologne, Paris and Oxford in the 1360s. When he returned, the Estudi General in Lleida offered him a professorship in Theology, which he was unable to accept as he lacked a teaching degree. With a grant from King Peter the Ceremonious and the protection of the Duke of Anjou and the Count of Armagnac, he graduated in Toulouse. He wrote the first volume of his encyclopaedic masterpiece *Lo Crestià* in Barcelona and delivered the funeral speech for Peter the Ceremonious. However, the death of his protector did not weaken his ties to the royal house, as he served as the confessor to King John I and Queen Maria de Luna, the wife of King Martin the Humane. In Valencia, he served as an advisor to the juries governing the city and effectively intervened in putting a peaceful end to the bloody attacks on the city's Jewish quarter in 1391. His *First* book of *Lo Crestià* and *El regiment de la cosa pública* (Rule of the Commonweal) were available in the council chamber of the municipal government of Valencia. In that period, he also wrote two other books that were widely translated, the *Llibre dels àngels* (Book of Angels) and *Llibre de les dones* (Book of Women), along with *Vida de Jesucrist* (Life of Jesus Christ). The *Llibre de les dones* is a fascinating document on the histo-

ry of the female condition, despite its clerical misogyny. He begins by talking about unmarried maidens, continues with married women and widows, and ends with nuns, never sparing in his criticisms of each group's customs.

There is clear proof that his oeuvre was widely disseminated, such as the 60 or so manuscripts of the *Llibre dels àngels* still conserved, as well as the notable number of



Figure 1. Frontispiece of the *Regiment de la cosa pública* (Rule of the Commonweal), published by Francesc Eiximenis. Printing by Cristòfol Cofman, Valencia 1499. Jurors Valencia and the guardian angel of the United mark the entrance to the city through the Seraneros towers. A sample of the late fifteenth century, the civic pride of the late medieval Valencia.

editions and translations of his works in the late 15th century and first half of the 16th century.

As Antoni Riera Melis, the organiser of the lecture series, said, Francesc Eiximenis' oeuvre is still extremely important today for both philologists and historians. For the former, it is prime testimony of the educated and vernacular language in the second half of the 14th century. Likewise, historians find in his work a vivid, detailed reflection of his coeval society, an indispensable source for analysing not only the economic, social and political structures of that century but also the customs, mindset, religiosity, phobias and phantasies of his contemporaries. While Eiximenis' work cannot be understood outside its context, it is simultaneously necessary for grasping this very context.

Flocel Sabaté from the University of Lleida spoke about the political structures of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown between 1333 and 1410. The catastrophic vision of the second half of the 14th century which has prevailed until quite recently is now in the midst of a revision in light of the creativity, vitality and institutional consolidation that took place in this period. The role of international trade, which was crucial in the economy of the time, is revelatory today. The peasantry was increasingly detached from the bourgeois investors, while the cities, governed by an oligarchy, as in Valencia, were trying to dominate the rural world and overcome the jurisdictional fragmentation that hindered claims. Eiximenis justified the role that the large cities were taking on, as they set limits on royal power while also opposing the sale of the king's jurisdictions, brought to this extreme by the crown's financial penury at a time of incessant wars and demographic contraction. Eiximenis theorised sovereignty as being of community origin within the pactist framework of a limited monarchy characteristic of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown, in which the bourgeois reinforced the parliamentary power of the Courts. He was also witness to the other classes' opposition to the urban patricians, who monopolised power and distributed jobs unequally. As the son of a merchant, he not only praised the role of this branch, rather he also provided rules for a fair municipal government. In any event, Eiximenis' utopian and apocalyptic vision of the last reign of "popular justice" was limited by his disdain for the peasantry, which comprised the vast majority of the population. This was coupled with his rejection of Jews and homosexuals and the start of the criminalisation of poverty, as he distinguished between poor people who were worthy of charity and the *lumpen*, who should be expelled from the city.

Enric Guinot from the University of Valencia spoke about this city in the second half of the 14th century. Despite the scourge of the Black Plague and the impoverishment of the peasantry, the city was growing, demonstrating its ability to reconstruct itself as a centre of exports and re-exports at the end of the century. Valencia gradually amassed lands from outside its boundaries in the guise of urban lordships. This economic and political de-

velopment took place despite problems like internal social conflicts, with a rise in internecine fighting, and despite the marginalisation of the Mudejars, the Muslims who remained under the Crown, who were the target of mistrust as potential allies of the Saracen attacks being waged from North Africa, and the hostility towards the Jews, the victims of an uncontrolled popular uprising in 1391 which led to their forced conversion.

Maria Teresa Ferrer, a researcher at the Spanish National Research Council and President of the History-Archaeology Department of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, spoke extensively and in depth about the Catalan-Aragonese Crown's ventures abroad at a time of virtually incessant wars with Genoa and the domain of Sardinia, and its battles with the Crown of Castile, with devastating attacks by its king that would put Peter the Ceremonious on the defensive and deplete his coffers. The Catalan-Aragonese Crown would overcome this asphyxiation thanks to the Castilian civil war. The positive end note of Peter the Ceremonious' and Martin the Humane's foreign policy was the return of the kingdoms of Mallorca and Sicily. Catalan foreign policy was linked to the Anglo-French Hundred Years' War and affected by the Western Schism, with the diversity of papal authorities.

Xavier Renedo from the University of Girona and the Francesc Eiximenis Institute devoted his lecture to analysing *Lo Crestià* using a great deal of documentation and numerous textual citations. This is a monumental work that is not yet fully published, including its twelfth book. Eiximenis was a reader of prophetic literature, which was quite popular in his day, although it was viewed mistrustfully by the Church hierarchy. However, Eiximenis considered the time of the prophets as over and presented himself as the "pious glosser of the ancient prophets" from the Bible. Yet he updated the legacy, even to the extent of making it a political work, because the public authorities had to be alerted to the perils of the future. The examples he offers when talking about sins and virtues make Eiximenis a keen observer of the society of his day and a definer of the city, not just the ideal city but the real one as well – and herein lies the interest of his work for the history of urban development – as well as military technique, education and the mutual aid brotherhoods. Eiximenis justifies the uprising against the prince who does not uphold the laws agreed upon and prophecies the end of the monarchies, but the king forced him to rectify this after the pogroms of 1391; the most notable rectification can be found in the *Llibre dels àngels*. This book is full of political references, with angelic intervention as the mediator. Eiximenis had said that power comes from the people, but it turns out that God is the one who guarantees the princes' rectification through angelic messages, thus forestalling a revolt by their subjects. Xavier Renedo has just edited the Eiximenis book *Art de predicació al poble* (The Art of Preaching to the People) in Eumo Editorial publishing house's collection of pedagogical texts.

Salvador Giner, a sociologist from the University of

Barcelona and President of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, spoke about the origins of republicanism in the book *El regiment de la cosa pública* (Rule of the Commonwealth). He lamented the unjustified failure to mention Eiximenis' work in the historiography on the mediaeval origins of republican thinking prior to Machiavelli. Giner stressed this Franciscan scholar's contribution to this current of democratic political philosophy, republicanism. Eiximenis based good governance on the sovereignty of the agreed-upon laws and justifies it with its utility for the good of the community. He extols the need for civic and secular, socially conscious and fraternal virtue, he defends the hegemony of the "mà mitjana" – the urban middle class – and he applauds human freedom, which is not only compatible with each group's privileges and with difference, but is respectful of it as long as others' rights are not violated. Eiximenis' pragmatism is a far cry from abstract constitutionalism, which came much later. Giner stressed the influence of the Franciscan teachers at Oxford University on Eiximenis' thinking. The text is brimming with reproofs against the parasitic sluggishness of the ruling class, and it exalts toil, despite the author's commiseration with paupers who are not to blame for their penury. Despite his appeals to divinity, Eiximenis is a harbinger of secular, lay political argumentation. His bourgeois disdain of the peasantry lay in his aversion towards the feudal world. However, he does not spare criticisms of the speculative, acquisitive merchant class. It goes without saying that Eiximenis' republicanism, which preferred the "insaculació" of public posts – lotteries to choose the magistrates at the voting place – is compatible with the justification of the monarch as the ultimate arbiter and moderator of society as a whole.

Josep Hernando, a professor at the University of Barcelona and a mediaevalist, delivered a lecture on Francesc Eiximenis's *Tractat d'usura* (Treatise on Usury). This work, conserved in manuscript 42 of the monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès, was unpublished until the 1980s, and only the first 13 chapters of it remain, which Eiximenis wrote between 1374 and 1383. The definition of usurer, provided in plentiful detail, enables the interest in the lending practised by the bourgeois lenders to be legitimised. The importance of labour is clear for more accurately understanding the Catalan mediaeval monetary system and the different kinds of loans made back then. There is a relationship between this treatise and the chapter on avarice in *Third book of Lo Crestià*.

Albert Hauf, a professor at the University of Valencia and member of the IEC, spoke about *Vita Christi* (Life of Christ), which falls within the genre of meditation books with examples from the life of Jesus Christ. It was written in Catalan, not in Latin as was common for this kind of work. This was at the request of its patron, Pere d'Artès, so that the work could reach a wider audience. Today it is a little-known book, although it was highly prized in its day, translated into several languages and read by the ruling classes. Proof of this is the translation by Hernando de

Talavera in Granada in 1496, and the translation of the manuscript into French by Joan of Valois in around 1461.

Curt Wittlin, a corresponding member of the Institute of Catalan Studies, spoke about the *Psalterium*, a book for popes, kings and bishops, which has a Catalan-language version from 1406 by a translator. Its origin can be found in the prayers that Eiximenis had been writing for the queen, the pope and theology students. They serve as a complement to his *Vita Christi*. Wittlin wonders where the author learned his classical Latin. It was at the Bible Vulgate of Saint Jerome, because no ancient Latin authors can be found in his library. Eiximenis manipulates and interprets his sources, not limiting himself to citing them verbatim, and he even goes so far as inventing sources and examples. He does not merely repeat authorities, and in this sense he is an original in the orthodox tradition. Within this repressed prophetic nature, Eiximenis asks God why he allows for poor rulers while the best ones are kept from power. The answer could be none other: they are a punishment for our sins. Eiximenis was aware that clergymen lived on the tithes paid by the subordinate classes. Wittlin illustrated his talk with numerous texts.

Jaume de Puig, a member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, offered a detailed list of the manuscripts of each of Eiximenis' masterpieces with their precise locations. He praised the catalogue that Massó i Torrents presented many years ago, but warned that we are still at the start of the discovery process, so the centennial itself might yield new finds. He also reported that a new catalogue is being readied for publication, a continuation of Massó's. The multiplication of manuscripts and their dissemination around Europe proves that Eiximenis was a prized author outside the Catalan-Aragonese Crown. His legacy has been the victim of its very vastness, which has enormously hindered a complete, indexed publication. Jaume de Puig also analysed the translations of Eiximenis' works into Flemish, Spanish and French.

A number of conclusions were drawn at the round table held at the end of the event, with Antoni Riera Melis, Albert Hauf and Salvador Giner as the speakers. Eiximenis has been underused as a source for mediaeval historians because of the very extent of his oeuvre, which, as it lacks a complete, indexed edition, is cumbersome to use. Yet it is indispensable for the history of religiosity and morality, as well as for the history of political thinking and the mindset of a turbulent, tragic period, yet one that was brimming with creativity sparked by the upheaval. Eiximenis justified the changes and was soon widely read and cited. Eiximenis' oeuvre is also extremely useful for the history of food and urbanity in the way of eating, an art that was brought over from Italy. He relates social rank with food and even sketches a kind of gastronomic patriotism. His work is also crucial for understanding everyday life. His writings vividly complete the notaries' mute inventories which lack any sort of explanation of their contents. The organisers of this event are aware that it was missing a talk on the *Llibre de les dones*, but they

hope to have a complementary article on it before all the lectures are published.

Long before the Inquisition put an end to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular by eliminating the Valencian Bible, printed in Catalan in 1478, Eiximenis upheld making the scriptures accessible to simple folk in their mother tongue. Eiximenis is also an essential source for folklore and legends. In short, publishing his entire oeuvre with an index for consultation is a necessary undertaking.

This report would not be complete without mentioning the international congress on Eiximenis that was held at the University of Girona between the 12th and 14th of November 2009. The talks were the following: Jaume de Puig, "Sobre els manuscrits de les traduccions en francès del *Llibre dels angels*" (On the manuscripts of the French translations of the *Llibre dels angels*); Paolo Evangelisti, "Moneta, sovranità, *res publica* in William of Pagula, Nicola Oresme, Francesc Eiximenis"; Albert Hauf, "Noves reflexions sobre la *Vita Christi* d'Eiximenis" (New reflections on Eiximenis' *Vita Christi*); Robert E. Lerner, "The authorship of *De Triplici Statu Mundi*"; Xavier Renedo, "Francesc Eiximenis i el pactisme" (Francesc Eiximenis and pactism); Damien Ruiz, "L'ordre Franciscain, Francesc Eiximenis et le schisme d'Occident" (The Franciscan order, Francesc Eiximenis and the Western Schism); Francesco Santi, "Francesc Eiximenis e la scrittura mistica europea tra XIV e XV secolo" (Francesc Eiximenis and European mystical writing in the 14th and 15th centuries); and Curt Wittlin, "Eiximenis: *Entenc a romançar e expondre... segons que em serà vejares que sia... pus profitós*".

The following papers were presented at the conference: Gemma Avenoza, "El manuscrito de la Universidad de Oviedo del *Libro de las donas*, traducción castellana del *Llibre de les dones* de Francesc Eiximenis" (The University of Oviedo's manuscript of the *Libro de las donas*: Spanish translation of Francesc Eiximenis' *Llibre de les dones*);

Montserrat Batllori, "Ordre de mots i estructura informativa a la llengua de Francesc Eiximenis" (Word order and informative structure of the language of Francesc Eiximenis); Míriam Cabré, "Francesc Eiximenis i Cerverí de Girona" (Francesc Eiximenis and Cerverí de Girona); Carme Clausell, "Tradició textual de l'*Scala Dei*" (Textual tradition of the *Scala Dei*); Antonio Contreras, "*En nostre temps present*: consideracions sobre l'art de la guerra segons Francesc Eiximenis" (*En nostre temps present*: Considerations on the art of war according to Francesc Eiximenis); Carme Cortès, "La justícia com a fonament de la cosa pública" (Justice as the cornerstone of the commonweal); Immaculada Fàbregas, "Algunes anotacions paremiològiques referents a *Lo llibre de les dones*" (Paremiological notations on the *Llibre de les dones*); Josep Antoni Iglésias, "Eiximenis i les inscripcions" (Eiximenis and inscriptions); Eva Izquierdo, "Tradició catalana del *Llibre de les dones*" (Catalan tradition of the *Llibre de les dones*); Sadurní Martí, "Amb el diable al cos: somnis i temptacions al *Segon del Crestià*" (With the devil in the body: Dreams and temptations in the *Second* book of *Lo Crestià*); Marco Pedretti, "Francesc Eiximenis, el bateig forçat dels jueus i els avalots del 1391" (Francesc Eiximenis, the forcible baptism of the Jews and the uproar of 1391); Jordi Redondo, "La sofística a l'obra de Francesc Eiximenis" (Sophistry in the oeuvre of Francesc Eiximenis); Jaume Torró, "Eiximenis i Joan I" (Eiximenis and John I); Enric Tremps, "Captius i servicials en la ciutat d'Eiximenis" (Captives and servants in Eiximenis' city); and Jaume Riera i Sans, "Eiximenis i Martí I" (Eiximenis and Martin I).

The scientific committee was made up of Stefano Alperti (Università Roma-La Sapienza), Lola Badia (Universitat de Barcelona), Pedro M. Cátedra (Universitat de Salamanca), Francesc M. Gimeno Blay (Universitat de València) and Gian Luca Potestà (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore).