The Dream of Bernat Metge

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

Richard Vernier

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Introduction

Bernat Metge was born in Barcelona between 1340 and 1346. The mere fact that this makes him a contemporary of Chaucer would be only of passing interest, if it were not for more substantial coincidences in their respective backgrounds, and for the literary sources as well as the preoccupations they had in common. One cannot help hoping to stumble upon an indication that those two had met, if only once, or at least that their paths had crossed. But nothing so far suggests that such a meeting might – or even could – have occurred. Their conversation which might have ranged – in Latin of course – from the duty of dignifying the vernacular to a heartily shared admiration for Petrarch, will have to remain imaginary.

Like Chaucer, Metge came from a commoner family in the process of social promotion via royal service. Like him, he served a monarchy on the brink of a catastrophic crisis: Chaucer lived to see Richard II deposed, Metge to witness the end of the Catalan dynasty of Aragon. Neither man could have, at the onset of his career, predicted such a dismal outcome: not the page Geoffrey Chaucer, at the court of a victorious Edward III, nor the young Bernat Metge, nurtured in the house of the Peter IV 'the Ceremonious', king of Aragon, Valencia and Majorca, count of Barcelona, lord of Sardinia, and so on.

Under this monarch the domains, both real and nominal, of the Crown of Aragón extended from one end to the other of the Mediterranean. The growth of this vast if dicontinuous empire had begun in 1150 with the marriage of Ramón Berenguer IV, count of Barcelona and marquis of Provence, to Petronilla, sole heiress to the small, landlocked Pyrenean kingdom of Aragon. That union brought together Catalonia and Aragon. The two realms shared prospects for expansion: to the north, with interests in Provence and the Languedoc; to the south, into the lands to be wrested from the increasing disarray of Moslem power; and across the sea, where the maritime vocation of Barcelona and other Catalan cities beckoned. It is perhaps significant that the heirs of Ramón Berenguer are called not king-counts, but count-kings, as if to signify the real pre-eminence of their Catalan title and of the city which was to be, of all their capitals, *cap i casal*, the head and home of the dynasty.

While the steady advance of the Reconquista earned Aragón substantial territorial gains in the lower Ebro valley, judicious matrimonial policy and the lotteries of feudal inheritance also brought Ramón Berenguer's immediate successors significant dominions north of the Pyrenees: Roussillon devolved in 1172 to Alfons II, and in 1204 Peter II married the heiress of Montpellier. But whatever ambitions the count-kings may have entertained for a trans-Pyrenean, Catalan-Provençal empire, those were definitively thwarted by the French invasion of the county of Toulouse under the pretext of a 'crusade' to rid the south of Cathar heretics and their protectors. In 1213, Peter II fell at Muret, leaving his infant son in the hands of the French leader Simon de Montfort. When he came of age, James I turned south to earn his title of 'Conqueror'. He began by adding to the double Crown a third kingdom, that of rich Valencia (1228), and later laid claims to Murcia by right of conquest, claims which would eventually become a bone of contention with rival Castile. Fresh from his success in Valencia, James then turned seaward and, with the enthusiastic help of the maritime cities – including his native Montpellier – wrested Majorca from the Moors in 1229. However, the Conqueror followed the meridional tradition of divided estates: while leaving to his heir Peter III his peninsular domains (Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia), he bequeathed Majorca and Roussillon to a younger son whose descendants would eventually clash with the senior branch of the dynasty.

When in 1282 the Sicilians revolted against the rule of Charles d'Anjou and expelled their French rulers, they chose Peter III of Aragon as their king, by virtue of his marriage to Constance of Hohenstaufen, granddaughter of the Emperor Frederick II whose court in Palermo had been perhaps the most splendid and literate of the century. Despite the strenuous efforts of the Capetians and vigorous objections from the Pope, Sicily remained under Aragonese rule. The Pope was eventually placated by the cession of Sicily to a junior branch of the Aragonese dynasty. In compensation, James II of Aragon was granted the lordship of Sardinia, to be held as a papal fief. Both this dubious boon and the devolution of Sicily would lead to trouble, especially in Bernat Metge's lifetime.

Meanwhile, in a spectacular side show to the Fourth Crusade so cynically diverted to the conquest of Constantinople, a company of Catalan mercenaries carved for themselves a duchy of Athens that existed, a distant vassal of the count-kings, until 1387. A more peaceful Catalan presence was established in every major Mediterranean and Levantine port in the form of consulates modelled after Barcelona's Consolat del Mar. Even though these were extensions of the maritime guilds rather than government representatives, they often fulfilled the functions of modern diplomacy, and

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the Catalan jurisprudence they exported came to define international maritime law.

Under Peter IV 'the Ceremonious' (1336–1387), these disparate dominions were seldom at peace. The first enterprise of the reign was to eject the junior dynasty from Majorca and bring that kingdom under the direct sceptre of the count-king. The war begun in 1341 ended eight years later when the dispossessed Jaume III died in a vain attempt to invade his lost island. To finance that futile expedition, he had sold the lordship of Montpellier to France. Peter had scarcely achieved the recovery of Roussillon and Majorca when he became embroiled in a series of bitter struggles against a coalition of cities and feudal magnates in Valencia and Aragon, whose common cause was the preservation or enlargement of their local franchises and privileges – the *fueros* that the king was sworn to uphold – at the expense of the Crown's fiscal and other prerogatives. Cornered more than once by his rebellious subjects, Peter emerged victorious and vindictive: he would boast in his *Chronicle* of having made the ringleaders of the Valencian uprising drink the molten metal of the bells which had pealed in honour of the defeated Union.

On one occasion in 1348, the king was rescued from blockade by an unexpected ally, when the arrival of the Black Death in Valencia dispersed the rebels. In the same year Majorca and Barcelona suffered enormous population losses, and the pestilence returned every summer until 1351. The demographic shock, aggravated by a series of famines whose onset predated the reign of Peter IV, do not seem to have distracted him from the pursuit of a war with the Republic of Genoa. At issue was maritime hegemony in the western Mediterranean, and in particular dominion over the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. The latter, where the resistance to Catalan colonization was led by native magnates bearing the quasi-biblical title of Judges of Arborea, became an especially onerous problem. The king himself led an inconclusive expedition to the island in 1354.

With the affairs of Sardinia and Sicily (which also threatened to slip away from the control of the senior dynasty) still unsettled, and the Greek duchies about to collapse, Aragon was then drawn into the nine-year conflict known as the 'War of the Two Pedros', as Peter's counterpart in Castile was Pedro I 'the Cruel'. Whatever the immediate pretexts of war – conflicting claims over Murcia, border disputes elsewhere, alleged Castilian interference with Catalan shipping – the deeper cause was the growth of expansionist Castile, largest and most populous of the four Christian kingdoms in the Peninsula. The War of the Two Pedros acquired a larger dimension in 1360, when the treaty of Brétigny interrupted the Anglo-French contest which would

eventually resume long enough to be called the Hundred Years War. While the truce lasted north of the Pyrenees, Spain served as a surrogate battlefield, with France lending support to Pedro I's half-brother, the bastard pretender Enrique de Trastamara, and England intervening on the side of the legitimate king. Each side scored its share of spectacular successes, followed by equally resounding reverses. In the end, Pedro I had alienated most of his allies, including Edward, Prince of Wales. Defeated and captured at Montiel in 1369, he was stabbed to death by his brother. Peter IV of Aragon, who had backed the count of Trastamara, found Enrique II somewhat lacking in gratitude. Their differences were eventually resolved by the usual means of a matrimonial alliance between the two houses, the marriage of Peter's daughter Elionor with Enrique's son, the future Juan I of Castile. The unforeseen consequence of that union was that, when Martin I, last king of the Catalan dynasty, died without a direct heir, the Crown of Aragon devolved to a grandson of Peter the Ceremonious, the Castilian Prince Fernando d'Antequera.

The son of Guillem Metge, apothecary and purveyor to the royal court, Bernat Metge grew up during those tumultuous years of Peter's reign. By the time he came of age, he had survived the onslaught of the Black Death of 1348, and in 1365 witnessed the dangerous transit of the Great Companies on their way to the Castilian war. He had also seen his native city transformed by a number of ambitious building projects. While the vastly extended outer wall of Peter IV has disappeared, many of the landmarks of that period stand today – such as the Drassanes (shipyards), the Llotja (maritime guildhall), the major part of the cathedral, the churches of Santa Maria del Mar and Santa Maria del Pí, and the Saló del Tinell, or royal banquet hall – making Barcelona's *Barri gotíc* one of the densest collections of medieval architecture in Europe.

The elder Metge's shop in the Carrer dels Espèciers (Street of the Spice Merchants) was only a few steps away from the royal residence of the Palau Major, where the apothecary was often called upon to bring potions to the sickly heir apparent, John, duke of Gerona. So often that in 1356 the prince's mother, Queen Elionor, named Guillem (who had been granted in 1351 the right to display arms) her 'domestic and familiar' and made him a regular member of her household.

Guillem Metge died in 1359. Soon afterwards his widow married Ferrer Sayol, an official of the royal chancellery and minor humanist. Little is known of young Bernat's education. In Book II of *Lo Somni* he acknowledges his gratitude at having been brought up (*nodrit*) in the royal household, which may mean that, in a court where letters were held in the

highest esteem, he was perhaps privileged to receive the same kind of classical education as the young princes. At any rate, it is clear that Metge's subsequent career would not have been possible without excellent schooling, and of course Ferrer Sayol's guidance and position must also have eased the entry of his stepson into the royal bureaucracy. Bernat was appointed in 1371 to the household of Queen Elionor as 'ajudant de registre' – a junior scribe – with a beginning salary of 750 *sous barcelonins* per annum. The fledgling clerk was expected to write correctly in the three official languages of the Crown of Aragon: Latin and Aragonese, to be sure, but also his native Catalan, which he was to choose as his literary vehicle.

Upon the queen's death in 1375, Metge entered the retinue of the duke of Gerona. At that time, the crown prince was 25 years old, and already deserved the flattering name of 'Amador de gentileza' (lover of elegance). He had undoubtedly inherited from his father an enthusiasm for music and letters. Peter the Ceremonious was not only the author of his own *Chronicle* and of the *Ordenacions* regulating, among other things, the functions of musicians in the royal household, but he also dabbled in verse, both Catalan and Provençal. His major-domo Bernat de Sò, viscount of Evol in Roussillon and author of a *Vision* in Provençal verse, was often consulted as an authoritative critic of pieces composed by the king and the crown prince in the idiom of the troubadours. While he remained to the end of his reign preoccupied with reviving the Provençal tradition of the *Gai saber*, John also showed a marked predilection for French fashions in literature and music. In a note of 1380 to his brother, he offers to set to music any 'virelai, rondeau or ballade in French' that the Infante Martín or any of his retainers may have composed. For music was one the prince's two dominant avocations. His other passion was the hunt, the sport *par excellence* of princes, in which John strove to emulate such famous experts as Duke Philip of Burgundy or his own kinsman Gaston Fébus of Foix. The nickname of 'el Cazador' (the Hunter) marks him as a member in good standing of that aristocratic club.

While John's devotion to music and the hunt at the expense of public affairs earned him the less decorous epithet of 'el Descurat' (the Negligent), it did not preclude a sincere interest in humanistic studies. The king is known to have learned at least the Greek alphabet, and Metge makes it clear that his master not only engaged him in frequent discussions on a high intellectual level but also, by lending him a copy of Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, played an active part in the genesis of *Lo Somni*. No less than the court, the royal chancery was a centre of the cultural activity which in the fourteenth century was extending the boundaries of scholastic learning. Its members routinely vied with each other and with Cicero in their Latin correspondence, and several would contribute to Catalan letters;

among them, Ferrer Sayol is noted for his translation of the *De re rustica*, a fourth-century treatise by Palladius Rutilius.

Bernat Metge joined this select company as an 'escrivà de la Reial audiencia'. This title probably indicates a promotion to higher responsibilities in which he would have to deal with legal and administrative matters. At any rate his annual salary signals a substantial and rapid advancement: at 3,300 *sous*, it exceeds that of many seasoned and higher-ranking officials of the royal Curia, including that of his stepfather. Such favour shown to a still junior secretary is hard to explain, and leads one to speculate that the beneficiary may have been regarded as a special retainer, perhaps even a friend, of the duke of Gerona. As was the case with Chaucer's career, the distinction between public service to the abstract entity of government and private service to the person of the prince was often blurred, but with the clearer and still highly feudal loyalty taking precedence. The favour shown Metge cannot have failed to cause raised eyebrows and durable jealousies, especially as he was often the recipient, from either the duke of Gerona or from the king, of large bonuses, sometimes barely camouflaged as legitimate reimbursements. In one instance he was awarded 100 florins (equal to 1,100 *sous*) for the loss of a mule in the prince's service, a more than adequate compensation if we consider that the market value of mules fluctuated in that period between 100 and 200 *sous*. Given the often penurious condition and the strangely casual handling of royal finances, the secretary's salary, as well as bonuses and reimbursements of expenses (legitimate or not) could take a very long time to materialize as cash. Like many another creditor of the Crown, Metge complained of delays, and even resorted to the occasional lawsuit in an attempt to collect arrears. Still, he prospered enough to own houses in Barcelona and Valencia. Moreover, the fact that at various times during his service to the royal family he lost not one, but four of those overvalued mules, cannot but raise questions about the humanist's reliability as a fiscal agent. Whether he did or not succumb to the temptations inherent to his office, hindsight makes this relatively benign padding of the expense account appear as an example of the financial intemperance which was later to cause much grief to royal servants in general, and to Bernat Metge in particular.

In 1379, Metge married Eulalia Vivò, daughter of a notary – another occasion for a respectable gift of cash from the duke of Gerona. The next year saw the prince himself take as his third wife a niece of Charles V of France, Yolande (in Catalan Violant) de Bar. In connection with the festivities which were held in Perpignan from 28 April to 8 May, Metge was dispatched to collect the 'gifts' levied in Aragon and Valencia for the expenses of the royal wedding. This marriage was not without political significance. Although France had by 1380 recovered from the disasters of

Crécy and Poitiers, and taken back much of the territory ceded to Edward III by the treaty of Brétigny, the Plantagenets still held firmly to their patrimony of Gascony and Bordeaux, theirs by inheritance since the middle of the twelfth century. Nor could the French king always count on his southern vassals to help contain the English, let alone expel them from the Continent. A marriage which would help secure the alliance – or at least the friendly neutrality – of Aragon was therefore in his interest.

Nevertheless, the crown prince's choice of a bride was not at all what Peter IV had in mind. Father and son had already been at odds over the widowed king's marriage to his mistress Sibilla de Fortia. The daughter of a minor baron, her elevation as Peter's fourth queen, with its inevitable rush of upstart relatives to preferments, was bitterly resented by the royal princes and many of the great nobles. A civil war was only averted when the duke of Gerona declined to lead the magnates in armed rebellion, and there was at least the appearance of a reconciliation. Now the uneasy peace in the royal family was threatened by John's obstinate disobedience. Since the only surviving offspring of his previous marriage was a daughter, the Infanta Joanna, the crown prince's remarriage was indeed an affair of state, in which the matter of the royal succession was only one factor determining the next matrimonial move on the diplomatic chessboard.

The king's wish was that his son should marry the heiress of Sicily, thus reinforcing Aragon's sometimes precarious hold on the island kingdom. However, the prince had set his mind on marrying a French princess. His resolve, which resisted all paternal threats and blandishments, may have had to do with their respective positions in the matter of the Great Schism. While the king remained steadfastly 'indifferent' – to use his own word – between the claims of the rival pontiffs to his obedience, John was from the onset a fervent partisan of Clement VII, the Avignon claimant supported by the French court. At the same time, the prospect of reigning over Sicilians mostly loyal to the Roman pope Urban VI can only have been distasteful to him. When he saw that nothing short of violence could stop the French marriage, Peter understood well enough that continued opposition could only offend Charles. He made of necessity virtue, but the formality of reconciliation only papered over the estrangement between father and son. It is worth noting that, even though he was a member of the prince's staff, nothing suggests that Bernat Metge ever ceased to enjoy the king's favour.

The arrival of Violant de Bar, while it helped repair certain political fences, was also the occasion for refreshing the traditional French cultural influences at the duke's court: fashions no doubt, but also music and letters and all manners of novelties. Violant brought in her retinue her own minstrels, one of whom was Jean d'Arras, future author of the *Roman de Mélusine*, and it is more than likely that Bernat Metge had occasion to

converse with the French poet. The princess was also well aware of the current 'must read' list, and a willing lender of trendy books (a letter written on her behalf by Metge directs the royal librarian to lend her own copy of 'the Machaut' to a Catalan nobleman). The French influence, already predominant in the entertainments at the courts of Peter IV and his sons, was thus reinforced by the arrival of the literate Valois princess. Nor was it to abate soon: in his *Book of the Ladies* (1396), the Franciscan chronicler Eixemenis was to observe that 'they amuse themselves all the time with French songs'. After the turn of the century, the pious Martin I, last king of the Catalan dynasty, decried the 'French motets with secular words, conducive to depravity', which were heard even in the convent of the Poor Clares of Valencia.

Given this pervading ultramontane ambience, and despite the fact that his vocabulary in this instance is studded with Provençalisms, Metge's choice of his native Catalan for his literary debut, the allegorical 'vision' poem *El Llibre de Fortuna i Prudencia* (The Book of Fortune and Prudence) is noteworthy. One should not however exaggerate its significance. French was fashionable as the language of chivalric romances and of the clever verse forms of the Machaut legacy, but in limited aristocratic circles, and Provençal was far from holding the cosmopolitan sway it had in earlier times. Both could be seen as occasional idioms, the hobby languages of courtly amateurs. Catalan, on the other hand, was already the vehicle of a distinguished body of literature illustrated in previous generations by such historic texts as the *Libre dels feyts* of James the Conqueror, and especially by the works – both in prose and verse – of the mystic preacher Ramon Llull (*ca.* 1232-1316). Early in his poem, Metge disclaims any pretence to fashionable Provençalizing, and thus settles comfortably in his vernacular:

> car ignorant sui de l'estil
> dels trobadors del saber gai.[1]

It is likely that *Fortuna i Prudencia* was composed in the early 1380s, an assumption supported by the author's own words placing his imaginary adventure on the first day of May, 1381. The day and the month are reminiscent of other medieval narratives (for example, Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, or Raimon Vidal's *Abril issia*) which open with conventional celebrations of the arrival of spring. On that morning the narrator, feeling feverish and unwell, goes to the seashore in search of fresh air. He is then lured by an old man into a boat without sails and oars, which nevertheless floats away from the shore at great speed. Here again, the motif of the magic ship harks back to the Breton lais and their courtly sequels, such as Marie de France's *Guigemar*. Eventually, the hijacked narrator is returned to the

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Barcelona strand, without any time having elapsed since his departure – another feature of the magic tales from Brocéliande. In the timeless interval, he has conversed at length with the personifications of Fortune and Prudence. This is the kind of allegory of which the *Roman de la Rose* was the best-known and inevitable model. It is, however, not a dream, but a waking vision, like that of Metge's older contemporary Bernat de Sò, and a work cast in a purely medieval mode.

Metge also produced the *Ovidi enamorat*, a prose translation of a late Latin poem then widely believed to be from the stylus of Ovid. A lost work entitled *Lucidari*, possibly a Catalan version of Bartholomeus Anglicus' encyclopedic treatise *De proprietatibus rerum*, probably dates from the same period. A more original, soul-baring piece is the short (211 lines) satirical *Sermó*. In this parody of the moralizing sermons then in vogue, Metge mocks women, clerics, naive husbands: in short, the usual targets of medieval satire. The poem stands, of course, in the ambiguous light of all parody: it is hard to say where the attack on hypocrisy ends, and where begins the deriding of conventional morality. In the retrospective light of Metge's troubles with the law and of certain passages of *Lo Somni*, the cynical advice he gives his reader would seem to anticipate and justify only too well the eventual indictment of his character:

> siats de natura d'anguila
> en quant farets.[2]

It is tempting to imagine the royal secretary enjoying his scholarly pursuits in the comfort and safety of a tranquil sinecure. He was, however, to experience all too soon the kind of reverses which made the motif of Fortuna so popular in the late Middle Ages. The death of Peter IV on 5 January 1387 ushered in a new round of confrontations between the Crown of Aragon and several of its vassals, most particularly with the Corts, or Estates, of Catalonia. The accession of the duke of Gerona as John I, far from signalling another promotion for Metge and other members of the prince's staff, brought them instead accusations of 'public scandal and malversations'. Although we do not know on what charges, it is certain that Bernat Metge was indicted. There is likewise no evidence that he was imprisoned, and he remained more than ever in the good graces of the new king and his queen. His exoneration may have been expedited at the king's insistence, and even though for the moment all seemed to end well, the episode must bring back to mind the inflated reimbursements received by Metge for his 'lost' mules and other instances of conspicuous royal largesse. Given the relations between Peter IV and his subjects, it is not surprising that the latter should see his death as an occasion for striking back at those who

were perceived not only as agents of his authoritarian policies, but also as profiteers skimming off from his enormously expensive projects. After decades of not always victorious wars (Sardinia still defied the Crown), recurrent epidemics and the popular resentment which was to erupt in the Barcelona pogrom of 1391, the atmosphere was one in which scapegoats had to be found and swiftly sacrificed.

In such an ambience, the literary theme of the fickleness of Fortune would inevitably modulate into the cautionary counsels of Prudence. It is perhaps characteristic of the humanistic temperament that, while Metge apparently left no personal account of the legal difficulties he experienced in the late 1380s, he chose that precise moment to return to those themes with his version of the Patient Griselda story. Or, to be more exact, with his translation of Petrarch's narrative, itself a Latin rendering of the tenth novella of the Tenth Day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. There is nothing surprising about that particular story surfacing in Catalonia: its moralistic appeal to Metge's contemporaries must have been more compelling than we can imagine, for it was then making the rounds of intellectual Europe, and is of course best-known to English readers as Chaucer's 'Tale of the Clerk of Oxenford'. What makes Metge's version noteworthy is that it not only gives the measure of the esteem in which Petrarch was held by the humanists of the royal chancery, but it also reveals the Catalan writer's preoccupation with the craft of language. In his dedicatory preface to Isabel de Guimera, he apologizes for the occasional 'roughness' (*grosseria*) of his translation, and cites the difficulty of rendering the subtlety of the original, for 'Romance [the Catalan vernacular] is to Latin as lead is to pure gold'. These disparaging remarks notwithstanding, Metge clearly spared no effort to polish the 'lead' of his *Valter e Griselda*, an exercise which undoubtedly gave him the opportunity to explore the stylistic potential of his native language.

By the early 1390s Bernat Metge was, much more than a mere scribe, one of the principal advisers to both the king and queen, with functions that entailed the collection of royal revenues. To his already high annual salary of 7,000 *sous*, the odd but never mean bonuses continued to gravitate, as for instance 1,000 florins on the occasion of Metge's second marriage. His first wife having died, the second (another Eulalia) was to give him another son and three daughters, one of them named Griselda. Heavier responsibilities in royal service devolved to Metge in the early 1390s, which explains the apparent absence of literary activity on his part. In 1392, he was entrusted with the administration of the ecclesiastical revenue which Pope Clement VII had made over to King John. In 1393, the queen named Metge her legal and financial adviser. Both appointments were fraught with potential trouble. Naturally, Metge followed the semi-nomadic court to its various

residences in Perpignan, Saragossa, Gerona, Valencia or Barcelona. These travels did not necessarily cause great hardship for the royal secretary: while we do not know if he had a mistress in every capital, it seems certain that in Valencia at least he had both the means to maintain, and the leisure to enjoy, an alternate ménage with a lady named Violant Cardona, who gave him yet another son.

The period was then a prosperous one for Metge, and yet his very success bore the seeds of future tribulations for which he could have blamed, at least in part, the flaws in his master's character. John's immersion in the management of his musical household and hunting *equipage* not only brought him to the edge of financial ruin, they also distracted him from his royal responsibilities. In matters touching religion, however, he took an all-too-active interest, one might say bordering on the maniacal. His genuine piety took the form of a strong, even obsessive advocacy of the Immaculate Conception, a dogma the Church would not get around to proclaiming until the nineteenth century. John I also became involved, much more so than his father had been, in the untidy politics of the divided papacy. While Peter IV had held fast to his neutral position despite pressures from some of his subjects and familiars, not to mention his powerful ally the king of France, John declared upon his accession for the Avignon Pope Clement VII. In September 1392, the election of the Pedro de Luna to succeed Clement as Benedict XIII engaged the royal house of Aragon even more directly, as the Infante Martin, John's brother and heir presumptive, had married a relative of the new Pope (or, as many historians have it, Antipope).

Family connections aside, John I's support of the Avignon papacy had in effect been prepaid by the already mentioned devolution of pontifical revenues. The tithes normally owed the Church were to be collected in the Crown domains and used to subsidize the reconquest of rebellious Sardinia, the papal fief granted to Aragon in 1297. Peter IV having failed to achieve this goal, King John's announcement of another expedition was vigorously cheered by the Barcelona burghers whose shipping industry and other commercial interest stood to profit, not only from the recovery of the island, but also from the discomfiture of the rebels' chief supporter, the Republic of Genoa. To their great disappointment, the promised expedition never materialized. Public opinion cried out that the king's advisers, bribed by the Genoese and the leaders of the Sardinian rebellion, had derailed the enterprise. But the simple fact was that the money was gone: the papal revenue supposedly earmarked for the purpose – and entrusted to Metge's administration – had been reassigned by the king to an Italian merchant named Luqui (or Luchino) Scarampo. It seems that the royal couple found

themselves in a situation not unknown to even the most powerful medieval monarch – deep in the debt of a hard-dealing money man. A more unusual and sinister aspect of the Scarampo business was that it grew into nothing less than a threat of invasion. It is hard to say whether the danger was real or imagined, but the time came when it was certainly perceived as imminent. And whatever his responsibility in the whole complicated affair, Bernat Metge was in the thick of it from beginning to end.

The momentum of events seems to have increased in 1395 with the despatch of an Aragonese embassy to Avignon. Metge was sent along with two of the Catalan magnates closest to the king, Roger de Montcada and Pere de Berga. At least part of the envoys' sealed instructions have remained a secret to this day, but the 'arduous negotiations' in which they were engaged with the papal bureaucracy are believed to have revolved around the devolution of certain ecclesiastical livings and revenues to members of the royal family. The Pope had then more urgent preoccupations, for it was in that same year that Benedict XIII was under great pressure from the French Crown to abdicate as he had promised to do before his election, and thus bring an end to the scandal of a divided Church. The envoys of Aragon were left to cool their heels while the pontiff was fending off the French, but it is unlikely that they also pleaded for the 'way of cession', for it seems that at the same time John the Negligent was entertaining the idea of transferring the Avignon court to Barcelona. The proposed move ran into strong opposition from the city councillors who did not fancy the fuss and expense. Nor did they care for the prospect of putting their own salvation in jeopardy by harbouring a schismatic Curia. Nevertheless, when French support was finally withdrawn, it was John's successor, Martin I, who repatriated the beleaguered but obstinate Benedict. And when Martin died, last of his dynasty, it was Benedict who negotiated the 'compromise' which put a Castilian prince on the throne of Aragon and Catalonia. These events were still in the unpredictable future when, in the leisure time of his mission to Avignon, Bernat Metge conversed with members of its cosmopolitan humanist circles and such movers of the new learning as the Aragonese magnate Juan Fernandez de Heredia. There he may well have met those who had known Petrarch, and there he became acquainted with his *Secretum* and other works. This studious interlude was unfortunately cut short when the king, accusing his envoys of 'having a good time' at the expense of his stalled interests, angrily recalled the embassy. Metge does not appear to have suffered personal disgrace from that failure, for he was with the court when it moved to Majorca in July 1395, fleeing from a recurrence of the plague on the mainland. During this reputedly festive island interlude (for which the locals had to foot a bill of at least 100,00 florins) the king lent his secretary another book, Macrobius' *Commentary on Cicero's Somnium Scipionis*,

which together with Petrarch's meditative work would constitute one of the models of Metge's own philosophical dialogue. His study time was interrupted at the beginning of 1396 by the return of the royal household to Perpignan, and to great troubles.

Perpignan is the capital of Roussillon, the Catalan province which lies north of the Pyrenees (now the French *département* of Pyrénées-Orientales). Royal by dint of being also the seat of the kings of Majorca, it should have been the best listening post for news from neighbouring France. Yet it was from Barcelona that word first came on 20 April, that mercenary companies under contract to Luqui Scarampo were poised to invade Catalonia within a month. The Consell de Cent – Barcelona's city council – immediately sent a delegation to convey the news to the king, as well as messengers to other cities, warning them of the impending danger. At about the same time, Valencia also dispatched an embassy to Perpignan, with a memorandum listing many grievances against the king's advisors. The latter were openly accused of having dilapidated practically all of the monarch's private patrimony, so that he had 'not a denier of regular income' and was reduced to living 'off taxes and the tears of [his] people'. Even more ominous was the allegation that coincided too well with the rumours of imminent invasion: 'Lord, among other property of yours, [they] have advised you and made you alienate the castles of the Roussillon border with France, and they now hold some of those.'

The indignant court reacted firmly to this unwelcome discourse: the messengers from Valencia were clapped into jail. One week later, the delegation from Barcelona arrived with its news and fresh accusations of collusion between the king's familiars and Luqui Scarampo. By then, however, John had left Perpignan for Torroella de Montgri in the Province of Gerona, where the hunting was better. He must not have taken the burghers' charges or their fears very seriously, for he seems to have left the queen in charge of the subsequent investigation. Instead of trying to ascertain the facts of the alleged military threat, Violant sent a team of three officials to Barcelona with a mission to find the source of the 'calumnies'. One of the three was Bernat Metge. By bullying the councillors, they traced the source of the news to a Barcelona resident in Avignon. Meanwhile, the queen having left Perpignan to join her husband, the governor of Roussillon reported to her that he had been unable to learn the whereabouts of the mercenary bands rumoured to be just on the other side of the French border. On 17 May, Bernat Metge reported at Torroella to the king who instructed him to return to Barcelona and to deal severely with the councillors for their disclosure of the Scarampo business. Yet there are signs that at this point the royal couple were beginning to sense that the threat of invasion was perhaps real after all.

If it was so, they did not have time to react, for John I died suddenly on 19 May, as he was setting out to hunt in the woods near Torroella. In an instant, the situation of Bernat Metge and his colleagues of the royal 'cabinet' was radically altered. They were the king's own men, personal retainers serving at his pleasure rather than state functionaries, and with his passing their privileges and immunities vanished. The new sovereign was to be Martin I, called 'the Humane', John's younger brother and at this time his embattled viceroy in Sicily. In Martin's absence his queen – Maria de Luna, Pope Benedict's kinswoman – presided in Barcelona over a Regency Council. The new government lost no time in naming a commission to investigate the charges brought by the cities against the late king's advisers. Many were arrested as early as 31 May. While Metge is not mentioned among them, his name appeared in the indictment when the trial opened on 2 June, 1396.

The rhetoric was ominous: John's familiars were depicted as 'sons of iniquity and perdition, who feared neither divine retribution nor human correction'. These 'devouring wolves' had entered a sworn compact to share among themselves the spoils of their malversations; they had alienated the royal patrimony; taken bribes to impede the Sardinian expedition; and plotted the hiring of mercenaries in concert with Luqui Scarampo. Metge was singled out as being responsible for causing the king to abandon the papal tithe to the Italian usurer in payment of an inflated debt. Worse even, for it was now a matter touching on the royal succession, he was accused of favouring Matthieu de Castelbon, count of Foix, who laid claim to the Aragonese throne in the name of his wife the Infanta Joanna, daughter of John I by his first wife Mata d'Armagnac. The charge rested in part on hostile comments Metge was alleged to have uttered earlier against Prince Martin, but it may be worth noting that, although no woman had ever reigned in Aragon, gender was evidently no bar to royal succession in other Iberian kingdoms (for example, Isabella of Castile, Blanche of Navarre) and thus Joanna's claim was not without its merits. To further complicate matters, it seems that there was at the former court a party hostile to Martin, headed by Metge's patroness Violant de Bar. In fact the now dowager queen tried to muddy the waters by announcing that she was pregnant and that her unborn child, rather than the late king's brother, was the legitimate heir to the throne. Given those undercurrents, and the fact that the count of Foix, resorting to force of arms to press his claim, attempted an invasion of Catalonia, it is quite conceivable that Metge was on trial for his life.

Once again, however, things turned out to his advantage, but not before he had endured several harrowing months of uncertainty. The former royal secretary was probably incarcerated from June or July 1396 until September of the following year, when Martin I arrived in Barcelona to take charge of

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