

Pere Engilbert and Dalmau Sesplanes, two astronomers/astrologers in the service of King Pere the Ceremonious¹

Summary: Astrology and astronomy reached their peak within the Crown of Aragon under the reign of Pere the Ceremonious (1336 – 1387). The promotion of the science of the stars that King Pere provided became substantial starting in 1359, when Pere Engilbert and Dalmau Sesplanes, master and disciple respectively, entered the service of the Crown to jointly carry out observations and produce astronomical works, with instruments built specifically for this purpose. After Engilbert's death, these tasks reached their culmination with the *Tables and almanac* and the *Tables of King Pere*, the latter including the participation of Jacob Corsuno. In addition, Engilbert and Sesplanes fulfilled the role of court astrologers. Particularly in the case of Sesplanes, documentation attests to a number of consultations he handled for Joan, the king's son and heir.

Keywords: medieval astrology, medieval astronomy, Pere the Ceremonious, Pere Engilbert, Dalmau Sesplanes, Crown of Aragon

The reign of Pere of Aragon (1336-1387) was indubitably the period in which the science of the stars reached its peak within the Crown of Aragon, thanks the pivotal support provided by that monarch². The main legacy of his patronage was an ensemble of astronomical and astrological works of great ambition. Among these, the *Tables and almanac* and the *Tables of King Pere*, which stemmed from the collaboration of two of the astronomers that were in the service of the Ceremonious: Pere Engilbert (fl. 1359 – 1361/1362) and Dalmau Sesplanes (fl. 1359 – 1383). Although they are fundamentally known for their astronomical legacy, there is no doubt that they also exercised the functions of court astrologer, as is shown by several documents that have been conserved. While today these are two completely separate fields, with astronomy being a field of scientific knowledge and astrology a pseudoscience, in the Middle Ages they were viewed as two sides of the same coin. One side was the theoretical study of the stars positions and the movement of heavenly bodies, while the other side was focused on how the heavenly bodies influenced our own world and often served as a justification to the theoretical study of the former. Therefore, the terms astronomy and astrology were

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² On Pere's promotion of astronomy/astrology see: J. M. Millàs, *Las Tablas astronómicas del Rey Don Pedro el Ceremonioso*, Madrid/Barcelona, CSIC, 1962, p. 54-84; J. Chabàs, *L'Astronomia de Jacob ben David Bonjorn*, Barcelona, IEC, 1992, p. 39-251; J. Chabàs, "L'activitat astronòmica a l'època del rei Pere (segle XIV)", *La ciència en la història dels Països Catalans. I: Dels àrabs al Renaixement*, ed. J. Vernet and R. Parés, Valencia, IEC/UV, 2004, p. 483-514; L. Cifuentes, *La ciència en català a l'Edat Mitjana i el Renaixement* (Barcelona/Palma, UB/UIB, 2006), p. 189-220; M. Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers: Astrology and Authority in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell, 2011, p. 105-153; J. Véronèse, "Nicolas Eymerich et l'astrologie à la cour d'Aragon", *De Frédéric II à Rodolphe II: Astrologie, divination et magie dans les cours (XIIIe-XVIIe siècle)*, ed. J.-P. Boudet, M. Ostorero and A. Paravicini Bagliani, Florence, SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2017, p. 97-155; S. Giralt, "Astrology in the service of the Crown: Bartomeu de Tresbens, physician and astrologer to King Pere the Ceremonious of Aragon", *Journal of Medieval History*, 44, 1, 2018, p. 104-129; G. Sabaté and L. Soriano, "La ciència dels estels dins del projecte cultural de Pere el Cerimoniós", *Literature, Science & Religion: Textual Transmission and Translation in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. M. Bellmunt and J. Mahiques, Kassel, Reichenberger, 2020, p. 397-414; J. Samsó, *Iberian Peninsula and the Maghrib*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2020, p. 200-206; S. Giralt, "Mestres de la ciència dels estels: astrònoms-astròlegs al servei del rei Pere el Cerimoniós", *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 52, 2, 2022, p. 649-675.

interchangeable at the time and the distinction between astronomer and astrologer were inexistent.

Master and disciple

From the first moment that we have documentary evidence of them, in 1359, Pere Engilbert and Dalmau Sesplanes appear working together in the service of King Pere of Aragon and we have no information at all regarding their trajectory prior to that point³. The name Engilbert appears written in several different ways in the documentation of the time: Engeubert, Angilbert, Engelbert, Engisberti, Gilabert. Despite the fact that the previous bibliography has shown a preference for the form Gilbert, which only appears in one of the copies of the *Tables of King Pere*, I follow the proposal by Lluís Cifuentes to make use of the form Engilbert⁴. All we know of him is that he was from the Occitan diocese of Rodez – because there is proof that this was the origins of his brother Bernat⁵ – and that he held the titles of master and of physician. While he was formerly considered only to be a master of arts because this was the title used in most of the known *Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó* (Archive of the Crown of Aragon, ACA) documentation regarding him, Cifuentes indicated several testimonies in which his status as a *fisic* is recognized, meaning a university-trained physician. His brother calls him *phisicus* in the notarial document mentioned above and he is specified as a “physician in the house of the lord king”⁶ in several notes from the treasury or as the “physician of his house”⁷. The fact that the title of physician is not consistently applied could be explained because in practice he must not have exercised this function within the house of the king. At least, there is no documentary evidence that he provided any medical care to the royal family. The activity for which there is proof is exclusively astronomical, and this is reflected by the fact he is sometimes called the *astrologus de domo nostra* by the king⁸.

In those same documents, we also see Dalmau Sesplanes designated as *astrologus de domo nostra*. In fact, from the very first mention in which he is connected to the house of the king, in 1359, until the death of Engilbert, in 1361-1362, Engilbert's name is continually associated with that of Sesplanes. Sesplanes was Engilbert's disciple, according to the preface of the *Tables and almanac* and of the *Tables of King Pere*⁹. Despite actually being from Perpinyà, in many documents up until his death he is designated as a citizen of Barcelona. His name also offers variants: Planes, Saplana (Çaplana), Dalmatius (the Latin form).

The first time we find both astrologers mentioned together in a document is a letter dated 15 October 1359, in which King Pere indicates to the master mason Guillem Carbonell what days and times are most suitable for the placement of the first stone of the building of the throne hall (*Tinell*) and other works he had undertaken for the *Palau Major* de Barcelona (Great Palace) according to the calculations of the royal astrologers Engilbert and Sesplanes, although the

³ With regard to these two astronomers, see Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 59-76; Chabàs, *L'Astronomia*, p. 16-25; Cifuentes, *La ciència*, p. 193-196; *Sciència.cat* –coord. L. Cifuentes, Universitat de Barcelona, 2012–, online database, <https://sciencia.cat/>, nom189 and nom187.

⁴ *Sciència.cat*, nom189.

⁵ Barcelona, Arxiu Capitular de la Catedral, Dignitats i oficis: Notaria particular, 230, fol. 170^{r-v}, edited in J. Hernando, *Llibres i lectors a la Barcelona del s. XIV*, Barcelona, Fundació Noguera, 1995, p. 355-356, doc. 228.

⁶ ACA, RP, MR, 829, fol. 44^r, fol. 173^v and fol. 244^r. See *Sciència.cat*, doc405, doc406, doc407.

⁷ ACA, RP, MR, 853, fol. 219^r. See *Sciència.cat*, doc404.

⁸ According to two documents preserved in the same folio: ACA, C, reg. 707, fol. 159^v.

⁹ “*Dalmatium Planes de Perpiniani habitorem in dicta sciencia [astrorum] eruditum apud Barchinone civitatem [...]. Dalmatius, discipulus ipsius*”, Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 90; “*Dalmau Planes, dexeble del dit mestre Pere*”, *ibid.*, p. 124; “*magistrum Dalmacium Planes scolarem dicti magistri Petri*”, *ibid.*, p. 142.

works had begun one month and a half before¹⁰. Actually, this strictly ceremonial use is the only piece of evidence of the use of astrology in any way by King Pere. In this case it is an election, the choice of the most favorable moment to perform an action.

Two other documents related to the work of the science of the stars that the master and the disciple wrote exist dated 24 October of that same year. One of them is the permit issued by Pere the Ceremonious to Sesplanes to consult the books on astrology/astronomy in the royal library one by one and with a receipt for each, for the purposes of composing a work on that art. Two books by Abenragel are excluded, as “those need not be released for said reason”¹¹. Various reasons for the exception of this Arabic author have been proposed, but it must be taken into account that if the work that had been assigned was astronomical in nature like the *Tables and almanac*, there would be no need for a book in astrology such as the extensive and famous compendium of Abenragel whose Latin title was *Liber completus in iudiciis astrorum*. That same day, Pere also wrote from Cervera to respond to Sesplanes, who had asked him whether Engilbert and he should send the book on the art of astrology that he had commissioned them to prepare or if they should offer it to him upon his return to Barcelona. The king ordered them to send it as soon as it was ready, to wherever he might be at that moment¹². Josep Chabàs identified the book of work “of the art of astrology” named in both documents as the *Tables and almanac*¹³. However, according to its preface, work on the *Tables and almanac* was not started until 1360 and was not completed until at least 1366 or even later, considering that, according to the Chabàs’ suggestion, the preface was not drawn up until 1373. Therefore, this identification fits poorly with the presentation of the book to the king, and the king demanding to see it “when it is finished” in October of 1359. On the other hand, Millàs suggests that it could be an astrological work, based on the reference to Abenragel in the document above¹⁴. Not taking into account his assumption that it was a Castilian version of Abenragel’s compendium despite clues pointing to it being in Latin instead, the exclusion of this work from the library access can be explained simply because it was irrelevant for a book in the field of astronomy, as I suggested above. In any case, this book, the first King Pere commissioned from Engilbert and Sesplanes, has been lost and there is no longer any way to discover its nature.

The preparation of the tables was carried out in parallel with the construction of astronomical instruments, according to what can be gathered from the prefaces of the *Tables and almanac* and the *Tables of King Pere*. They recall the many instruments of large size (numbering thirteen in total, some of which measured up to sixteen cubits) that were used by Engilbert and Sesplanes in order to carry out the observations needed for the development of these two works¹⁵. These observations were made both during the day and at night and required a large amount of time and effort. Among the instruments mentioned were quadrants and *armille* (armillary rings or armillary spheres), which were frequently employed in Islamic observatories.

¹⁰ ACA, C, reg. 1168, fol. 69^v (15 October 1359), edited in J. M. Madurell, “El Palau Reial Major de Barcelona: recull de notes històriques”, *Estudis Universitaris Catalans*, 22, 1936, p. 491-518. Regarding the building of the throne hall see R. J. Pujades, *Pedra i poder. El Palau Major de Barcelona*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2023, p. 316-318.

¹¹ ACA, C, reg. 1071, fol. 76^v (24 October 1359), edited in A. Rubió, *Documents per l’historia de la cultura catalana mig-aval*, Barcelona, IEC, 1908/1921, vol. 1, p. 190, doc. 191; *Sciència.cat*, doc388 (corrected).

¹² ACA, C, reg. 1071, fol. 77^r (24 October 1359), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 191, doc. 192; *Sciència.cat*, doc387 (corrected).

¹³ Chabàs, *L’astronomia*, p. 16-17.

¹⁴ Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 64-65.

¹⁵ *Tables and almanac*, Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 90 and 124.

However, far and away the most exceptional was a large sphere that was seven spans in diameter, and which was completed in December of 1361. At the beginning of January in the following year the king ordered space be made in the palace's royal library to hold the sphere, if necessary by removing chests that held books to have them moved to the archive¹⁶. Several documents from the chancellery and the treasury reveal substantial data regarding the materials and pieces, along with their respective value, that went into the construction of this sphere, which must have begun in 1359¹⁷. Julio Samsó identified this instrument as a celestial sphere¹⁸. This identification seems to be correct, if we examine the pieces and materials described in the expense notes for the deliveries accepted by Sesplanes in its construction. These notes include work by the painter, Ramon Torrent, for the planets, zodiac signs, stars and “figures of beasts” (constellations) in gold, silver, and tin on the celestial globe (“pom”)¹⁹. Unlike the quadrants or the armillary spheres, a celestial sphere is a demonstrative and computational tool rather than an instrument of observation. It is possible that, alongside this sphere, two large armillary rings were put together at the same time, as these appear as two combined instruments, placed on top of a wooden tower, “to confirm the course of the stars”, in the oldest document referring to the sphere²⁰. Sesplanes was also paid for another uncertain work he was making for the king²¹. Engilbert and Sesplanes's sphere is likely the same that in 1407 King Martí ordered to build a house expressly to host²².

The manufacturing of the sphere, along with the other astronomical instruments, must have been a particularly demanding task for Engilbert and Sesplanes. Indeed, it is recognized that for 11 months, from 1 December 1360 until the end of October 1361, both astronomers were constantly busy, “in some work that the stated lord [i.e. the king] sent them to do in the city of Barcelona”, which served to justify the payments they had received for two beasts of burden or transport²³. Although, there were payments for the same in the previous year²⁴, along with payments for clothes²⁵.

We do not know if Engilbert lived to see the sphere put in place, since he died sometime before 15 January 1362. It may have been at the beginning of that year or the end of the year before. Payment was issued in his name in November and December of 1361 for two animals²⁶ and then he was already indicated as deceased in the delivery note for the expenses incurred on

¹⁶ ACA, C, reg. 1179, fol. 106^v, edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 199-200, doc. 202, and *Sciència.cat*, doc387 (revised).

¹⁷ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 943, fol. 247^r (1359 or before), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 2, p. 139-140 n. 1, and in *Sciència.cat*, doc386 (corrected); reg. 1179, fol. 106^r (4 January 1362), edited in *Sciència.cat*, doc392 (revised); reg. 1179, fol. 106^r (4 January 1362), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 199, doc. 201, and in *Sciència.cat*, doc393 (corrected); ACA, RP, MR, vol. 871, fol. 186^v and ff. (15 January 1362), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 2, p. 139-142, doc. 141 (see *Sciència.cat*, doc394). Apparently, another copy of the document is ACA, RP, MR, 871, fol. 876-877: see J. Trenchs, *Documents de Cancelleria i de Mestre Racional sobre la cultura catalana medieval*, Barcelona, IEC, 2011, doc. 1209.

¹⁸ J. Samsó, “El tratado alfonsí sobre la esfera”, *Dynamis*, 2, 1982, p. 57-73; Samsó, *On Both Sides*, p. 860.

¹⁹ In the document mentioned above: ACA, RP, MR, vol. 871, fol. 186^v and ff.

²⁰ “Notamemnts d'En Daumau Sesplanes e de maestre Pere Engeubert de les armil·les e de la espera que an feta al senyor rey. Primerament, tenen II rodes grans de fusta ab lurs perns e ab lurs edificis per provar lo cors de les esteles, en les quals rodes entra fusta qui costa, ab mans de maestres, segons que vuy és obrada, ab aquella qui entra en l'espera qui està en una altra roda de fusta...”, ACA, RP, MR, vol. 943, fol. 247^r (cited above).

²¹ “los altres L florins deuen romandre notats per altra obra que fa nostra entrò sia acabada”, in the forementioned ACA, RP, MR, vol. 871, fol. 186^v and ff.

²² ACA, C, reg. 2251, f. 88v, edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 441, doc. 507.

²³ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 829, fol. 173^r and 173^v (10 September 1361), see *Sciència.cat*, doc410.

²⁴ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 829, fol. 44^r (4 September 1360), see *Sciència.cat*, doc409.

²⁵ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 853, fol. 219^r (14 February 1360), see *Sciència.cat*, doc408.

²⁶ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 829, fol. 244^r (31 December 1361), see *Sciència.cat*, doc411.

the sphere by him and Sesplanes on 15 January²⁷. His death led to a dispute over the inheritance of his belongings between his disciple Sesplanes and his brother Bernat. While Bernat had initially renounced all claim to his brother's sphere in favor of Sesplanes on 24 January²⁸, just two months later the virulence of the disagreement became evident as it required the king's involvement. At the petition of Bernat, the Ceremonious sent two orders to the *veguer* (the king's territorial deputy) of Barcelona and el Vallès to intervene. On one hand, he ordered him to take interest in the complaint that Bernat planned to lodge against Sesplanes accusing him of withholding improperly obtained property, so that the case be resolved quickly and justly. On the other hand, he ordered him to investigate Dalmau's possible culpable involvement in the death of Engilbert and, in the case he was found guilty, to condemn him to an exemplary punishment. Thus, the king lent a certain amount of credibility to Bernat's accusation that Sesplanes had taken advantage of the fact they lived together to poison his brother. The only evidence the accuser provided for this was that his brother had died after the physicians attending to him had declared that he was out of danger²⁹. Nevertheless, in the end, neither Engilbert's death nor the accusations of his brother stopped Dalmau from enjoying the king's confidence for the rest of his life. Therefore, we must presume that the process was found to be unfounded. This would lead to the suspicion that the accusations were false and simply a desperate attempt by Bernat to take possession of his brother's property.

Other works by Dalmau Sesplanes

Upon the death of his master, Sesplanes continued his astronomical work alone. The first of his solo productions that is known is the *Stellarum verificatio*, a list of 88 stars that is preserved in a manuscript held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France³⁰. According to the heading it was drawn up in 1362 along with two large *armille* by an astronomer paid by the King of Aragon from Barcelona. Chabàs interprets the two *armille* as armillary spheres, but I wonder if they might be the two armillary rings that we saw built together with the sphere above. On the other hand, the same scholar concludes that the astronomer must be Sesplanes and that the position of the stars therein seems to be a product of calculations rather than observation.

Based on the observations and work begun with Engilbert, Dalmau completed the composition of the *Tables and almanac*, as they are called in the preface of a later work, the *Tables of King Pere*³¹. According to the preface of the *Tables and almanac*, that work was written between January of 1361 and late 1366. However, the preface could have been written around 1373, as Chabàs supposes, given that it was stated the tables are applicable to the years between 1360 and 1433 and clarified that they reached up to 60 years, "counting from the

²⁷ "...despeses en la ciutat de Barchinona per rahó de I spera qu-el dit Dalmau e Maestre Pere Angibert, senrera mestre d'estrologia, han feta en la dita ciutat de Barchinona e fo acabada la dita espera per tot lo mes de desembre proppassat...", in the document already mentioned: ACA, RP, MR, vol. 871, fol. 186^v and ff.

²⁸ Document cited above (note 5).

²⁹ Both documents in the same folio: ACA, C, reg. 707, fol. 159^v, 24 March 1362.

³⁰ "*Iste stelle fuerunt correcte anno Domini 1362 in civitate Barchinone cum 2 magnis armillis per unum magnum astrologum quem dominus rex Aragonum pencionabat pro hoc faciendo. Iste stelle ascendunt cum istis gradibus signorum in horizonte Barchinone*" (BnF, Latin 7324, fol. 50^v-51^v). The list is edited and studied in J. Chabàs, "A List of Stars Correcte Cum 2 Magnis Armillis in 1362", *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 46, 2, 2015, p. 206-217.

³¹ This work was called *Tables of Barcelona* by its first editor: L. Thorndike, "Introduction and Canon by Dalmatius to Tables of Barcelona for the Years 1361-1433", *Isis*, 26, 2, 1936, p. 310-320. However, I prefer to make use of the title *Tables and almanac* (following Chabàs), as it is referred to in the preface of the *Tables of King Pere*, where it is called *almanach e taules* in Catalan and *tabule et almanach* in Latin: Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 90 and 142.

present moment”³². The need for new tables was justified because the prior ones, such as those of Toledo or of Alfonso X, had become obsolete due to the errors they contained and the passage of time. The *Tables and almanac* provided the moments of conjunction and opposition of the Sun and the Moon and the true position of the planets and of the Dragon’s Head, calculated in Barcelona. All that remains today is a preface and some incomplete canons in Latin, but nothing of the tables themselves.

Later, the Ceremonious promoted the development of some new tables by the same Sesplanes and Jacob Corsuno, a Jewish astronomer who seems to be expressly brought in from the Crown of Castile for this assignment. Three versions have been conserved: Catalan, Hebrew and Latin. The title *Tables of King Pere* comes from the Catalan version, although they are also known as the *Tables of Barcelona*³³. The preface written in the name of the king praises the science of the stars as the most noble and excellent of the natural sciences, justifying its practicality in the use of various branches judiciary astrology, particularly with regard to questions connected to the government. It is a science that allows us to know the vicissitudes of life through nativities, the events in specific moments through interrogations and to achieve advantages or avoid adversities thanks to elections. In addition, the preface exposes the need for these tables, which, unlike the *Tables and almanac* – made according to the ninth sphere, the sphere preferred by most Christians – were calculated also with consideration of the eight sphere more usually employed by “Arabs, Jews, and men of other religions”. Therefore, the monarch’s intention is to issue tables that can be accepted on an international scale, and hence the versions in three languages, but that are nevertheless calculated in Barcelona. They make up a complete set of astronomical tables stemming fundamentally from the Andalusian tradition and make it accessible to Christian astronomers³⁴.

Several pieces of documentary evidence suggest that the writing of the *Tables of King Pere* stretched out over several years, from 1375 to 1381. In November of 1375, the Ceremonious ordered the payment of twelve thousand *sous* (shillings) to Dalmau Sesplanes for his labors on a work regarding the science of the stars that he had been commissioned to do, but proof that this payment was made does not appear until May of 1380³⁵. However, later the astronomer presented a complaint to the king because he was still owed most of the twelve thousand *sous*. For this reason, on 31 December of that same year, the monarch addressed the treasurer Pere Desvalls to reprimand him for not having fulfilled the obligation, as well as to urge him to pay part of the debt due to Sesplanes immediately and agree on terms to complete the payment to him under the threat of making him fulfill it with his own property³⁶. The king described the book or books in question as, “a great and solemn work of astrology”, and then informed the

³² Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 85-93. Regarding this work see *ibid.*, p. 18-20, Chabàs, *L’Astronomia*, p. 18-19 and Chabàs, *L’activitat*, p. 484-486.

³³ I follow Cifuentes’ criteria (*Sciència.cat*, op2690) regarding the title given by the manuscript in the Catalan version (*Taules del rei En Pere*, MS Ripoll, Biblioteca Lambert Mata, XXI, fol. 120^v). The Latin title does not deviate from it very much: *Tabule illustrissimi regis Petri tertii* (MS París, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Latin 10263, fol. 53^r). Other scholars have called this work *Tablas astronómicas del rey don Pedro el Ceremonioso* (Millàs) or *Tables of Barcelona* (Chabàs and Samsó).

³⁴ The *Tables of King Pere* are edited in Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 95-238. On this work see *ibid.* p. 22-53 and 69-71; J. Chabàs, “Astronomía andalusí en Cataluña: las *Tablas de Barcelona*”, *Anuari de Filologia. B: Estudis àrabs i islàmics*, 2/1, 1996, p. 477-525; Cifuentes, *La ciència*, p. 194-196; Chabàs, *L’Astronomia*, p. 19-25; Chabàs, “L’activitat”, p. 486-491.

³⁵ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 372, fol. 146^r, partially edited in Trenchs, *Documents*, p. 477, doc 1890, and completely in *Sciència.cat*, doc449.

³⁶ ACA, C, reg. 1270, fol. 41^v (31 December 1380), partially edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 298-299, doc. 325, and revised and completed in *Sciència.cat*, doc414.

treasurer that he had commissioned the same astronomer to produce, “another as solemn as that one and also necessary”. Once again, in March, Pere had to insist on payment while Sesplanes waited to collect it before leaving Barcelona and taking on a new assignment that the king said was, “close to his heart”³⁷. The work that had just been completed must have been the same (“*cuiusdam operis seu libri astrologie*”) for which King Pere exempted Dalmau Sesplanes from military service for a three-year period on 5 January 1376, so that he could finish within said period that was deemed sufficient and to do so without distractions. He then provided him with judicial immunity against any legal case during that same period³⁸. What might this work be? Millàs opts not to identify this as the work completed in 1380, which according to him would be the *Tables of King Pere*, but instead suggests that the work commissioned in 1375 could be a book on eclipses received by Joan, which will be addressed below³⁹. Instead, Cifuentes rightly observes that, unlike the book described by Pere the Ceremonious, this was a small volume (“*llibret*”) intended for the duke, not for the king himself. Cifuentes argues that it is another work, of either astronomy or astrology⁴⁰. The most likely hypothesis belongs to Chabàs, who suggests that it could be the *Tables of King Pere*, since the dates are compatible with the other author of those tables, Corsuno, of whom there is proof of his presence in Barcelona between 1378 and 1381⁴¹.

Finally, regarding the last work which, as we have already seen, was commissioned by Pere and Sesplanes supposedly began working on in 1380, there are no other known references. It is very likely that it was interrupted by the death of the master in 1383.

Thus, Sesplanes’ production, mostly made in collaboration, either with Engilbert or with Corsuno, included two collections of tables, a list of stars, and an unknown work that would have had to have been completed around 1359. Did Sesplanes write any other works? Some documents from the ACA have been used by scholars to support hypotheses regarding other books written by Dalmau on the science of the stars that did not survive to our time. However, in my opinion, these indications are far from conclusive.

The first clue we find is in a payment from 1367, documented in double entry⁴². On 6 January of that year King Pere ordered the treasurer Raimon de Vilanova to give 300 golden Aragonese florins to Dalmau Sesplanes for his services and to cover the expenses that he had incurred for some astrology/astronomy books belonging to the king that had been released to him. On 24 January, Dalmau recognized before a notary that he had been paid this amount by the treasurer for said reason. Despite the fact that it may appear to reference books written by Dalmau himself as Millàs and Chabàs indicate, they should rather be considered as books acquired on behalf of the king according to Hernando’s interpretation⁴³. In my opinion, the

³⁷ ACA, C, reg. 1270, fol. 94^v, edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 290-291, doc. 316, and *Sciència.cat*, doc413.

³⁸ ACA, C, reg. 1095, fol. 48^v. The partial transcription published in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 280 n. 1, has been revised and completed in *Sciència.cat*, doc401.

³⁹ Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 74-75.

⁴⁰ Cifuentes, *La ciència*, p. 207

⁴¹ Chabàs, *L’astronomia*, p. 25.

⁴² “*In remuneracionem serviciorum per vos, fidelem domesticum nostrum Dalmacium Planes, nobis impensorum et in aliqualem satisfaccionem sumptuum per vos factorum in quibusdam libris nostris astrologie, quos nobis tradidistis, trecentos florenos auri Aragonie vobis cum presenti concedimus graciose*”, ACA, C, reg. 1344, fol. 22^v-23^r (6 January 1367), edited in Trenchs, *Documents*, p. 360-361, doc. 1354, and *Sciència.cat*, doc441. The second, Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona (AHPB), 20/9, fol. 56^v-57^r (26 January 1367), was edited in J. M. Madurell, “Documentos para la biografía de Dalmacio Ces-Planes, astrólogo de Pedro el Ceremonioso”, *Hispania*, 24, 96, 1964, p. 581-598, doc. 2, and Hernando, “Llibres i lectors”, doc. 260.

⁴³ Millàs, *Las Tablas*, p. 71; Chabàs, *L’Astronomia*, p. 22; Hernando, “Llibres i lectors”, doc. 260; Cifuentes, *La ciència*, p. 206.

references to “expenses” (“*sumptuum*”) and the use of the verb “release” (“*tradistis*”) make that interpretation more likely.

In 1379, after receiving the “*llibret*” on “the eclipse of the Sun and the moon in the new moon and the full moon” sent by Sesplanes through the surgeon Guillem Colteller, the Duke of Girona ordered his chamberlain, Joan Gener, to pass on to the astronomer a doubt he had regarding from which moment the hours of the new moon or the full moon must be counted⁴⁴. I have already mentioned that Millàs identified the booklet mentioned by Duke Joan as the work the king had commissioned from Dalmau. Cifuentes also believes it probable that it was a book by Sesplanes himself and that it was written in Catalan⁴⁵. However, in my own opinion, it could also be a text written by another author that Sesplanes solely provided to the royal library, in which there is record of a book in Latin with an identical title⁴⁶. On the other hand, Chabàs notes that the subject matter would fit the *Taules* of David Bonjorn⁴⁷.

Sesplanes’ Consultations

The position of court astrologer did not only involve composing works that would provide prestige to his lord, but also to answer the astrological questions of the king and his heir. As stated above, the preface of the tables bearing his name includes intense praise for astrology as the most useful natural science for political questions. The works of the other great astrologer in the service of Pere the Ceremonious, Bartomeu de Tresbens, also have a political orientation. However, unlike his son Joan, Pere was far more reluctant to call on his astrologers to advise him on affairs of state. Actually, there is only record of him doing so twice. We have already seen that the first document, in which Sesplanes appears alongside Engilbert, is in relation to the astrologically auspicious moment for the placement of the first stone in the remodeling of the royal palace of Barcelona in 1359. Then, there are no other known examples of the king consulting his astrologers until fifteen years later. In a letter dated 2 December 1374, Pere the Ceremonious ordered his lieutenant of the *mestre racional* (the chief of financial administration) to provide Tresbens and Sesplanes with whatever they might need in order for them to carry out certain matters relating to the Crown before they came to Cervera to appear before him. It seems likely that the task assigned was a joint consultation of an astrological nature, perhaps related with a message from Duke Joan dated the prior 31 October, in which he requests his father receive Tresbens and listen to what must have been astrological predictions regarding the monarch, the heir and the lands of the Crown of Aragon⁴⁸. If this was the case, Sesplanes could have been called to give his own opinion on Tresbens’ prophecies, and it would have been the king’s own son who convinced him to listen to the astrologers, and the initiative had indeed come from Joan.

In my opinion, this interpretation is reinforced by the fact that later Joan himself posed astrological questions to Sesplanes. Specifically, starting in 1379, there are several times when the duke of Girona sought consultations with the astrologer from Perpinyà. In August 1379, the duke asked his chamberlain, Joan Gener, to send a prophecy that had arrived from Avignon to

⁴⁴ ACA, C, reg. 1658, fol. 11^v (12 September 1379), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 280-281, doc. 304.

⁴⁵ Cifuentes, *La ciència*, p. 198-199.

⁴⁶ J. Massó, “Inventari dels béns mobles del rey Martí d’Aragó”, *Revue Hispanique*, 12, 42, 1905, p. 413-590, § 54.

⁴⁷ Chabàs, *L’Astronomia*, p. 26.

⁴⁸ ACA, C, reg. 1357, fol. 2^r, and ACA, C, reg. 1742, fol. 7^v. Both documents are edited in C. Ferragud and S. Giralt, “Bartomeu de Tresbens, metge i astròleg de Pere el Cerimoniós: aproximació biogràfica i diplomàtica”, *Magnificat: Cultura i Literatura Medievals*, 6, 2019, p. 113-163, docs. 28 and 29. The second also in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 2, p. 175, doc. 187.

Sesplanes so that he could confirm whether or not it was astrologically credible. He also wished for him to communicate it to King Pere to learn whether he knew of it and what use he thought to make of it⁴⁹. In December of that same year, the duke asked Joan Gener to ask Sesplanes which days would be most fortuitous for his betrothed, Violant de Bar, to enter Catalonia and for them to celebrate the wedding⁵⁰. This question, like that of the placement of the first stone, is an example of the search for favorable dates to carry out a political act (an astrological election), in this case for the marriage ceremony of the heir to the Crown. Finally, in November of 1381, Duke Joan was uneasy because of a bright, tailed star that had been seen in Barcelona, Tarragona, Valencia, and other locations for several days and wrote to Gener from Tarragona. With the general belief being that this phenomenon was a signal of a significant upcoming event, the duke ordered the chamberlain to ask Francesc Eiximenis, a Franciscan monk interested in prophecy, as well as Sesplanes, what interpretation they gave to the sighting. Each consultation was to be carried out separately and without either knowing of the other⁵¹. Unfortunately, we do not know the answer that either gave to this question.

Other questions the duke posed to Sesplanes were regarding doubts on astronomical technique. Earlier we saw that in September of 1379, he had asked about when to begin counting the hours of the new moon and full moon in reference to a book on eclipses and lunar phases. As Chabàs says, Joan was clearly not very familiar with the subject matter, because all astronomers considered that the origin of the day was at noon⁵². One year later, again through Gener, he sent another question to Sesplanes regarding the day and time in which the full moon began, because he could not find a proper explanation in the book the astronomer had sent to him, most likely the same book that elicited the previous question⁵³. Three days earlier, the duke had asked for the astrolabe that Sesplanes deemed appropriate be issued from the royal archive to Councilor Jaume Pallarès, because the one he had at the time did not work well. Based on this, it is likely that Joan not only read about astronomy but also attempted to practice it on his own⁵⁴.

Payments and royal benefits

Over the years that Sesplanes was in the service of Pere the Ceremonious, he received various ordinary payments from the royal treasury, by way of salary, clothing, and the animals he required. We have already seen that in 1360 and 1361, along with Engilbert, he was paid for animals and clothes. In 1366, the king's treasurer paid 2000 Barcelonan *sous* for back salary and clothes corresponding to the years 1364 and 1365⁵⁵.

Likewise, Dalmau also received money from the royal treasury for extra-ordinary payments, such as the writing of books, as we have seen. On some occasions the payment was a gift, such as on the occasion of his marriage, the king granted Dalmau 5000 Barcelonan *sous* in February of 1368, which were then paid in August of the same year⁵⁶. His marriage to Agnes

⁴⁹ ACA, C, reg. 1746, fol. 12^{rv} (6 August 1379), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 280-281; *Sciència.cat*, doc442 (corrected).

⁵⁰ ACA, C, reg. 1746, fol. 49^v-50^v (9 December 1379), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 281.

⁵¹ ACA, C, reg. 1665, fol. 38^v (15 November 1381), edited in Trenchs, *Documents*, p. 493, doc. 1970; *Sciència.cat*, doc400. Given the dates, the star mentioned could not be Halley's comet: Chabàs, *L'Astronomia*, p. 24-25.

⁵² ACA, C, reg. 1658, fol. 11^v (mentioned above). See Chabàs, *L'Astronomia*, p. 24.

⁵³ ACA, C, reg. 1659, fol. 132^r (19 September 1380), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 2, p. 223, doc. 236.

⁵⁴ ACA, C, reg. 159, fol. 126^r (16 September 1380), edited in Rubió, *Documents*, vol. 2, p. 222-223, doc. 235.

⁵⁵ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 352, fol. 64^r (January 1366), edited in *Sciència.cat*, doc446.

⁵⁶ ACA, C, reg. 1216, fol. 70^v (20 febrer 1368); ACA, RP, MR, vol. 356, fol. 89^r (August 1368), edited in *Sciència.cat*, doc448.

(as his wife's name appears in his will) was confirmed with the 50 Aragonese Florins he received from the merchant Francesc Roure, a citizen of Barcelona, in May of the following year. According to Josep Maria Madurell, this could be the dowry given for the wedding of Dalmau and Agnes, who was Roure's daughter⁵⁷.

Another way of rewarding his faithful servants was to appoint them to official positions. Thus, in June of 1371, Pere the Ceremonious granted Sesplanes the desk of the *taula d'acordar* of the royal navy, the office for enlisting ships' crews, in Barcelona⁵⁸. Shortly thereafter the appointment was modified so that he could assign the job to a substitute⁵⁹. The role was exclusive and for life, but he did not fulfill the office for long. In February of 1374, it was already occupied by Berenguer Simó, even though the official nomination of Dalmau's successor was not made until June of 1375⁶⁰. In testimony of his activity in this role, the autograph account book from 1372 regarding two galleys has been conserved along with various documents regarding payments of patrons, crews, and the equipment for ships⁶¹. It is possible that Sesplanes left this work in order to return exclusively to dedicating himself to being the court astronomer, especially considering that, as we have seen, in 1374, he was summoned to Cervera by the king, most likely for an astrological consultation, and starting in 1375 he had undertaken to write a text on the science of the stars.

Sesplanes' private documents

Besides the abundant documentation in the ACA, the name Sesplanes also appears in many documents of the notary Guillem de Santhilari, that were found in the *Arxiu Històric de Protocols* (Historical Archive of Notary Acts) of Barcelona and published by Madurell. Among these was the act referring to his dowry mentioned above. The oldest mention is from 1365 and consists of a writ of substitution of office signed by the astronomer for his role as proxy of the royal chamberlain Simó d'Empúries in favor of Jaume Barba so that Barba could act as proxy on behalf of Dalmau himself or on behalf of Simó⁶². In June of 1369, Sesplanes acknowledged that he had received 48 gold florins of Aragon from the notary Francesc Pasqual as an order or deposit⁶³. In 1381, Sesplanes acted as the executor for King Pere's physician, Ponç Salvador, and the Barcelonan silversmith Francesc Bonanat. Madurell references thirteen bills of payment for fulfilling the dispositions of Salvador's will that were drawn up between 21 August and 29 November 1382.

The last known document of Sesplanes is his own will that appears with the writ of its publication. To his wife Agnes, most likely the daughter of the merchant Francesc Roure, he returned her dowry. He assigned her the role of guardian for their three daughters, Isabel, Clara, and Violant, who were named universal heirs. On 29 August, the same day on which Sesplanes

⁵⁷ Madurell, "Documentos", p. 583

⁵⁸ "Donamus vobis, dicto Dalmano Planes, de tota vita vestra scribania armatarum nostrarum, ita quod vos et non alius sitis dum vixeritis scriptor ipsarum armatarum ipsamque scribaniam regatis", ACA, C, reg. 920, fol. 179v-180r (see *Sciència.cat*, doc5888).

⁵⁹ ACA, C, reg. 920, fol. 188r-189r (see *Sciència.cat*, doc5889).

⁶⁰ ACA, C, reg. 1404, fol. 124r-124v (8 June 1375) (see *Sciència.cat*, doc5898). On his substitution by Simó, see *Sciència.cat*, nom187.

⁶¹ ACA, RP, MR, vol. 2311/1, fol. 3v (9 abril 1372), see *Sciència.cat*, doc5885; ACA, RP, MR, vol. 363, fol. 101r (December 1372); ACA, RP, MR, vol. 363, fol. 105r (December 1372); ACA, RP, MR, vol. 363, fol. 108v (December 1372); ACA, RP, MR, vol. 363, fol. 115v (December 1372), all edited in *Sciència.cat*, doc450, doc451, doc453, doc453.

⁶² AHPB, 20/2, fol. 26r (24 October 1365), edited in Madurell, "Documentos", doc. 1.

⁶³ AHPB, 20/10, fol. 39v (1 June 1369), edited in Madurell, "Documentos", doc. 5.

was buried, the notary authorized the writ of publication. From this Madurell deduces that he died on 28 August 1383⁶⁴.

Conclusion

Thanks mainly to the rich documentary fund hosted at the ACA, so many as fourteen astronomers-astrologers directly related to King Pere the Ceremonious are known, either writing works on the science of stars or making astronomical instruments⁶⁵. Out of all, doubtlessly Engilbert and Sesplanes occupy an outstanding place, both by the notable works they contributed to composing (indirectly in the case of the former, prematurely dead) and by the construction of a large celestial sphere and other instruments, as well as their close connexion with the Crown. Sesplanes remained for twenty-four years in the service to the king, as witnessed by more than fifty documents that mention him, and participated in composing three astronomical works partially or entirely preserved. Therefore, among all the masters of the science of stars who served Pere, he was the lengthiest and most closely linked to Pere and is best biographically documented.

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⁶⁴ AHPB, 20/12, fol. 133^r-134^v (19 August 1383), Madurell, "Documentos", doc. 9.

⁶⁵ Giralt, "Mestres de la ciència dels estels".