

Francisco Ximénez de Santa Catalina

Francisco Jiménez de Santa Catalina

Date of Birth: 2.XII.1685

Place of Birth: Esquivias (Toledo)

Date of Death: Uncertain, possibly 1757-1760.

Place of Death: Dos Barrios (Toledo).

Biography

Francisco Ximénez took the habit of *Trinitario Calzado* in the convent of Dos Barrios (Toledo), in 1700. He studied logic and philosophy and completed his education by studying theology at the University of Salamanca in 1704. He was ordained a priest in 1709 and after Toledo he became the major preacher and vicar of the convent of Cuellar (Segovia). In 1717, he was assigned to North Africa along with other members of his order to found a hospital in Oran at a time when the Algerian authorities took the city from the Spanish. He arrived there on May 4, 1718. In his two-week stay in Oran he couldn't achieve his objective as a result of which he moved to the city of Algiers on May 21, 1718. In Algiers, he took care of the Christian captives as the senior preacher of the hospital of *Trinitarios*. There, he began to write a diary (later called *Diario de Argel*) in which he told the events that happened to him and drafted specific chapters on the characters of the city, the religious forms of the Muslims, etc. In May 1720, he moved to Tunisia with the intention to found a hospital for taking care of the Christian captives. In order to achieve this objective, he had to overcome the resistance of the Tunisian authorities, as well as the impediments imposed by the Capuchins who were supported by the French consul residing in the city on behalf of Propaganda Fide. In 1722, he managed to found the *Trinitario* Hospital of San Juan de Mata for the assistance of the captives, an institution that remained active until 1817. He lived in Tunis until 1735 as the administrator of the Hospital he founded. He travelled through the country to visit groups of Christian captives settled in other cities. He accompanied the doctor and French epigraphist, Jean-André Peyssonnel. These travels allowed him to describe archaeological sites and inscriptions written on the tombs and the buildings of antiquity. He collected all this information in four manuscript volumes of his *Diario de Túnez* and in the eight volumes of his *Historia del Reyno de Túnez*. During the fifteen years that he resided in the city he had frequent relations with descendants of *Moriscos* (expelled from Spain in 1609) who preserved Spanish as a second language. This was the case of Mohammed el Tahaxen de Urrea, who helped him to translate Arabic texts from Guacir and Budinaz and served as copyist for old Morisco texts in Spanish (*Historia de Moyssés en prosa y de Mahoma en castellano...*). He returned to Castile in

1735, where he carried out the office of retired *predicador general* and minister in the convent of Tejada in the town of Garaballa (Cuenca). He wrote a memoir of his years in this convent. He died in the convent of Dos Barrios, the exact year of which is unknown, though it must have taken place between 1757 and 1760.

Primary Sources

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Contributor: Miguel Ángel de Bunes

Viaje (Diario) de Argel y de Túnez, 1718-1735.

Historia del Reyno de Túnez.

Colonia Trinitaria de Túnez.

Date: 1718-1735

Original Language: Spanish

Description.

In all the texts he wrote, Francisco Ximénez de Santa Catalina dedicated a chapter to describe the religious beliefs and manners of Muslims, whether in Tunisia or Algiers. The main importance of his work is not the novelty of his opinions because his approach to Islam is similar to the traditional discourse of Spanish ecclesiastics of the Early Modern Age. Nevertheless, he refers to the social and religious practices of the societies in which he lived. Therefore, his writings are essential for obtaining a knowledge of the peculiarities of this part of Maghreb in the early years of the eighteenth century. The explanation of the Muslim religion follows the classical model. He refers to Muhammad's life, the beginning of his preaching, the ways in which he attained power and his death. Then, he explains the principal commandments of Muslim law and the obligations of Muslims, makes characterization and definition of men of religion, and explains the most important festivities that the Muslims celebrate throughout a year. He tends to mix the essential precepts of Islamic law with the

popular traditions of *Berbería*. Accordingly, these writings allows us to understand the popular religion of the two cities he lived in. He also offers an account of the two weeks he resided in Oran to establish a hospital when the city was recently conquered by the regency of Algiers. He refers to the changes in the physiognomy of Oran where the most representative buildings of the city were subjected to new religious uses after the conquest. This allows us to understand the reislamization process in Oran. During his stay in Algiers, he made only one trip, so, the information he offers is related exclusively with the capital. On the contrary, when he was in Tunisia, he travelled much of the country, which means that he gives information on the social and religious customs of all the parts he visited.

Significance.

The works of Francisco Ximénez, who resided in Algiers and Tunisia in the first third of the eighteenth century, are among the best European chronicles on the social, cultural, religious, archaeological and human reality of these two cities and their areas of influence. In addition to a great deal of descriptions of archaeological sites and a large number of epigraphic transcriptions that he included in his extensive texts, the most important value of his works is its description of the religious manners of the Tunisians during the Ottoman era, and to a lesser extent, those of the inhabitants of the city of Algiers. He assumes that he describes a false religion that is not able to separate the political power from religion, and that Muslims are governed by men who are closer to madness than to the true religion. Leaving aside this official discourse, recurrent in all these types of texts, the most interesting aspect of his works is his description of the typical customs and traditions of the cities in which he resided as an inhabitant. In both Tunisia and Algiers, the co-existence of Christians and Muslims, the contribution of the Ottomans and the traditions of the original inhabitants of the region, together with the large number of renegades who lived in these cities, create a very interesting human and cultural universe. Unfortunately, the limited circulation of the texts written by Francisco Ximénez de Santa Catalina, which are still preserved as manuscripts in several Spanish libraries, more studied in their archaeological and epigraphic aspects than in their religious characteristics, have prevented this author from being known in all his dimensions. He is not a polemicist or a Christian theologian who wants to attack the North African Islam because Francisco Ximénez studied the religious customs of Algeria and, above all, Tunisia as a culturalist and as an integral member of this society. His continuous communication with the *Moriscos* and renegades, and the compilation of texts of *aljamiada* literature that he acquired and brought to Spain when he returned from his long mission, allowed him to obtain valuable and original information, which he narrated in a very peculiar manner. His works are very important for comprehending the culture of the *Moriscos* a century after their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the religious customs that these Muslims preserved from their European past.

Publications

Colonia Trinitaria de Túnez, ed. De I. Bauer Landauer, Tetuán, Tipografía Gomariz, 1934.

Studies

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