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Nigra Sum Sed Formosa:
Black Slaves and Exotica in the Court of a
Fourteenth-Century Aragonese Queen¹

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Abstract

African slaves of Europeans are most commonly associated with images of exploitation as brute labor or domestic servants, as marginalized and discriminated against on the basis of their skin color, and perceived of as of inherently lower status. An examination of the role of black slaves in the royal households of the Crown of Aragon in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, however, reveals that African captives were sometimes given a privileged position at court. African slaves were esteemed as ornamental fixtures and, as such, comprised yet another element of the exotica with which members of the aristocratic elite surrounded themselves in order to convey a sense of wealth and power. Although this may represent yet another dimension of the objectification of these slaves, nevertheless, it reflects the fact that, prior to the age of colonization and mass-enslavement, Africans could be valued rather than disdained for their appearance.

Keywords

Queens-Spain-History; Queenship; Slavery-History; Spain-History; Exotic Animals-History; Crown of Aragon (Spain)-History.

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The following abbreviations are used: ACA for Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (Barcelona); ARV for Arxiu del Regne de València (Valencia); C for Cancillería Real; RP for Real

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As the historiography of medieval Europe and, in particular, Iberia has come to focus more and more sharply on figures traditionally considered to be on the “margins” of society, non-European peoples, including sub-Saharan Africans, and especially slaves, have become an object of interest to historians. It is now recognized that such individuals participated more widely than previously believed in the society and economy of the Iberian Peninsula in the late Middle Ages and in roles which were by no means limited to the lower echelon of society.² As the following study of the court of Queen Maria de Luna of the Crown of Aragon (r. 1396-1406) shows, black slaves played a role in royal courts that transcended that of mere servant, one which was related to the public demonstration of princely power and inextricably bound up with their “exotic” physical appearance.

Maria de Luna was born around 1358, the first child of Lope, Count of Luna and Lord of Segorbe, and of Brianda d’Agout.³ On Sunday, 13 June 1372, she married the *infant* Martí (the second son of Pere the Ceremonious) at the cathedral of Barcelona. Martí was not the heir to the Crown; hence, Maria’s ascension to the throne was unexpected, precipitated by the death of King Joan I “the Hunter” (r. 1387-96), who died in an accident

Patrimonio; MR for *Mestre racional*; and *CODOIN* for *Colección de documentos inéditos del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón*, ed. Próspero de Bofarull y Mascaró, 44 vols. (Barcelona: J. E. Montfort, 1847-1910).

² See, for example, José L. Cortés López, *Los orígenes de la esclavitud negra en España* (Madrid: Mundo Negro, 1986); Cortés López, *La esclavitud en la España peninsular del siglo XVI* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1989); Debra Blumenthal, “‘Implements of Labor, Instruments of Honor’: Muslim, Eastern and Black African Slaves in Fifteenth-Century Valencia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2000); and *De l’esclavitud a la llibertat: Esclaus i lliberts a l’Edat Mitjana*, ed. Maria Teresa Ferrer Mallol and Josefina Mutgé Vives (Barcelona: Consell Superior d’Investigacions Científiques, Institució Milà i Fontanals, Departament d’Estudis Medievals, 2000).

³ The Luna family was one of the most important Aragonese noble lineages. In the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the family split into three branches. The most important was that of Ferrench de Luna, to which Maria belonged. Maria’s father, Lope de Luna, had been a loyal supporter and close companion of her father-in-law, Pere “the Ceremonious.” For their part, the Agout were an important Provençal family; Lords of Sault, they were also related to the Baux (a family which claimed title to the extinct Latin empire of Constantinople). Brianda d’Agout was the daughter of Fouquet d’Agout, Lord of Sault and Reillanne, Grand Seneschal of Provence; her mother was Baucio, the daughter of Ramon de Baucio, Count of Abelino. Francisco de Moxó y Montoliu, *La Casa de Luna (1276-1348): Factor político y lazos de sangre en la ascensión de un linaje aragonés* (Madrid: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1990), 311.

on May 19, 1396, while practicing the pastime after which he was nicknamed. Because the king had left no male heir, Martí inherited the crown, and Maria, whose destiny had apparently been that of an *infanta*, or princess, became queen and lieutenant. Nevertheless, Maria was not entirely unprepared for her new role, given that during her years as *infanta* she had been one of the most richly endowed noblewomen of the Crown of Aragon and had garnered extensive experience in governing her own and her husband's estates.

Maria's role as a governing queen was manifest throughout her reign, starting when she acted as lieutenant for her husband, Martí the Ecclesiastic or the Old (posthumously referred to as "the Humane"), in 1396 and 1397, and later was abroad involved in the pacification of Sicily. In this period, the queen was confronted with the challenges of ruling alone and defending the throne against pretenders who would have claimed the kingdom as their own; once having shown herself capable of these tasks, she remained her husband's valued counselor throughout her life. Thus, when the Kingdom of Valencia entered into a crisis of violent noble factionalism in 1402, it was she whom the king called on to act as his lieutenant in that realm. Her political activity brought her into diplomatic contact with foreign kings and nobility, as well as the Church, headed at one point by her relative, the schismatic Benedict XIII, "Papa Luna." Maria's political acumen is unanimously acknowledged by historians, especially in contrast to that of her husband, who is consistently portrayed as more interested in books than governance.⁴

The queens of the Crown of Aragon administered their patrimony and organized their own court (*consortium domesticum et familiarum*) independently from that of their husbands, managing their resources according to their tastes and the interests of the politics of the monarchy. This had been the case since the reign of Jaume II "the Just" (1291-1327). In 1308 the king promulgated an order referring to the protocol of his table which was particularly concerned with the members of the queen's court; ten years later, he issued a much more specific policy concerning the adminis-

⁴ See Núria Silleras-Fernández, "Spirit and Force: Court and Conscience in the Reign of Maria de Luna (1396-1406)," in *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 78-90; and Silleras-Fernández, *Maria de Luna. Power. Piety and Patronage in Late Medieval Queenship*: (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

trative autonomy of the court of Maria of Cyprus, then his wife.⁵ Subsequently, in 1344 Jaume's grandson, Pere the Ceremonious, formalized this arrangement in the *Ordinacions*, a treatise which regulated the administration and ceremony of the royal court, and the chancery and financial apparatus of the kingdom. These rules remained in force, with some modifications, through the reign of Ferran II "the Catholic" (1479-1516).⁶ Thus, as a result of their economic independence, the queens of the Crown of Aragon became powerful sponsors of cultural and artistic initiatives, patronesses with considerable resources and influence at their disposal.

Maria de Luna's court falls within the bounds of what may be classified as a European court of the "flamboyant age," in which there was often no clear division between rulers' private and public spheres.⁷ Although her court lacked the splendor of that of some of her contemporaries (like the Dukes of Burgundy) and was not as ostentatious as that of her predecessors, Joan I "the Hunter" and Violant de Bar (r. 1387-96), it constituted a prime nexus of power and influence in the great Catalano-Aragonese aggregate. It was a household in which politics, culture, and society meshed

⁵ *CODOIN*, 6:17-19.

⁶ Traditionally, the *Ordinacions* of Pere the Ceremonious (who gained this honorific title precisely for having promulgated these regulations) have been considered a mere copy of the *Leges Palatinae* of Jaume III, king of Mallorca (1324-49), which had been promulgated (in Latin) in 1337. Undoubtedly, Pere knew of the Mallorcan work, since he edited his *Ordinacions* soon after he annexed Mallorca to the Crown. Certain parts of Jaume's work appear verbatim in the *Ordinacions*, merely translated into Catalan. It is possible, as Olivetta Schena suggests, that the unwritten protocol of the court of the Crown of Aragon inspired the adaptation of the Mallorcan treatise. Schena, *Leggi palatine di Pietro IV d'Aragona* (Cagliari: Edizioni Della Torre, 1983), 31-2. See also Olivetta Schena and Josep Trenchs, "Le leggi palatinae di Giacomo III de Maiorca nella corte di Pietro IV d'Aragona," XIII Congrès d'Història de la Corona d'Aragó, 4 vols. (Palma de Mallorca: Institut d'Estudis Balearics, 1990), 2:112; F. Sevillano Colom, "Apuntes para el estudio de la cancillería de Pedro IV el Ceremonioso," *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, 20 (1950): 144; and Marta VanLandingham, *Transforming the State: King, Court and Political Culture in the Realms of Aragon, 1213-1387* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002). The text of the *Ordinacions* is published in volume 5 of *CODOIN*.

⁷ Jacques Le Goff attributes a specific creativity and modernity to the era which covered (with regional variations) the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See Le Goff's preface to J. Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'au-delà* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1980), x. This era also coincides with the period which Johan Huizinga qualifies as the "waning of the Middle Ages." Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study in the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth centuries* (London: Arnold, 1955).

through the distribution of patronage as well as through core institutions in which the main protagonists benefited from public manifestations of power and majesty. This power was customarily demonstrated by the possession of precious or exotic objects and by the display of luxury. Hence, just as they maintained a monopoly on legitimate political power, the monarchs enjoyed special rights regarding the display of luxurious clothing and objects. Typically, rulers were mostly exempt from the sumptuary laws which limited ostentatious displays of wealth and luxury, and they also had the power to grant dispensations (*la divisa de la corretja*) to individual subjects so that they too could adorn themselves with the visible trappings of courtly power.⁸

María de Luna was an energetic and ambitious queen, driven by the desire to forward her dynasty and her family and to govern. She had both a public and a private persona: the image she cultivated before her subjects and the character she displayed in the intimacy of her household. In each, the strength of her Christian devotion was manifest. It was evident, for example, in her choice of private reading; María never demonstrated any interest in secular literature but limited her reading to pious works and the breviary. On the other hand, courtly music, objects of beauty, and rich clothes were much to her taste, and the esteem in which she held such costly objects was directly related to her intention to emphasize her royal dignity.⁹ In addition, because of her social status and her particular preoccupation with maintaining outward symbols of regal power, María maintained a retinue of slaves, both as *infanta* and queen.¹⁰ Whereas some

⁸ *La divisa de la corretja* was an honor bestowed by the Catalan-Aragonese rulers on their nobility and other followers which granted dispensation from the sumptuary laws aimed at curbing the growing luxury. Henri Bresc, “*L’empresa de la correte et la conquête de la Sicile: Le royaume errant de Martin de Montblanc*,” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 23 (1993): 198, 211-12.

⁹ Thus, when María founded the convent of Sant Esperit (situated in near Sagunto and under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Zaragoza) in 1402, she did so as queen. As a result, it was endowed in what may have been an excessive manner, given the strict model of Franciscan observance which it was meant to follow. María continued to favor this royal foundation; even in death, her will provided for it with a significant donation. This may have been mere piety, but it may also have been meant to assure the survival of the convent, which would continue to celebrate masses for her soul and honor her memory as founder. Benjamín Agulló Pascual, “Fundación y dotación del convento de Santo Espíritu del Monte,” *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 42 (1982): 125-55.

¹⁰ In this respect, the queen was at variance with the customs of her times, given that female slave owners were typically widows who had inherited slaves from their husbands.

of the slaves fulfilled strictly practical functions as servants, others were intended merely to flesh out her retinue to a suitable size. Among these were some who were valued particularly for their striking appearance or unusual purveyance; for this reason, black slaves held a special attraction for the queen and her contemporaries.

Thus, in March 1400 Maria de Luna dispatched a special gift to Carlos III “the Noble” (1387-1425): a “little black slave” (*l’esclaveta negra*) named Sofia.¹¹ The Navarrese king received this gift in a special wrapping—the girl was dressed in an *aljuba morisca*, that is, a “Moorish cloak,” made from the finest silk of Venice. Her outfit was specified as being red, considered the most beautiful color, particularly popular with outfits for festivities and special occasions and believed to embody curative and magical powers.¹² Sofia is documented for the first time at the court of the queen in the year 1397, where she also appears described by the diminutive *esclaveta* (little slave) in reference to her youth; here, she was mentioned as wearing a blue outfit.¹³ One of the factors which may have influenced the queen to present her slave to the Navarrese king was that in 1399 her son, Martí the Young, king of Sicily, had offered her two female black slaves, the mother and daughter Rosa and Dominica. Both of these women were attached to the household of the queen, and at the moment of their arrival Martí I had

Non-widowed female slave owners were rare. Roser Salicrú, “Esclaus i propietaris d’esclaus a la Barcelona de 1424-1425,” in *III Congrés d’Història de Barcelona: La ciutat i el seu territori, dos mil anys d’història*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Ajuntament, Institut Municipal d’Història, 1993), 1:227.

¹¹ See appendix, doc. 1.

¹² In this period, red was considered the most beautiful color, *de rigueur* for great public celebrations. According to the *Ordinacions*, during the coronation ceremony, the king was to be dressed in red and gold and the queen in white. *CODOIN*, 5:272, 305. Curative and magical powers were also ascribed to the color red; hence, Martí’s doctors recommended he wear only red clothing when he was ill, as recorded in a letter from the king to Ramon de Mur, bailiff-general of Aragon, dated 17 January 1403: “E com per rao del nostre accident, de consell dels metges, a nos convengue quaix tota vegada vestir vermell.” Daniel Girona Llagostera, *Itinerari del rei en Martí* (Barcelona: Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1916), 109, doc. 8; cf. 110, doc.13.

¹³ The first document in which Sofia appears is dated at Barcelona, 25 April 1397. Among the payments for clothing which had purchased from Berenguer Pomar, a Barcelona draper, the financial account given by Jaume Pastor notes “a bolt and a half of blue cloth” (“una cana e mitja de drap blau”), part of which was used “to make a garment for the black slave girl, Sofia” (“de que’s estada feta una cota a Sofia, esclaveta negra de la dita senyora Reyna”). See ACA: RP, reg. 905, fol. 79r.

them presented with new outfits, again, red in color.¹⁴ With these two new additions to her retinue, the queen could afford to dispense with one of her black slave girls in a show of monarchical magnanimity to a fellow ruler.

Rosa and Dominica appear in a series of documents in the queen's account books from the years 1400 through 1405.¹⁵ Initially, one of Maria de Luna's ladies in waiting, Joana de Castellnou, and Garcia Cosida, the queen's *sotscomprador* (assistant purchasing agent), were ordered to look after the two women, seeing to their needs, including providing their food. In 1403 Joana married, and her responsibilities were passed on to Toda Pastor, another administrator of the court.¹⁶ A hint of the position of this mother-daughter couple within the court can be seen in a receipt of the various assignments for food and drink which the queen paid to each of her ladies in waiting and domestic servants. In this account, Rosa and Dominica appear toward the end of the list, adjacent to the section which dealt with court administrators, and just after the ladies of the court; each of the two women had a separate budget allocation.¹⁷ On 1 October 1404, Rosa died and the queen paid for the expenses of her funeral, just as she had done for another of her black slaves, Caterina, who had died in July of the same year.¹⁸ Dominica, on the other hand, continued in Maria's service

¹⁴ Girona, *Itinerari del rei en Martí*, 64, doc. 38-3 (16 May 1399). Javierre's reference does not correspond to the proper register. Aurea L. Javierre Mur, *Maria de Luna, reina de Aragón* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Jerónimo Zurita, 1942), 114.

¹⁵ These refer to the provisioning of food and clothing, which came to approximately twelve *solidos* of Barcelona for the two women. ACA: RP, reg. 906, fol. 55r; reg. 526, fol. 59r; reg. 530, fol. 42r, 74r; reg. 531, fols. 56r-v; and reg. 532, fol. 41v.

¹⁶ Joana de Castellnou's marriage is attested to by a document dated at Sagunto on 19 May, 1403, in which Maria contributed four hundred Aragonese *florins* to her dowry. ACA, C, reg. 2339, fol. 11v.

¹⁷ Beginning in 1404, Rosa and Dominica appear in a list of provisions distributed to the ladies and other personnel of the queen's court. ACA: RP, reg. 531, fols. 56r-v. The two women seem to have been quite well cared for. For example, the total of ninety-two *solidos* of Barcelona which they received compares favorably (given the two women's status as slaves) to the 176s. 4d. received by Violant de Luna (a member of Maria's lineage and, thus, one of the more prestigious ladies at court) or the 153s. 4d. which Joana de Castellnou (she who was originally responsible for Rosa and Dominica's care) were apportioned.

¹⁸ Maria paid for Rosa's burial (see appendix, doc. 2). Thereafter, Dominica appears in two documents, receiving her provisions from Toda Pastor. ACA: RP, reg. 532, fol. 80r (31 December 1404); reg. 533, fol. 46v (30 September 1405). The black slave Caterina's death in July 1404 is confirmed by a document in which the queen takes charge of her funeral arrangements. ACA: RP, reg. 531, fol. 35v (12 July 1404).

until the queen's death on 28 December 1406. Thereafter, she appeared at the funeral of her mistress along with the other members of the royal household, dressed in the requisite black mourning outfit and taking part in the funeral procession which bore the former queen's remains the sixty kilometers from Vila-Real to Valencia.¹⁹

To understand the position and role of black slaves in contemporary royal and seigniorial courts, the context of slave ownership and the concept of the exotic must both be taken into account. Being black and a slave in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Crown of Aragon was not exotic in itself, and the notarial protocols confirm the existence of a considerable population of black and "brown" (*llor*) slaves whose skin color is specifically noted in documents of exchange and sale.²⁰ At the beginning of the fifteenth century, slaves in Barcelona numbered approximately five thousand (compared to a total population of thirty thousand), and many of these were nonwhite.²¹ In fact, a trade in slaves between the Crown and North Africa can be traced back to before the eleventh century, when slaves were carried across the Sahara by Muslim traders and transported to Sicily, from where they were then introduced to the Iberian peninsula by Catalan traders. This source was complemented by the arrival of others captured in the course of military campaigns and coastal raids. Later, from the mid-sixteenth century on, as European powers established bases on the West African coast, the number of black slaves arriving in the Iberian Peninsula increased dramatically. By the 1550s, Spanish traders were importing up to two thousand sub-Saharan annually using the Casa dos Escravos in Lisbon.²² At this time, the slave population in Spain may have numbered one hundred thousand, and it was mostly concentrated in the south.²³

¹⁹ Dominica's fate after the death of Maria de Luna is unknown. For her appearance in the funeral cortege, see ARV: MR, C. reg. 9709, fol. 44v (1407).

²⁰ See a catalog of documents relating to slaves, Josep Hernando, *Els esclaus islàmics a Barcelona: Blancs, negres, llors i turcs; De l'esclavitud a la llibertat (s. XIV)* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003).

²¹ Roser Salicrú, *Esclaus i propietaris d'esclaus: L'assegurança contra fugues* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1998), 5.

²² Alfonso Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Sevilla y su tierra a fines de la Edad Media* (Seville: Diputación provincial, 1979), 222-3; A. C. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10; Franklin Knight, "Slavery and Lagging Capitalism in the Spanish and Portuguese American Empires, 1492-1713," in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 72.

²³ Aurelia Martín Casares, *La esclavitud en Granada en el siglo XVI: Género, raza y religión* (Granada: Ilustre Colegio Notarial de Granada, 2000), 91-138.

Like other slaves, many black Africans converted to Christianity either out of personal conviction or in hopes of emancipation or a change in status. Indeed, the illuminated miniature attached to the rubric *De iudeis et de sarracenis baptizandis* in a thirteenth-century manuscript of Vidal Canellas's Aragonese legal compilation of 1247 depicts a black man receiving baptism. However, unlike many other Muslim *baptizati*, black converts must have had difficulty integrating themselves into the society of the Crown, given the color of their skin—they could not hide their “foreign” origin.²⁴ Nevertheless, black individuals, slaves or not, would have been common enough in the Crown that they would not have been considered exotic merely by virtue of their skin color. In fact, by the late fifteenth century, converted African slaves and their descendents were so common in the Crown of Aragon that they had founded their own religious confraternities in Barcelona (1455) and Valencia (1472).²⁵ They were also common in the lands of Castile, and in 1475 there was a prosperous confraternity of Africans and mulattos in Seville, which counted among its members the judge Juan de Valladolid, an usher of Queen Isabel the Catholic (r. 1474-1504), and patronized a hospital and chapel dedicated to two Ethiopian saints, Elesban and Ephigenia.²⁶

²⁴ G. Tilander, *Vidal Mayor: Traducción aragonesa de la obra “In excelsis Dei thesaurii” de Vidal de Canellas*, 3 vols. (Lund: H. Ohlssons boktr., 1956), 1:xxv (VIII: 11).

²⁵ These confraternities aimed to foster solidarity among members and ensure that they received a Christian burial. Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale*, 2 vols. (Bruges: De Tempel, 1955), 1: 530-1; M. Gual Camarena, “Una cofradía de negros libertos en el siglo XV,” *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón*, 5 (1952): 457-66; Debra Blumenthal, “La Casa dels Negres: Black African Solidarity in Late Medieval Valencia,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227; and Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, “La esclavitud en Castilla durante la Edad Media,” in *La esclavitud en Castilla en la Edad Moderna y otros estudios de marginados* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2003), 27. The rules of the Barcelona chapter are edited by Bofarull in volume 7 of *CODOIN*.

²⁶ Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Sevilla*, 222-3. St. Elesban was the religious name of Caleb, a sixth-century Ethiopian king famous for having undertaken a military expedition against the Jewish kingdom of Yemen. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967-96), s.v. “Ethiopia.” St. Ephigenia was an Ethiopian princess evangelized by St. Matthew who, tradition says, founded a convent for two hundred virgins; Matthew was martyred for refusing to consent to her marriage to the local king, Hirtacus. *The Golden Legend; or, Lives of the Saints, as Englished by William Caxton*, 7 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1900-1939), 5: s.v. “St. Matthew.” See also, Domínguez Ortiz, “La esclavitud en Castilla durante la Edad Media,” 4.

On the other hand, in contrast to black slaves destined to be laborers or domestics, slaves who were given as gifts and kept at the royal court can be qualified as *exotica*—their primary function was one of display. Slaves are normally referred to in chancery documents in terms of their origin, gender, age, name, and profession; the fact that the slaves mentioned in these documents were all very young women and were all described as being dressed in bright colors and in precious fabrics cut in “Moorish” styles underlines their primary function as decorative objects. In the royal registers, which are normally quite detailed in respect to the activities of household slaves, there is no mention of any other function that they may have performed on a regular basis.²⁷ They were deliberately chosen for the color of their skin, which, along with their youth, reflected an image of beauty perceived as excitingly different. There is no evidence that they suffered negative discrimination at the royal court on the basis of their skin tone. Indeed, the Church fought against the idea of any correlation between an individual’s physical appearance and spiritual rectitude. As said in the Song of Songs, “*Nigra sum, sed formosa*”—“I am black, but beautiful.”²⁸

And, in fact, Maria de Luna was not the only monarch of the Crown of Aragon interested in this type of slave; documents of Joan I “the Hunter,” Maria’s brother-in-law, are even more explicit about the role which black slaves were to exercise at court. In two letters, dated January 1396, the king ordered his envoys Ramon Alamani de Cervelló and Nicolau Morato to send a royal gift to the Lord of Merode: a mule and a black slave. Joan asked both of these agents to find a slave to purchase or expropriate, preferably one who was ten years old, but if not, no more than twenty, and most of all, of “very dark skin”—“*un esclau ben negre*.”²⁹ Likewise, Joan’s queen,

²⁷ Around the 1450s, black Africans were used at the court of Portugal in public ceremonies and celebrations to impress foreign dignitaries and diplomats and show them the power of the Portuguese monarchy in West Africa. Peter Russell, *Prince Henry “the Navigator”: A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 259.

²⁸ Holy Bible, Canticum Cantorum Salomonis, Song of Songs 1:4.

²⁹ “We wish to send to the Lord of Merode one mule and one black slave between ten and twenty years of age, the younger the better, from ten years on up to twenty” (Nos volem enviar al senyor de Merode una mula e .I. esclau negre que sia d’edat de X fins en XX anys; però com pus fadrí puxa ésser o de X anys o d’allí amunt fins en XX). ACA: C, reg. 1968, fol. 77v (Perpignan, January 31, 1396); cited in Javierre, *María de Luna*, 114.

“We are writing to Mister Ramon Alamani so that he will procure for us either by donation or purchase one very black slave whom we wish to send to the Lord of Merode, with one mule which we already have obtained. And we order you expressly that the said slave,

Violant de Bar, also sent a black male slave as a present to her brother, Henry, in France, as well as other presents, including a horse with “Moorish” tack.³⁰ Maria’s husband, Martí, also gave black slaves as gifts. For example, in January 1400, he ordered the bailiff-general (*batlle general*) of Valencia to purchase two pieces of yellow Granadine or North African (*de Barbería*) fabric to clothe two black slaves whom he planned on sending as part of a shipment of gifts to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.³¹ In another case, the king wrote to Guillem Martorell on 20 September 1404, after hearing news that his counselor had obtained a black Tunisian who had been captured at Oriola. In his letter, Martí demanded the slave’s expropriation for incorporation into his personal retinue.³²

During the reign of Maria de Luna, there were regular exchanges of exotica between the Crown and its western neighbor, Navarre, where the royal castle of Olite was famous for its menagerie of lions and other wild and exotic animals. It was in this context that Carlos III “the Noble” sent Martí I a lion and some ostriches.³³ The succession of gifts which were sent back and forth between the two royal courts reflected the close relationship between the two monarchies and reflected an ever-closer alliance, which

whom you procure for us from the said Mister Ramon should be from the age of ten up to the age of twenty” (Nos escrivim a mossèn Ramon Alamani que ns procur, o per do o per compra, I esclau ben negre que volem trametre al senyor de Merode, ab I mula la qual havem ja ací presta. Perquè us manam expressament que l dit esclau, lo qual sia d’edat de X fins en XX anys, nos procurets ab lo dit mossèn Ramon). ACA: C, reg. 1968, fol. 77v (Perpignan, 31 January 1396); cited in Javierre, *Maria de Luna*, 114.

³⁰ “Molt car frare, per Henrich de Stanahoust, coper meu, vos tramet un caval e un ginet ab tot son arnes per tal que vejats en quina manera los moros en aquesta terra se arnessan, e un catiu negre, e un ala.” Dawn Bratsch-Prince, *Vida y epistolario de Violante de Bar (1365-1431), duquesa de Gerona y reina de Aragón* (Madrid: Ediciones del Orto, 2001), 57-8, doc. 2 (Barcelona, 22 August 1382.)

³¹ A. Rubió Lluch, *Documents per l’Història de la cultura catalana mig-aval*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Institut d’estudis catalans, 1908-1921), 2:355. The letter is dated January 1400 at Zaragoza.

³² Martí wrote to Martorell, soldier and royal counselor: “Know ye that we have need of a black slave to serve here in our chamber, and as we understand, you have one at Oriola, from among the prisoners taken at Tunis, [thus] you must send that slave to us immediately” (Sapiats que nos havem mester un sclau negre per servir aci en la nostra cambra, e segons havem entes, vos tenits ne I daquells qui foren presos de Tunij a Oriola, lo qual sclau nos trametats decontinent). Girona, *Itinerari del rei en Martí*, 147, doc. 70.

³³ Anna M. Adroer Tasis, “Animals exòtics als palaus reials de Barcelona,” *Medievalia* 8 (1989): 14; José R. Castro, *Carlos III el Noble de Navarra (1387-1425)* (Pamplona: Institución Príncipe de Viana, Diputación Floral de Navarra, 1967), 512-26.

culminated in the marriage of Martí and Maria's son, Martí the Young, to Carlos III's daughter, Blanca de Navarre, in 1402. Maria de Luna's gift of the black girl Sofia to the king of Navarre, mentioned above, was clearly a gift of an exotic object rather than a slave *per se* and also falls within this context.³⁴ Sofia, the slave girl, who may well have been a convert to Christianity, was dressed in such a manner which, along with her dark skin, identified her with a Muslim or Oriental "other" but one which in this case did not imply her identification as an enemy of the faith—rather, the choice of rich clothing sought to underline her "exotic" aspect, like the rich plumage of a rare bird.³⁵ Generally, it seems the ethno-religious origin of these prized black slaves did not impede their integration into the queen's household any more than their conversion to Christianity implied their emancipation.³⁶ The fact that Rosa and Dominica were Christian did not relieve them from their servile status; the pious queen did not manumit them on this basis, but neither did their African-Muslim origin prevent them from receiving favor.

³⁴ There are a number of possible ways to account for the origin of the name Sofia for this slave. At baptism, she may have been renamed Sofia (a Latin name of Greek provenance meaning "wisdom"), a name which was not generally common, but which had a marked currency among slaves in contemporary Mallorca. M. Pujol, "L'esclavitud en el Regne de Mallorca durant el govern del Rei Martí I (1396-1410)," *Bolletí de la Societat Arqueològica Lulliana*, 52 (1996): 133. On the other hand, it may represent an adaptation of the Arabic name Safa'.

³⁵ Maria de Luna was not the only queen interested in possessing black slaves. For example, in 1438 Maria of Castille (1416-58), queen consort of Alfonso "the Magnanimous" (1416-79), asked the Hafsîd ruler 'Uthman to authorize the merchant Luis Bertran, then a resident in Tunis, to purchase five or six black Christian slave girls, which the queen had requested for her court. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale*, 1:360.

³⁶ The Convent of Pedralbes outside Barcelona, for example, was a community of Claires which through the fifteenth century normally counted the presence of some forty female slaves who, along with other free women called *companyes*, looked after the menial tasks of the convent. Black Muslim slaves are specifically noted in documents of the early fifteenth century. Anna Castellano Tresserra, *Pedralbes a l'Edat Mitjana: Història d'un monestir femení* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, Institut de Cultura, 1998), 295-300. In fact, it was not uncommon for ecclesiastical institutions to make use of slaves. See Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Age dans le monde méditerranéen* (Poitiers: Fayard, 1981), 98. The use of female slaves was also very common at the female monastery of Jonqueres at Barcelona, an affiliate of the Order of Santiago. Maria M. Costa Paretas, "Els esclaus del monestir de Jonqueres," in *De l'esclavitud a la llibertat*, 296-7. See also, generally, Joaquín Miret Sans, "La esclavitud en Cataluña en los últimos tiempos de la Edad Media," *Revue Historique*, 41 (1917): 1-109.

Nevertheless, black slaves formed only one element of exotica in the royal court of Barcelona. For example, in the fourteenth century, the queen's garden at her royal palace in Barcelona, the *palau menor*, contained an impressive collection of wild animals, including lions, leopards, bears, and a variety of unusual birds and fish.³⁷ The popularity of such animals, valued for their rarity and expense, is documented from the thirteenth century on.³⁸ These mysterious and striking beasts were dramatic visible evidence of luxury and wealth: such animals were difficult to find, transport, maintain, and feed, and their mere possession was indicative of substantial affluence.³⁹

When she acted as reigning queen, Maria de Luna took responsibility for these animals; despite the grave challenges which the Crown faced during her first lieutenancy (including an invasion by the Count of Foix), she did not neglect the collection of exotica which Martí had inherited from his brother. Thus, she entrusted Bartomeua, a servant, with the care of two scorpions and a porcupine, and another unnamed retainer was given

³⁷ In 1370 King Pere "the Ceremonious" purchased and outfitted a separate palace for his third wife, Elionor de Sicilia, near the church of Santa Maria del Mar in Barcelona. This became known as the *palau menor* (lesser palace) to differentiate it from the king's *palau major* (greater palace), which was located beside the cathedral. From that point on, the *palau menor* functioned as the official residence of the queens of the Crown of Aragon. See Claire Ponsich, "L'espace de la reine dans le palais: L'exemple de la confédération catalano-aragonaise (fin XIV^e—début XV^e siècle)," in *Palais et Pouvoir: De Constantinople à Versailles*, ed. M. F. Auzépy and J. Cornette (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vicennes, 2003), 189.

³⁸ The maintenance of wild animals, such as lions, was traditionally funded by a special tax levied on the Jewish community in whichever area the animals were kept. The fiscal dues of Jewish *aljamas* were the inalienable property of the monarchy and thus provided a dependable source of funding for such projects. This factor limited the presence of menageries to urban centers and provoked a small crisis when the pogroms of 1391 and the destruction of Barcelona's *call* forced Joan I to look for a new source of support. He decided that the most influential members of the court should absorb the cost, a system which Martí I continued, formalizing the task and establishing a budget allotment for an official lion keeper (*leoner*). Adroer, "Animals exòtics als palaus reials de Barcelona," 13; cf. Asunción Blasco Martínez, "La casa de fieras de la Aljafería de Zaragoza y los Judíos," in *XV Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón*, 5 vols. (Zaragoza: Departamento de Educación y Cultura, 1996), 1:293-318. For example, Martí I freed the Jewish community of Perpignan from this obligation. ACA: C, Cartas reales, caja 1, núm. 26 (7 August 1397).

³⁹ The taste for keeping exotic and especially ferocious animals like lions is not limited to the Middle Ages. Twentieth-century "barons," from Hermann Goering to William Randolph Hearst, kept menageries which included such animals. For Goering, see A. M. Sigmund, *Las mujeres de los Nazis* (Barcelona: Plaza and Janés, 2000), 73.

responsibility over the leopard.⁴⁰ Such assignments do not seem to have been made randomly; Bartomeua, for example, had previously been assigned the care of the royal scorpions and other animals by Pere “the Ceremonious” and his successor, Joan I “The Hunter”.⁴¹ Maria’s concern for the animals during the crisis was not a frivolity; the presence of these living emblems in the palace underlined her status as legitimate queen and reigning monarch.

Because the exotic was emblematic of power, each monarch endeavored not only to maintain but to enlarge their collections as well. Hence, once Martí returned from Sicily and established himself at the royal court, he resumed personal control over the menagerie and began to acquire new additions. In October 1400, having fallen ill, he requested that a peacock be brought to his palace in Barcelona. When it turned out that the nearest bird was the property of Guillem de Begat, the king requested this merchant of Montpellier to donate or sell it to him “at a reasonable price” on the grounds that he needed it “to distract him from his illness.”⁴² At another point, Martí was recorded adding bears to the royal menagerie. The high esteem with which Martí regarded exotic animals can be seen in an event of 1404, when the king requested his son, Martí of Sicily, to send him a female leopard, dispatching an envoy with twenty retainers, ten horsemen and ten on foot, to retrieve it—a considerable expense and great ceremony for a mere animal. Thus, when the bishop of Tortosa wanted to send Martí a gift, he presented Martí with a lion for the garden of the *palau menor* at Barcelona, another exotic symbol of regal power, strength, and majesty.⁴³ As queen, Maria de Luna’s own taste in the exotic tended toward less-aggressive animals than those preferred by her husband; she shared his

⁴⁰ Bartomeua was assigned the care of two scorpions and a porcupine in 1396. ACA: RP, reg. E-41, fol. extraordinary September 1396. These animals appear under the care of Bartomeua and “the man who feeds the leopard” (*l’hom que pensa lo leopard*) among the special monthly expenses of the queen’s quartermaster. Despite the poor condition of these registers, it is possible to follow their provisioning until King Martí’s return, when the monarch himself resumed this responsibility. See ACA: RP, reg. E-41, fol. extraordinary July 1396.

⁴¹ Adroer, “Animals exòtics als palaus reials de Barcelona,” 15.

⁴² Girona, *Itinerari del rei en Martí*, 76-7, doc. 42 (letter dated at Barcelona on 18 October 1400).

⁴³ Anna M. Adroer Tasis, “La possessió de lleons símbol de poder,” in *Actas XV Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón*, 5 vols. (Zaragoza: Departamento de Educación y Cultura, 1993), 3: 262; Girona, *Itinerari del rei en Martí*, 145-6.

affection for peacocks, keeping a number of them housed in an elaborate cage bearing her coat of arms.⁴⁴

Black slaves were not the only exotic persons found at the royal court. Although not all of the documentation from Maria de Luna's period as *infanta* is preserved, there is ample evidence that her court contained other decorative human elements; for instance, receipts from the years 1379 to 1387 record the provisioning of a "dwarf" (*nan*), Antoni Serra, with clothing and food.⁴⁵ Likewise, in 1379 her household included a woman designated as Margalida la Negra (Margaret the Black)—her status was not specified, so it is almost certain that she was free.⁴⁶ Margalida la Negra, Nicolaua la Esclava (another of Maria's slaves), and Antoni Serra together held a position in the palace analogous to that of the animals of the royal menagerie; indeed, they were always mentioned together in the registers, as if they composed a collection.⁴⁷ Nor was Maria the only queen of the Crown of Aragon to maintain such a collection. Her mother-in-law, Elionor de Sicilia, the third wife of Pere "the Ceremonious" kept a similar retinue, comprising ten slaves and including three little persons (one man and two women), one *sarracena* (either a foreigner or a *mudéjar*—an Iberian Muslim woman), two Tatar women, one North African, and two black women.⁴⁸ Dwarves are, of course, a stock figure of the European

⁴⁴ These birds are documented in 1378, when Maria was still *infanta*. The cage, which was made of wood and decorated with arms of the Luna family and the royal house, cost 49s. 19d. ACA: RP, reg. 918, fols. 59r, 60r, 60v.

⁴⁵ See ACA: RP, reg. 918, fols. 82v-83r, 85v-86r; and reg. 919, fols. 14r-v, 23r, 56v, 63v, 72r, 77v, 86r, 93v, 100r-v, 110r.

⁴⁶ "Item, li és degut per XI alnes de drap de Perpinyà lo qual liurà a n Ramon Guasch, sastre de la dita senyora, a obs de V fedures, a Nicholaua la esclava, e Margalida la Negra e Anthoni Serra, el nan, cost a rahó de XVI solidos la cana que fan CLXXVI solidos." ACA: RP, reg. 918, fols. 82v-83r (fragment: Valencia, 1 August 1379). It is, of course, possible that "Negra" in this case did not refer to complexion, but rather was merely a surname derived from some other source.

⁴⁷ Item, li és degut per forradura de drap de li, fil neta de seda e de fil en un cot e samarra de Nicolaua la esclava, e en un cot a obs de Margalida la Negra, e en un aljuba e caperó a obs d'Anthoni Serra, lo nan, qui foren fetes de XI alnes de drap verd de Perpinyà qui era en la cambra, ab III solidos que costà de baixar lo dit drap, e ab VIII solidos que donà a un sastre que li ajudà acabar les dites robes. . . . ACA: RP, reg. 918, fols. 85v-86r (fragment: Valencia, 12 October 1379).

⁴⁸ Ulla Deibel, "La Reyna Elionor de Sicilia," *Memorias de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, 10 (1928): 398. Maria of Castile, the wife of Alfonso "the Magnanimous," also had a dwarf in her entourage named Violeta or Violica, who was provided with

royal court; they can be seen in other Iberian royal households, such as that of Isabel the Catholic of Castile and her husband Ferdinand II of Aragon or that of Beatriz of Castile, wife of Afonso IV of Portugal (r. 1325-57).⁴⁹

Exotic gifts, be they persons, animals, or objects, were highly prized by monarchs and magnates. One of the attributes *par excellence* of the medieval prince was largesse, which marked off the superior status of the giver. This ideal is manifest in the writings of Francesc Eiximenis (d. 1409), counselor and confidant of Maria de Luna, who wrote in his book *Lo Crestià* (The Christian): “It thus befalls the Prince that he be munificent and liberal, a great donor and wise distributor of his riches.”⁵⁰ The implication, of course, was that the royal gift implied compensatory obligation on the part of the receiver. The fascination of the medieval world with the exotic is obvious given the examples above—as is the role of the black slaves who were given as gifts. These slaves were valued for the dark color of their skin, their youth, and their beauty; their bright, luxurious, and foreign-styled garb accentuated this aspect. They may have indeed performed domestic tasks at times, but their primary role was as decorative objects.⁵¹ Black slaves, dwarves, and wild animals and plants were all prized for their distinctness: it was their visible impact that counted. In this sense, they represent a departure from the typical North American—influenced image of the black slave as a low-status agrarian laborer, marginalized and despised precisely because of race. At the same time, they do not fit into

a servant to attend her needs. Ferran Soldevila, “La Reyna Maria, muller del Magnànim,” *Memorias de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, 10 (1928): 350.

⁴⁹ Alvaro Fernández de Córdoba Miralles, *La Corte de Isabel I: Ritos y ceremonias de una reina (1474-1504)* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2002), 167; Rita Costa Gomes, *The Making of a Court Society: Kings and Nobles in Late Medieval Portugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71.

⁵⁰ “Com lo príncep sia magnífich e liberal: Pertany encara al príncep qui sia magnífic e liberal e gran donador e savi distribuïdor de ses riqueses...” *Dotzè llibre del Crestià*, ed. Curt Wittlin et al. (Girona: Diputació de Girona, 1986), 1.2 (DCXXXV): 404-5.

⁵¹ Hence, after the death of her husband, Joan I, when Violant de Bar no longer had the same resources that she had enjoyed as queen, she commended her black slave girl Llúcia as an apprentice to the seamstress Margarida for a period of eight years. Without a regal household or retinue, Violant had neither the resources nor the need for exotic human adornments; henceforth, Llúcia would have to earn her own keep. Margarida was the wife of Joan Espanya, a Barcelona tanner, and she agreed to provide the girl with food and drink and footwear in exchange for her services; Violant would continue to provide her clothing. Hernando, *Els esclaus islàmics a Barcelona*, 608, doc. 823 (Barcelona, 18 January 1398).

the conception of the typical slave according to Spanish historiographical tradition—a member of a community formally marginalized by the law. Further, they defy the typical characterization of slaves as miserable and lacking in resources and influence—they enjoyed the privilege of daily contact with monarchs and the most influential lords, formed part of their households, and took part in the most important ceremonies. Dressed in luxurious robes, they were exposed to the most sophisticated cultural and intellectual environments of the times. In this sense, this small number of black slaves enjoyed, paradoxically, far greater comfort and privilege than the vast majority of free Christians. Given as gifts, they were transformed into symbols, representative of the Crown and of the monarch who gave the gift. Of course, the use of black slaves as ornaments or insignia of power was not an innovation of the fourteenth century, but rather an established Mediterranean tradition. Frederick II (d. 1250), Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, had used black servants to make manifest the potentially universal reach of his imperial power, while in Iberia African servants had been displayed to tremendous effect in the courts of the tenth-century Umayyad caliphs.⁵² Indeed, the display of exotic-appearing individuals was a prominent feature of court ritual going back to the time of Egypt and Persia, the first empires that aspired to universal domination.

In conclusion, like other nobles of her era, Maria de Luna found it politically convenient and aesthetically gratifying to include black slaves in her court. Although Maria herself did not show a great personal affinity for exoticism, magic, or literature, in the ceremonial sphere they formed part of her political image, part of the household of the queen. Thus, black slaves, little people, and peacocks, along with troubadours, musicians, beguines, and nuns, all helped configure the image of the royal court. These people, animals, and objects were always well presented and richly dressed, adorned with symbols, such as coats of arms, which directly identified them with the monarchs. Undoubtedly this situation changed, as, over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, black people, particularly slaves, became more common and easier and cheaper to acquire.

It was at this point that black servants started appearing in more royal and noble courts and even in the houses of the patriciate and wealthy commoners. They became extremely common, for example, in Italian Renais-

⁵² P. H. Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, 127.

sance courts, and as a consequence of their ubiquity they began to appear with frequency in the works of painters like Andrea Mantegna (d. 1506) and Titian (d. 1576).⁵³ It seems that the custom of employing black slaves was introduced to Italy by the Aragonese kings of Naples, through their close diplomatic ties to important northern Italian patrician houses, such as the Sforza, Gonzaga, and D'Este, which also came to hold African slaves in their employ.⁵⁴ Therefore, over time, black retainers, either slaves or free, lost part of their cachet as an exotic novelty item and came to be regarded as any other human or hardly human chattel.⁵⁵ But, nevertheless, they were needed as servants. If slaves were no longer valued so much as exotica, ownership of them in general (more and more of whom would be black) became a sign of social prestige. This transition can be observed in the court of Isabel the Catholic in Spain. This queen had many black slaves, some of whom made up an exotic decorative element in her court, as well as many others who labored in the "downstairs" world as seamstresses, washerwomen, cleaners, and probably midwives.⁵⁶

Likewise in Portugal, slaves also worked as domestics at the royal court. For instance, women slaves in attendance of the queen were treated almost like free maids of honor and wore elegant clothing.⁵⁷ But Portugal became one of the first European societies in which slaves were very common, and by 1552 many affluent households owned at least one for domestic duties. In this context, black Africans were particularly valued, but not for their beautiful or exotic appearance; on the contrary, they were considered ugly but were prized for their alleged loyalty and physical strength.⁵⁸ However,

⁵³ Consider, for example, Andrea Mantegna's "Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes" (1491-92; Florence: Uffizi), "Adoration of the Magi" (ca. 1464; Florence: Uffizi), and "Judith" (ca. 1495-1500; Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland); Titian's "Laura Dianti and Her Page" (ca. 1523; Switzerland: private collection); or Albrecht Dürer's "Portrait of Katherina" (1521; Florence: Uffizi). See Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," 126, 131, 140, 142-4, 152-3.

⁵⁴ Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," 128.

⁵⁵ K. Lowe, "The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, 18.

⁵⁶ Fernández, *La Corte de Isabel I*, 166. In the sixteenth century, black slaves were also valued as singers, musicians, and dancers. Ruth Pike, "Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century: Slaves and Freedmen," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 47- 3 (1967): 349.

⁵⁷ Saunders, *A Social History*, 82.

⁵⁸ A. M. Jordan, "Images of Empire: Slaves in the Lisbon Household and Court of Catherine of Austria," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, 156. Portugal supplied

in the late fourteenth century, European society as a whole had yet to become bound up in the massive African slave trade, and in this era, in the courtly context, black slaves were prized precisely because, paraphrasing the Song of Songs, “black is beautiful.”

Appendix

Document 1

ACA: RP, reg 525, fol. 57 r (cited in Javierre, *María de Luna*, 114-15). Zaragoza, 14 March 1400.

Maria de Luna orders a disbursement to a retainer, Pere Marçal, to honor a receipt dated at Zaragoza on 14 March 1400 and totaling 446 *solidos* of Jaca, for a piece of Venetian silk and the red fabric which he bought from the merchant Ramon de Casaldaguila, and which were made into a Moorish-style robe for the black slave girl named Sofia whom the queen had sent to the king of Navarre, as well as for other items purchased for Sofia and other errands which the slave girl had done at the command of the queen.

Albarà,

Item, done a-n Pere Marçal, cambrer de la senyora Reyna, los quals li eren deguts ab albarà d'escriva de ració escrit en Saragoça, a XIII dies del mes de març de l'any .M.CCCC., per una peça de drap de seda de Venècia ab lo camper vermell que comprà de-n Ramon de Casaldaguila, mercader, de que fou feta una aljuba morisca a una esclaveta negra apel·lada Soffia, la qual la dita senyora tramés al rey de Navarra. E per IIII coudes e mig de tafetà blau que foren comprats al dit Ramon per folrar la dita aljuba, per II alquiralls, l'un de seda l'altre de lin, per III coudes e mig de drap de verni vermell que comprà per gonella e calces. E per moltes d'altres messions qui foren fetes per la dita Soffia de manament de la dita senyora, segons que n lo dit albarà se conté lo qual cobre, CCCCXLVI solidos jaqueses.

90 percent of the slaves imported to the Americas in the first decades of the sixteenth century. See Ernst Van Den Boogaart, “The Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World, 1600-90: Estimates of Trends in Composition and Value,” 33, no. 3 (1992): 376.

Document 2

ACA: RP, reg. 531, fol. 85v

Valencia, 14 October 1404

Maria de Luna orders a payment totaling fifty-four *solidos* and ten *dineros* of Barcelona to Garcia Cosida, her “assistant purchasing agent,” for a receipt dated at Valencia on 25 October 1403, for the errands he ran in relation to the funeral arrangements of the queen’s black slave, Rosa, who passed away during that month.

Item, done al dit en Garcia Cosida, sotscomprador de casa de la dita senyora Reyna, los quals li eren deguts ab albarà d’escriva de ració scrit en València, a XXV dies del mes d’octubre de l’any .M.CCCC.III., per raó de les messions les quals de manament de la dita senyora ha fetes en la sepultura de Rosa, esclava negra de la dita senyora, la qual, en lo dit mes d’octubre, passà d’aquesta present vida; segons que, lo dit albarà se conté lo qual cobre, LIIII solidos IX diners Barchinone.