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ASHGATE
Chapter 8
Enchained in Paradise:
Slave Identities on the Island of
Mallorca, ca. 1360–1390

Kevin Mummey

Early in February 1380, Bernat Martí’s lembus sailed into Mallorca’s harbor, the
Porto Pi. Among the cargo was Gordino, described in the notarial record as a
“Sardinian bastard slave child, about three years old.” The boy was not prized
merchandise—Martí gave him outright to the fuller Jaume Jaubert. Typical of arid
notarial style, nothing more is revealed of Gordino than a single mention of an
otherwise obscure life, a circumstance in which we can find him on a particular day
and time. The purpose of this study is to present a selection of these cases, moments in
the lives of more than 600 enslaved people recorded in Mallorcan notarial protocols
between 1360 and 1390. The evidence suggests a wide range of conditions under
which the enslaved labored and lived, and disparities in the economic and legal
resources at their disposal. The confessional status of the enslaved played a role in
their treatment, and enslaved Roman Catholic Sardinian prisoners of war and Greek
Orthodox Christian slaves seem to have had better opportunities for manumission
and integration into the lower rungs of Mallorcan society. The treatment of the
enslaved was also conditioned by the rising cost of labor throughout the period,
caused by epidemiological crises and political, military, and financial challenges
faced by Mallorca as a frontier outpost of the Crown of Aragon. The fates of
individual slaves were bound in a matrix of local and regional politics, cultural
assumptions, civic hygiene efforts, and family affairs. By examining Mallorcan
slavery through the notarial lens, I will argue that slave identities were formed, and
reformed, in the context of the daily personal and commercial decision-making of
slave owners, freed slaves, and occasionally those still in slavery.

The socialization and integration of the enslaved is a major historiographical
question of Mediterranean slavery studies, and scholarly opinion in the case of

1 Arxiu del Regne de Mallorca (ARM) 2418, 102v, sardum burdum meum etatis trium
annorum vel inde circa. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. For the Porto Pi
see Francisco Sevillano Colom, Historia del Puerto de Mallorca (Palma: Muntaner, 1974)
and “Mercaderes y navegantes mallorquines (siglos XIII– XV),” Historia de Mallorca.
and Maria Barcelo Crespi, La ciudad de Mallorca: La vida cotidiana en una ciudad
Mallorca ranges from Stephen Bensch’s image of the City’s slave block as a miniature Ellis Island to Ricardo Soto’s vision of Mallorca as a giant jail. Antoni Mas i Forners has echoed Soto, suggesting “the defining feature ... of medieval Mallorcan society resides in the mechanisms constructed for the control and domination of slaves, above all non-Christians.” Josep Fc. López i Bonet argued “the religion or nation of origin of the captive is not a determining factor: he is a commodity to be exploited.” There is merit to all of the above insights, but the notarial record of slavery on Mallorca reveals a spectrum of servile circumstances, ranging from enslaved chattel slaves to those working off labor and debt contracts, to freed former slaves participating in legal and commercial affairs with the same facility and authority exercised by their Catalan counterparts.

**Slave Provenance**

The identity of enslaved Mallorcan can be difficult to glean from notarial acts, which often provide nothing more than their price and nationality. The latter can provide clues to slave circumstances because not all enslaved nationalities were perceived in the same way. All we will likely ever know about the slave renamed Caterina, sold by the fuller Nicolaus Font and his wife Joana to the draper Berengar de Plagamans in February 1385, is her nationality, Tartar, and her price, 30 pounds and 10 shillings. Enslaved people identified as Tartars make up the largest group in the present study, and it is difficult to discern why Tartar slaves comprised such a large part of the population, especially as their price was almost five Mallorcan pounds higher than the overall average (49.38). It may be that Caterina’s unfamiliarity with Mallorcan culture and the impossibility of returning home made her and her fellow Tartars safer, and possibly more exploitable, investments. Pagan and Muslim Tartars, unlike their Greek and Sardinian counterparts, were subject to enslavement without legal or ethical impediments. The significant Tartar presence may reflect the fact that Italian and Catalan merchants enhanced their cargoes with potentially valuable slaves, and their price may reflect shipping costs involved in moving humans from central Asia to the western Mediterranean. In March 1366, ship owner Joan Sunyer sold the Tartar Miepe to the fuller Francesc de Casas for 50 pounds. We do not know whether de Casas intended to exploit Miepe’s labor power or resell him, but for the substantial sum of 50 pounds the fuller certainly would have been looking for a return on his investment.

Sardinians, Greeks, and “Saracens” posed problems of control and segregation for the dominant Catalan population. Victims of a long-standing rebellion against the expanding Crown of Aragon, Sardinian prisoners of war occupied a unique place among the servile population of the island in that they were Roman-rite Catholics and could not technically be enslaved. In a study of Sardinian captives found in embarkation licenses, Francisco Sevilla Colom pointed to notarial language uniquely describing Sardinians as “prisoners of a just war,” “subjects of the traitorous Dukes of Arborea,” and “rebels against our illustrious King.” Combining this linguistic evidence with evidence from the embarkation licenses, he suggested Sardinians may have been more servants than slaves. The notarial evidence is not so clear; Sardinians are found occupying much the same range of servile circumstances as other enslaved peoples. Some appear to have been aware of the political context of their servitude. In 1387, as a truce between rebel Sardinians and the Crown of Aragon was pending, Calgano d’Sori added a postscript to his servitude contract with legal expert (jurisperitus) and slave trader Johannes Lobera stipulating that his bondage would end if the King of Aragon declared Sardinians free. Other Sardinians seemed not to have had

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5 As Alfonso Franco Silva has noted, any discussion of the provenance of slaves should be approached with caution. See *La Esclavitud en Andalucía* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1992).

6 Sevilla Colom has reported that privileges extended to foreign merchants were a cause of concern for local merchants. *Historia del Puerto*, p. 182. In 1386, the Genoese merchants Lazzaro de Levanto and Giulio Pelegrini sold the Tartars “Asel” and “Tolobey” to the vegetable seller (orellano) Berengar Jover. ARM 143, 187v–188r.

7 ARM 2415, 20v–21r.


11 It is only in the protocol of Andreu de Plandolit for the years 1381–82 that Sardinians are described with the language noted by Sevilla Colom. By contrast, the surviving protocols of Plandolit’s contemporary Bartomeu De Casis contain less explicit language. For 33 pounds the merchant Joan Cortes was guaranteed possession of the Sard Vacili, against all persons “as long it served the pleasure of the King.” ARM 2418, 180v–181r. A year later Pere sa Roca sold his Sardinian slave Joanna with the same promise, though the end of the phrase was altered to “the King and no one else,” an emphasis that may have been added to protect the buyer from claims on the legitimacy of his property. ARM 2418, 133r.

12 ARM 2421, 31v–32r.
in this period. In March of 1382 Jacmeta, the wife and heir of the silversmith (argentarius) Francesc Oliver, sold the Greek Caterina and her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter to Guillen Marsagay for 30 pounds. 20 Jocelyn Hillgarth published the account of a Greek teenager enslaved on the island as late as 1419 who had the facility to learn Catalan, find a notary in the City, and successfully petition for his freedom. 21 Greek captivity on Mallorca was affected by their Christian status, decades of artisanal activity in the City, the fluid balance of power in the Mediterranean, and negotiations between the eastern and western churches, though throughout the century Greeks were still being bought and sold.

Saracen- and Turk-identified slaves presented an entirely different problem for Catalan authorities, and were often perceived as a "fifth column" in league with corsairs and North African political entities which were often at war with the Crown of Aragon. 22 In 1354 the Ordenanza de policia de esclavos forbade them from maritime activity. 23 In the 1370s, a time of plagues and grain shortages, authorities called for Saracen slaves to be enchained at night, and in 1374 14 "Moorish and Tartar" slaves were hung for an alleged revolt. 24 Despite real or imagined fears of porous and menaced borders, some Muslims appear to have spent decades as domestic servants in the City. In his marital counter-gift Bartolomeu Formiguera promised his 18-year-old wife Margarita an impressive inventory of movable goods and human property, making her the largest slaveholder in the present study. Among the enslaved were four Saracens: 35-year-old Mahomet; white-skinned Acmet, about 65, "suffering in his eyes, teeth, and intestines"; Jucell, about 60; and 35-year-old Abdella, "with a blemish or white spot in his eye." 25 While the attention of fourteenth-century authorities and contemporary scholars focuses on the dangers of Muslims in the City, they also lived and worked in public and domestic spaces along with other enslaved peoples, and the streets of the City were shaped by the remnants of Madina Mayurqa and by Muslim slave labor. 26

In addition to the perception of male Muslim slaves as dangerous, Muslim women appear to have been pressed into sexual service, as Serra Barceló...
Bernat i Roca have shown. The notarial record for the period does not explicitly reveal the presence of Muslim women engaged in sex work, but the cases of Fatima and Zahara raise suspicion. In 1374, the famine year in which authorities called for the removal of slaves from the brothels, Fatima and Zahara, who were both misnamed “Cotolo,” left the island on ships bound for Tunis. Both promised to pay large sums to the ships’ captains upon their arrival. Equally suspicion is the extraordinary price of 80 pounds that Jewish merchant Susser Senyoret paid for Fatima, “also called Rima.” While Fatima, Zahara, and the Muslim slaves gained by Margarita in her marriage may have experienced different fates, they shared the identity of Saracen, which was apparently neither ethnic nor racial but confessional, and therefore mutable. In 1378 Simona, the widow of the apothecary Jaume Alexander, purchased a slave for her son from the merchant Bernat Magadins. Bernat described the slave as “Pere, my baptized, olive-skinned servant [and] one-time Saracen.” While Pere is the only Muslim convert in the present study, conversion seemed to have been an option for enslaved Mallorcan Muslims to alter their identity.

Slaves in Daily Life

However different their perceived national origins or confessional statuses, enslaved peoples shared the common circumstance of being commodities that could be bought and sold and used for low-status labor. If the known occupations of the owners are an indication of the kind of work being done by the enslaved, they were engaged in almost every kind of domestic and artisanal activity performed in the City. The enslaved in the current study were owned by individuals and families from over 100 different occupations, ranging from government and ecclesiastical officials to merchants, lawyers, notaries, and a wide array of artisans, particularly those in the cloth trade. They were also sent to the countryside by merchants who often possessed agricultural property in the outskirts of the city. In 1366, Pasqua de Piero Castro and Jordi Proseti entered into a five-year partnership to produce grain on an alqueria where “a white-skinned slave called Johannes” was laboring. Slaves also labored on the extensive agricultural holdings held by the Church. The monks of the Convent of Santa Maria de la Reial, who held property in the City as well as Delà, Manacor, and Esporles, were forthcoming about their need for slaves. In 1379, the monks acquired slaves in response to the problem of “lands and possessions for the greater part defenseless and uncultivated,” confessing, “we do not have in the said monastery the [free] servants or another household necessary to till the below mentioned land nor are we able to buy the necessary servants from the money we do have.” Though Mallorca was not a slave society, by the late fourteenth century it was a society that could not function without slave labor.

The terms under which the enslaved labored were often a matter of record, and the most detailed work contracts in notarial protocols are those of domestics and wet-nurses. In December of 1352, the tailor Ramon Mora promised to pay his former slave, Clare, 25 pounds for three years of service as an ancilla (domestic servant) to him and as a wet-nurse to his son. Despite the familial intimacy that came with the job, some labor contracts reveal the barebones conditions under which even freed servants lived. In September 1381, Jacme, the one-time slave of Pere Jordà of Barcelona, entered into a two-year contract with Antonio Catalá, subvicario civicissim Maiorcarum. She contracted for 7 pounds, in addition to food, drink, “sufficient footwear” (sotularius calcuti sufficienent), a shirt of stiff thread (unam camisiam fili stipe), and a bed cover for her own use. She was also to live there in sickness and in health “according to Mallorcan custom.”

Wet-nurses fared slightly better in terms of pay than other current and manumitted slaves, though as Rebecca Winer has demonstrated, they were often subject to sexual exploitation from their masters and interruptions in their own child-bearing cycle. On the same day Margarita was manumitted by Francesca, the widow of

31 ARM 2415, 79v–80r.
33 In 1362 fishermen protested against restrictions levied by the jurats (city councilors) of Mallorca against the use of “baptized captives or free Saracens or slaves” in their boats. Many of the captive fishermen were Greeks. “Un fruit,” pp. 1464 and 1505 n. 30.
34 ARM 2415, 53v–54v.
35 ARM 2418, 216v–217r.
Enchained in Paradise

Michael, Axa, and the slaves described above were part of a population of enslaved individuals who crowded the narrow streets, congregated in public spaces, and performed the tasks necessary to keep the City functioning. These omnipresent and mobile slaves became a focus of concern for the authorities, especially in times of crisis. They were engaged in artisanal and maritime activities as well as the expected onerous tasks, confirmed by civic hygiene legislation that warned slaves against dumping garbage inside city walls, or carrying construction materials away from them, on pain of fine and whipping.43 Slave labor was tied to the water supply of the city, as slaves drew water from its many cisterns, and washed clothes in the aqueduct. Uniquely, the first six clauses of civic hygiene legislation concerning the water supply were aimed at slaves, who appear to have used water sources as a gathering site and a place to practice personal hygiene.44 City fathers were also concerned about an oversupply of servile labor. During the crippling famine of 1374 Mallorcan governor Olfa de Proxida sent a letter to the bailiffs of outlying parishes ordering them to return to the city those slaves who had the audacity to roam about the parishes earning money.45 In the same year authorities called for a reduction in the number of slaves, citing the dangers caused by roving bands of larcenous and licentious slaves.46 Mallorcan authorities were caught between the reality of a foreign street-level labor force and the ideal of orderly Catalan streets.

Despite these occasional civic hygiene efforts, the enslaved were products of the street, both figuratively and literally. As Barceló Crespi and Rosselló Bordoy have demonstrated in their studies of the City’s medieval architecture, slaves were commonly confined to the lower part of the house, variously referred to as the cambra dels escuders, cambra dels macips, or cambra dels catus, spaces they often shared with livestock.47 The spatial relationship of servants and animals in domestic spaces was reflected in written inventories, where mentions of the two are often adjoining. In the post-mortem inventory of Joan de Portillo mention of the Sard Mariano, who was to be held for one more years of service, was followed by descriptions of Joan’s animals.48 In addition to tack, inventories of slave quarters often reveal they had little more than a straw mattress, bedclothes, a water jug, and two or three simple articles of clothing. A post-mortem inventory from the parish of St. Eulalia mentions “an old bed for the slave” as the only item in the

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41 Rosselló Bordoy and Barceló Crespi, La Ciudad de Mallorca, pp. 68–9.
42 Antonio Pons, Libre del Mostasar de Mallorca (Mallorca: CSIC, 1949), pp. 35–6.
43 Mas, Esclaus, p. 62.
46 ARM 2418, 276r–278v.
servant’s quarters. The enslaved had little but the public spaces, and the streets and character of the city were colored by their sight and sound.

**Manumission and Integration**

Throughout the City enslaved people were awaiting their manumission, either by a decision of their masters or their masters’ heirs, or via work contracts. Manumissions in notarial protocols, often appearing in testaments and post-mortem inventories, provide glimpses of the relationships the enslaved developed with their masters. Late in December 1387, Angelina willed her first cousin Johannes Senespleda a *hostipium* in the parish of St. Eulalia. Among the household inventory was Angelina’s slave Magdalena, who was to be manumitted after her death.69 Pere Grimau also notarized his desire for the post-mortem liberation of his slave Michael, adding that the release was in gratitude for Michael’s service. Michael added a first-person recognition of this arrangement in the document.50 Some family-related manumissions came with strings attached. In her will, Caterina, the widow of Joan de Brunil, promised to free her Greek slave Sophie with the condition that she serve her mother, Benvenguda. After Benvenguda’s death, Caterina’s heirs were ordered to draw up a contract of *froncham et allforiam* (freedom and release) for Sophie, who was also to be left a bed, some linen, and whatever money she may have possessed.51 Impending death seems to be behind the manumissions of the merchant and frequent slave trader Berengat Fferrar, who freed five slaves without condition between May and October 1387.52 While late fourteenth-century Mallorcan slavery had its roots in economic imperatives, other factors determined the fate of some of the enslaved, including physical proximity to their owners.

The physical proximity of the enslaved and their masters also created children. In May 1386, Pere de Podio released his three-month-old “illegitimate” child (*spurium mecum*), Mariana, without condition to the care of the barber, Bernat Bonet. Mariana was the product of Pere’s male slave, Catino, and Bonet’s daughter, and Pere seems to be acknowledging that Mariana’s status followed that of her mother.53 In a complex slave sale from early 1380, Jaume Jaubert sold the Tartar Caterina to his first cousin (*consobrinum*) Caterina. Jaume made the bargain under the specific condition that his cousin deduct the cost of the care and feeding of his freed two-and-a-half-year-old son Amado from the purchase price. Amado’s mother was Jaubert’s Tartar slave Caterina, who was to be given 30 pounds and her freedom after a year.54 Other transactions indicate that slave owners wanted little to do with enslaved children. In an obliquely worded document from 1379 Jaume Manresa of Felanitx sold the Tartar Johan for 43 pounds 10 shillings. Johan is described as a “bastard slave child” (*bort cattiu*) “pertaining” to Guillem Uguet for “certain known and expressed reasons.” While those reasons are not explicit, it is clear that Guillem hired an agent to sell Johan in the City, placing some distance between himself and the Tartar “pertaining” to him.55 Slave children were an inevitable product of the master-slave relationship, though the notarial record reveals that families reacted to them in a variety of ways.

While some slaves benefited from manumission or adoption, many attempted to earn their freedom by working off the terms of their servitude contracts. These contracts occupy a nebulous space between the mercantile and personal aspects of slavery. To Ricardo Soto, the work-contract system transformed Mallorca into an immense jail where captives awaited their redemption, a situation where the deal was not to turn the captive into a slave, but to get him to pay his ransom—“better in coin, but if not, in work.”56 While Soto’s characterization has a ring of truth to it, work contracts, like manumissions, reveal a variety of circumstances under which the enslaved were bound. Some contracts stipulate a matter of time that the enslaved must serve, such as that which bound Francesc Bonviatge to the peltiner, Guillem Ponç, for six years.57

Other contracts tied slaves to specific work, such as the wet-nurses and domestics previously mentioned. Another specific task was the preparation of food in the public ovens—labour apparently so valuable or so onerous, or both, that money was typically reduced from the slaves’ debt every time they performed the task. The Saracen “Abdella,” was tied to a 30-pound debt on the condition that he work the ovens, for which he was paid 7 pennies per visit. Typical of such contracts, an additional penny was deducted from his debt for every 80 shillings he paid toward his release.58 A year after he purchased Abdella, Guillem Ribe bought another Saracen, Lahia, from Pere Nicola and his wife, Margarita. He immediately placed her under a manumission contract for her purchase price of 64 pounds, with 16 pennies deducted for each visit to the ovens, and an additional penny deduction for every 80 shillings she paid toward her release.59 Ribe’s terms appear to have been a standard formula for these types of work-release arrangements, and similar terms appear with some frequency in notarial protocols.

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54 ARM 2418, 106v–107r.
55 ARM P133, 79v–81r.
57 ARM P143, 145r.
58 ARM 2418, 44r–45v.
59 ARM 2418, 77v–78r.
As part of the estate settlement of her late merchant husband, Jacme de Podio, Brumssend placed her two Sardinian slaves in a state of “liberrate et alforria” for the sum of 69 pounds. Pere was promised 8½ pennies and Leonard 9 pennies, “on whatever day you are not idle and in which you bake bread in the communal ovens in Mallorca.” Work in the ovens put slaves in close contact with other slaves, and in public spaces throughout the city. Zaforza y Musoles, in his meticulous survey of Mallorca’s streets, was able to positively identify 13 ovens functioning before 1444, and they are located in every major parish as well as the Jewish Cal. One can only imagine what these spaces, worked by enslaved men and women from all over the greater Mediterranean, looked, sounded, and smelled like, or what role some slaves, especially Sardinians, may have played as “code switchers,” facilitating the transition of slaves from distant cultures.

Through unconditional manumission and completion of work contracts some of the enslaved were able to move from servitude to freedom. However, “free” did not mean “Catalan.” The condition of servitude followed the servile in notarial protocols, where they were customarily not referred to by occupation, civic status, or family name but as liber/libera or as the “one time” (olim) servant of their master. The appearance of freed slaves on the street caught the attention of civic authorities who in the late fourteenth century promulgated a series of crude-to-grave sumptuary laws aimed at ostentatious display. Women who were former slaves, or the children of former slaves, even if their father was Catalan, were forbidden from wearing clothes made of scarlet-colored silk or other costly robes. Mallorcan legislation was pointed at segregating the servile population, placing even former slaves on something like probationary status.

Despite obstacles to integration facing the newly freed, notarial evidence indicates they gained facility with Mallorcan culture and commerce and took advantage of legal opportunities. In 1385, Joan, the Sardinian slave of the widow Simone, hired Berengar Puigderd as procurator for his legal affairs, and a year later two other Sardinian slaves, Joan and Julio, hired Berengar in the same capacity. In 1391 the Greek slave Nichola was placed in a 50-pound contract with Magdalena, the heir of Berengar de Tornamira. The very next document shows Nicola appointing Berengar Garriga as procurator for her affairs, prompting questions as to how and where she hired Berengar, and under what conditions they all met in the notary’s office that day. In a relatively rare instance, the slave Caterina’s name heads a notarial document (Ego Caterina Russa) in which she promises to pay the widow Jacme 8 pounds toward her 50-pound manumission contract. First-person entries by slaves were also included in manumission contracts, as when in 1387 the Sardinian captive Nicolau agreed to conditions of servitude with his new owner, Pere, the abbot of the Monastery of the Blessed Mary. While powerless in many significant ways, some of the enslaved at least had the capacity to make the terms of their servitude and their impending liberation a matter of record.

Transactions initiated by former slaves indicate the close relationships some shared with their former masters, as well as their facility with the legal culture. Early in 1382, the notary Ramon Compte recorded the testamentary wishes of Teodora, “one-time Greek footservant” (greca olim pedisroca). Teodora was providing “out of motherly affection” for the three children she had with her former master, Guillem Sastre, as well as giving money to an illegitimate child (burdam) of uncertain progeny. Over the course of her servitude and afterward, Teodora had forged family ties, acquired assets, and was able to employ the legal system to express her post-mortem wishes. In May 1382, the Tartar Caterina, “free and under her own power,” and Francesc Bonviat, the “one-time” servant of the hosteler Constantia, acted as executors of a section of Constantia’s will, in which they were ordered to give 9 pounds and some bedclothes to Constantia’s former slave, Marie. A noteworthy aspect of the document is that the Tartar Caterina renounced the Velleian Senatus Consultum and the Sic Quia Muller, two remnants of Justinianic legislation designed to protect women from liability in lawsuits, which had made their way into the lus commune of the medieval Mediterranean. That Mediterranean legal language confirmed the Romanitas of a former Tartar slave, acting as an executrix for her former master, speaks to the myriad relationships possible in the medieval Mediterranean, where laws, customs, and people were blown across space and time.

Some former slaves employed the legal system to assist those still in captivity. In the spring of 1367 Margarita, grecha libera and the widow of Joan Ballistar, manumitted Teodor, who had been the slave of the fuller Joan Obert. The free Sardinian, Augustino, signed on as guarantor for his enslaved son, Corso, who was paying the 15-pound balance of his 35-pound debt. Other slaves were not as interested in assimilation as helping each other escape. In 1366 Bartomeu Fornt sold the female slave Assen, described as “white-skinned and from the region of Morocco,” to the ship captain, Stephan Pinyer. In the very next document a male slave, also called Assen, paid the balance of the first Assen’s manumission contract plus an additional 12 pounds to Pinyer to take them to “Bougie or another place in the said country.” Apparently the enslaved North Africans had arranged with the two Catalans to facilitate their migration from the island, and had the legal competence to make their flight a matter of legal record.

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60 ARM P142, 138r–v.
62 Sastre Moll, Alguns aspectes, p. 100.
63 ARM 2418, 76v–77r, ARM 2419, 85r–v.
64 ARM 2421, 165v–166r.
65 ARM 2418, 67r.
66 ARM 2421, 26v–27r.
67 ARM 2414, 45r–v.
69 ARM 2415, 109r.
70 ARM 2418, 92v–94r.
71 ARM 2415, 2v–3v.
Not every present or former slave could, or wanted to, leave the island, and some appear to have put down roots, married, procreated, and purchased real estate. In 1368 Johana, a free Greek and the widow of Joan Arcagedor, sold a domus in St. Michael’s parish to another free Greek, Dominica, for 8 pounds. The domus was in the Den Barcelona section of the parish, near the present-day Carrer de la Missió. In 1379, at the end of a decade marked by profound anxiety over the number of slaves on the island, Francesca, heir of the legal professional Guilelm de Villar, ceded in emphyteusis a domus in the same neighborhood to the freed slave Johannes Grecho, for which he paid 20 shillings a year. The property abutted that of another freed Greek, Domingo Grechi. Some slaves even became slave owners themselves. At the end of 1361 the freed Greek Nicola unconditionally manumitted his own Greek slave Mitre. Greeks and Sards, bearing the surnames of their nationalities, appear in a 1390 tax census of St. Michael’s parish, and while many appear to have been living in poverty, a few had moved into the role of taxable citizens. Despite efforts at segregation and control, freed slaves were establishing themselves in the city, creating outposts, however small, of their cultural identity.

By these speculations on the ethnic make-up of late fourteenth-century St. Michael’s parish, I do not mean to imply that the medieval City was a convivial multicultural society. Mallorcan elites worked for their hegemony, employing the physical, legal, statutory, and cultural weapons at their disposal. Violence was chained to the slave experience; authorities feared violence from slaves while sanctioning violence against them for everything from fishing for eels in irrigation ditches to suspicion of sedition. Slaves were segregated from other lower-status labor by being statutorily subject to physical punishment for their transgressions. They were not only separated from society by the treatment of their bodies, but by the perceived condition of their souls. Antoni Mas has argued that Mallorcan identity was bound up in the concept of “Old Christians” which separated native Catalans from Jews, Muslims, newly baptized slaves, and foreigners. Mallorcan slavery was not a benign institution, and it is difficult not to feel empathy for the plight of the Greek slave Nicolau, returned to his seller because of the visibly fractured tibia he suffered from being overworked, or the Tartar Caterina, declared by surgeons to be “diseased” (morbosso) and returned to her previous owners as part of a legal settlement. Cases of enslaved children are particularly pathetic, and one can only wonder about the fate of Sonia, a ten-year-old girl “of Russian descent” (de genere Russorum) whose seller suspiciously declared she had been brought to Mallorca sine usum piratorum.

Despite the harshness of the institution of slavery and the severity of the system of control, a street-level examination of the notarial record shows slaves experiencing a spectrum of circumstances. The notarial lens is illuminating and refracting: the closer we look, the farther we get from being able to characterize slavery, be it Mallorcan, Mediterranean, or medieval. The identities of the enslaved were as varied as the social forces working on them. Muslim slavery was characterized by the Aragonese expulsion and enslavement of the indigenous population in the thirteenth century, and the complex political relationships between Iberian and North African political entities in the fourteenth. Greek slavery was sculpted by Aragonese expansion in the eastern Mediterranean and diplomacy between the eastern and western churches, and by a long history of Greek artisanal activity on Mallorca, which produced populations of freed and enslaved Greeks increasingly aware of their possibilities for manumission. Sardinian captivity was unique, as these Román Catholic Christians were prisoners, not slaves, and shared religious, linguistic, and cultural affinities with their captors. Italian merchants brought Tartars, Circassians, Russians, and Bulgars from the Black Sea to Mallorca; despite their expense they were a sought-after investment. Victims of social forces beyond their control, the enslaved nevertheless transformed the landscape around them, working as domestics and engaged in artisanal activity, cleaning the streets, baking bread, hauling wood, water, and stone. Not everyone in this labor force was treated the same, and some work contracts show slaves transitioning to low-status freedom, while others point to long-term bondage. Some were physically abused and sexually exploited, while others developed familial bonds with their owners. Some developed the capacity and accumulated the resources to take advantage of the legal system, participating in their own manumission contracts, intervening in the affairs of others, establishing themselves in marginal neighborhoods. The presence of these enslaved in the streets compounded the problem of Mallorcan identity, as streets full of essential foreign laborers compelled authorities to keep the streets clean of foreign influence. Neither Ricardo Soto’s vision of Mallorca as a giant jail nor Stephen Bensch’s image of the city’s port as a miniature Ellis Island dovetails neatly with the images in the notarial protocols, which contain evidence of grievous servitude along with limited economic, legal, and individual opportunity. This evidence of late fourteenth-century slaves does not define or characterize Mallorcan slavery or society, but it provides a means of understanding that slave identity was a product of complex, specific, and local social forces, and of the day-to-day decision-making of everyone involved in the system.

72 Of course, having a family did not necessarily mean possessing freedom. In September 1367, Pere Rausell, fabro, bought Marios and Xera, married Tartars, along with their son “about twenty days old.” ARM 2415 138r–v.
73 ARM 2415, 177r–v.
74 ARM 2418, 82v–83r.
75 ACM 14589 1r.
78 For Nicolau, ARM P133, 140r–141r; for Caterina, ARM P143, 73r–74v.
79 ARM P143, 187 r–v.
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