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## Finding Amica in the Archives: Navigating a path between strategic collaboration and independent research.

Michelle Armstrong-Partida and Susan McDonough

We were sitting at a sunny table in the mostly empty Arxiu Real de Valencia making our way through the records of the Justicia Civil de 300 Sueldos, which recorded petitions made to one of Valencia's courts to enforce the payment of debts. The register was tricky, with lots of ink from the recto bleeding through to the verso (and vice versa) and the hand wasn't great, though it wasn't the worst we had encountered or would later come across. Still, an entry from the first of June 1401 jumped out, though not because we'd found what we were looking for, exactly. It was a petition from the surgeon N. Gabriel Amar, asking that Dona Maria, "la muller d'en" (the wife of) someone (the scribe left a space for the unnamed husband, but never came back to fill it in) pay him for, what? We passed the document back and forth and then realized--he was asking to be paid for his treatment of a malady in her breast, or, as the Valencian vernacular put it, *cure dels mammelles*.<sup>1</sup>

This laconic six-line entry grabbed our collective imaginations, making us wonder about this woman and her breasts. Though we're both historians of gender and sexuality, we realized we don't spend that much time thinking about medieval women's breasts. We noticed right away that the scribe left space for a husband's name, but then never came back to fill in the blank. Was this a reflex, a scribal assumption that of course the woman had a husband? The unfilled name suggested perhaps she did not. Since we are both working on medieval women living outside the parameters of heterosexual marriage, the possibility was intriguing. Instead of "dona" indicating Maria's status as a married woman, perhaps it simply indicated she was a woman of a certain age, an adult in the eyes of her community.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps then, it denoted a certain deference or respect. Our

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In the spirit of true co-authorship, we have determined that our practice will be to take turns as first author to ensure that it is not assumed that one person is doing most of the work and the second author is simply signing on. We'd like to thank the NEH for funding the archival research that gave rise to this article, the editors of the AHR and the anonymous reviewers for their careful readings and suggestions for strengthening our arguments.

<sup>1</sup> Arxiu Real de Valencia (ARV), Justicia Civil de 300 Sueldos 702, fol. 26v. (1401).

<sup>2</sup> After much work with the sources from Barcelona and Valencia, we are confident that the designation *dona* alone does not indicate a married woman but can also be used for singlewomen. Typically, as in Dona Maria's case, the documents use the formula "la dona X, muller d'en Y" to indicate a married woman, as we see in the eleven sous fine

excitement mounted: could this blank space for a husband indicate she was a widow, a singlewoman, or even a concubine? We knew, sometimes, notaries designated concubines, and even concubine-prostitutes, “Na” (short for Dona) in official documentation, so this wasn’t an impossible conjecture.<sup>3</sup> The blank space cried out for us to fill it with our speculation, attentive as we were to the ways archives silence the lives, and especially sex lives, of the very women to whom we turned our scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup> And then there was the petition itself, which made us wonder about the woman and her illness. Was she suffering from breast cancer? From mastitis? From some other disease more likely to impact women than men? And why hadn’t she paid the surgeon? Was she too poor to do so or was she unhappy with her treatment and thus withholding payment in protest? All of these questions, from such paltry information on the page. And the best part of this interesting find was that we could ask and think about answers in real time, because there we were, sitting right next to each other.

This is a story of seven archives and two historians. It takes place in archives scattered around Mediterranean Europe, at desks in our American homes, against the backdrop of a global pandemic. It is a story of joy, of friendship, of frustration, of scholarship, and finally of making do and seeing a way forward to new possibilities. We first met in the Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona in the summer of 2016 when starting our respective new Mediterranean projects. That unexpected meeting planted the seed for

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for blasphemy paid by “la dona Maria, muller d’en Johan Lopez,” or the widow of a fisherman who took a butcher to court who appears in the case as “Na Marquesa muller quondam d’En Bertho Bortis.” See ARV Mestre Racional no. 5974, fol. 13r. (1383); ARV, Justicia Criminal, no. 47, fol. 32r. (1396). This pattern is likewise seen in the register of fines meted out by the royal bailiff of Barcelona where the wife of a Muslim man, “Na Ussa, muller d’en Mafumet, serrayn” and “Na Caterina, muller de G Almugaver” were fined for exchanging insults. See Berenguer Morey, *Llibre del Batlle Reial de Barcelona, 1375-1378*, transcribed by Josep María Casas Homs (Barcelona, 1976), 39.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, ARV Mestre Racional, no. 5979, fol. 12r. and 12v. (1387) and Arxiu de la Corona d’Aragó (ACA), Real Patrimonial, Mestre Racional, no. 1547, fol. 9r-v. (1369).

<sup>4</sup> Historians and archivists are attentive to this silencing, especially around issues pertaining to gender and sexuality. See, for example, Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14 no. 1/ 2 (January/April 2005), 10-27; Rodney G.S. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” *Archivaria* 61, 215-233; and Charu Gupta, “Writing Sex and Sexuality: Archives of Colonial North India,” *Journal of Women’s Studies* 23 no. 4 (Winter, 2011), 12-35.

our deliberate forays, together, into archives in three countries.<sup>5</sup> There was a lot of luck involved in these archival explorations. It helped, of course, that we had hit it off and shared similar interests in studying the social lives of women whose choices and circumstances both integrated them into and pushed them to the margins of mainstream medieval society. Michelle's project explores the widespread practice of concubinage among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Mediterranean. Susan's work considers how prostitutes used municipal institutions to integrate themselves into the civic culture of Mediterranean port towns. The conviction that notarial and legal records housed in archives throughout Mediterranean Europe contained evidence of the daily interactions of prostitutes and concubines within their communities animated both projects.

A shared goal to bring gender to the forefront of the discussion of the medieval Mediterranean brought us together again in 2017 when a mutual friend asked us to participate on a gender panel and we realized that we were both tackling the same issues in the scholarship of the Mediterranean--the lack of attention to women and a much dated adherence to discussing women as the objects of men's honor. After our first meeting in Barcelona, we emailed frequently, sharing articles, discussing problems, and offering practical advice when we had worked in Marseille at different times. In another fortuitous coincidence, we both received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities the same year. Realizing that we had targeted several of the same port cities and their archives and that our projects engaged the same documentary materials, we decided to coordinate our efforts to overlap in Valencia, Palermo, Mallorca, and a return trip to Barcelona. A lot of stars had to align for us to make this work, but work, it did. We realized we were moving out of the comfort zone of most historians, whose instinct is to protect their research. The move was counter-intuitive to our profession's solitary work habits.<sup>6</sup> Our projects overlapped in significant ways, because of the questions we were asking about the social and economic lives of concubines and prostitutes, and sometimes, as the archives made clear, the boundaries between the two were quite porous. The projects were also quite distinct, as they

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<sup>5</sup> We overlapped in the Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, the Arxiu Real de Valencia, the Archivo del Reino de Mallorca, the Archivo Capitular de Mallorca, the Archivio Storico di Palermo and the Archivio Storico di Comune di Palermo, and had email conversations about working in the Archives Départemental des Bouches-du-Rhône in Marseille.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Banner, *Being a Historian: An Introduction to the Professional World of History* (Cambridge, 2012), 65, 147-148, 236. The image and practice of the solitary historian dates back to the early days of the professionalism of the field. See Bonnie Smith's account of Leopold von Ranke longing for his friends during solo trips to the archives in "Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century," *The American Historical Review*, 100 no. 4 (October, 1995), 1173.

engage with women who were received in radically different ways in their communities. Even with this tension between our individual foci and our shared questions, we believed that the possibility of having a friend and collaborator in the archive was not an opportunity to be passed up.<sup>7</sup>

We have both experienced the challenges of walking into unfamiliar archives in countries where we do not speak the language. Our first day in Palermo underscored our shared disadvantage in Italy. Though we had both written to introduce ourselves and our research to the archivists long before our arrival, the people with whom we had corresponded weren't present when we arrived. Even figuring out the basics-- Where are the inventory guides to the archive? How do we request material? How do we know when our material has arrived--do we pick it up or do they bring it to our assigned desk?-- was an exercise in creativity and good humor. To answer all of these questions, we relied on a combination of our language skills in Castilian, French, and increasingly frantic hand gestures. When we eventually met the archivists with whom we'd been corresponding, we found them unfailingly interested in helping, though due in part to their interest in modern history **and lack of paleographical skills**, none of them were as fluent in the medieval archives as we might have hoped. This further highlighted our delight in each other's company, as we flipped through potentially fruitful inventories and tracked down the crumbs left, à la Hansel and Gretel, by earlier historians.<sup>8</sup>

Some of these crumbs disintegrated when we tried to pick them up. As we prepped for our archival visits, we scoured the scholarship of local historians, who often have the luxury of building their careers around the rich collections steps from their homes. And sometimes, the interests of these historians coincided perfectly with ours. We ran into problems, though, tracking down their very limited footnotes. One initially very exciting

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<sup>7</sup> In this, we're distinct from our friends Alexandra Guerson and Dana Wessell Lightfoot who model an entirely collaborative project, from grant proposal to research to final dissemination. For more on their work together, see Guerson and Wessell Lightfoot, "Digging through the Archives Together: Collaborative Research in Late Medieval Gender and Jewish History," *Early Modern Women* 13, no. 1 (2018): 92-105. As two medievalists who focus on gender history, our approach is also different from that of Gillian Weiss and Meredith Martin, recipients of the ACLS Collaborative Research Grant who approach their collaboration from the disciplines of history and art history. See for example, their "'Turks' on Display during the Reign of Louis XIV," *L'Esprit Créateur* 53 no. 4 (Winter, 2013), 98-112.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Henri Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen: Économie et société en Sicile, 1300-1450* (Rome, 1986); Patrizia Sardina, "La sessualità femminile in Sicilia fra trasgressione, mercificazione e violenza (Secc. XII-XV), *Archivio Storico Siracusano* (1999): 73-147; Rafael Narbona Vizcaíno, *Pueblo, Poder, y Sexo: Valencia Medieval (1306-1420)* (València, 1992).

article on immigration to Mallorca had a table that included the names and cities of origins of twenty-two women, identified as either prostitutes or concubines.<sup>9</sup> Imagine our crushing disappointment when the citation accompanying the impressive table pointed us to the list of 450 notarial protocols, all unindexed and unfoliated, all over 150 folia, that served as an appendix to the author's monograph on slavery.<sup>10</sup> A similarly promising volume had no citations at all, and many of the archival citations in another were simply incorrect and led us to dead ends.<sup>11</sup> Though it was likely not the intention of the scholars who produced them, this scholarship left us with the distinct impression of intellectual hoarding, of showing off the gems they had collected, while cutting us off from the possibility of expanding on their discoveries. What we are proposing in our tandem research is exactly the opposite. It is premised on radical sharing, even when it means that sometimes one person's project bears fruit and the other's doesn't.

Perhaps because the frustrations of false starts and dead ends were shared, we had many chances to discover the joys of teamwork in the archive. Our strategy was simple: we both searched for concubines, prostitutes, and single women.<sup>12</sup> Rather than cover the same territory by reviewing the identical registers and documents, we tackled different fonds and were able to expand our chronological scope and documentary sources. Working together meant we covered more ground. We shared our individual notes and pictures in Dropbox. This generosity of spirit and collaboration in the archive paid off in so many ways--in having another expert with the extra pair of eyes when deciphering nightmarish script, in discussing our interpretation of a certain phrase or wording, in helping each other understand new legal or economic sources we were unfamiliar with, in discussing broader arguments we wanted to make, in supporting each other when we believed we had found a document that undermined our argument. Here, our paired archival experience anchored and perhaps even protected us from what Arlette Farge has called the "startling contradiction" of the archive, "as it immerses

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<sup>9</sup> Onofre Vaquer Bennasar, "Immigrants a Mallorca a la segona meitat del segle IV," *Bolletí de la Societat Arqueològica Lulliana* 51 (1995), 127-138.

<sup>10</sup> Onofre Vaquer Bennassar, *L'esclavitud a Mallorca, 1448-1500*, (Mallorca, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Ramon Roselló Vaquer and Jaume Bover Pujol, *El Sexe a Mallorca. Notes Històriques*. Vol I and II (Mallorca, 1992), and Henri Bresc, "La prostitution médiévale en Méditerranée occidentale. De la 'liberté' à l'enfermement," in Christiane Vauvy, Marguerite Rollinde, and Mireille Azzoug, eds., *Les femmes entre violences et stratégies de liberté. Maghreb et Europe du Sud*, (Saint Denis, 2004), 255-272.

<sup>12</sup> Cordelia Beattie, "'Living as a Single Person': marital status, performance and the law in late medieval England," *Women's History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 327-340.

and invades the reader, its vastness gives rise to a feeling of solitude.”<sup>13</sup> Loneliness and the boredom brought on by the monotony of searching through folio after folio of faded and crumbling paper were staved off by our partnership. Working collaboratively and finding our shared goals let us approach our own work with renewed excitement.

One shared goal was figuring out the semantic range that the medieval notaries used to designate the women we were interested in writing about. Sometimes a notary (helpfully for us as historians, not necessarily for the real women in question) labeled the women, allowing later historians to put them into categories.<sup>14</sup> A prostitute might be a *fembre peccadriu* in Valencia, a *femina falhita* in Marseille, or a *meletrix* in Palermo where a concubine might be an *amasia or ganea* in Palermo, an *amica* in Valencia, or a *concupina* in Marseille. This mattered to us because women who lived on the margins of marriage, particularly those whose sexual lives are not easily labeled, have often been lumped together in the historiography. We are invested in fleshing out the circumstances that allowed for this fuzziness and in exploring the distinctiveness of their lives and lived experience.

A documentary encounter on the second to last day in the archives in Valencia forced us to grapple with this slippage. Even as collaborators working through the documents in tandem, we could not escape the archival anxiety of time: would we be able to get it all done?<sup>15</sup> We had started looking through the series of the Mestre Racional, which recorded fines paid to the Crown for various offences. We were attracted to the documents partially because the series began in the 1370s, and we’ve found the fourteenth-century notarial hand usually easier to read than the fifteenth. These were really beautiful documents--in good shape, wide margins, and relatively consistently organized. The notary grouped the fines in categories by offense and one such category was “Pledges made by the judge for errant public women, and others, in the following

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<sup>13</sup> Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Raildon, (New Haven, 2013), 14. In an ironic twist, as the pandemic closed off our university offices, so too it closed off our access to personal copies of the original text, *Le gout de l’archive*.

<sup>14</sup> Historians have long been attentive to the slippery semantics of locating prostitutes in medieval records. See Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women* (Oxford, 1998), 11-12. See also Karras, “Marriage, Concubinage, and the Law,” in Ruth Mazo Karras, Joel Kaye, and E. Ann Matter eds., *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe*, (Philadelphia, 2008), 117-120; Eukena Lacarra Lanz, “Changing Boundaries of Licit and Illicit Unions: Concubinage and Prostitution”, in Eukena Lacarra Lanz ed. *Marriage and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, (New York, 2002), 253-4.

<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Steedman, “Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust,” *The American Historical Review*, 106 no. 4, (October, 2001), 1165.

format.”<sup>16</sup> At first glance, this seemed to be a category focused on prostitutes and the fines they paid for straying outside the boundaries legally allotted to them. But closer inspection revealed the very categorical overlap that we’d been discussing. The Crown of Aragon collected a fine from Goçalbo and Johanna, *fembra publica del bordel*, who were also known as an “amich e amiga.”<sup>17</sup> What exactly was going on here? Were they being fined because they were acting more like a long-term, sexually active monogamous couple, as the terms *amich* and *amiga*, with their association with concubinage implied, rather than the more anonymous transactional encounter between a prostitution and a john?<sup>18</sup> We had hypothesized that the Mediterranean ports lent themselves to such arrangements--men who traveled as sailors, as merchants, and had favorites in the municipal brothels with whom they developed more long-term relationships. Especially since Goçalbo was identified as being from Valladolid in Castille, and was thus a stranger to Valencia, we saw this paid fine as support for our hypothesis.

Questions remained, though. Was Johanna being fined for being one man’s concubine while she lived in a brothel where she was expected to service multiple clients? Why was this arrangement illegal? Concubinage in and of itself was not illegal--unless one or both parties were married. Neither was prostitution, but Valencia’s officials were clearly invested in maintaining a marked boundary between prostitution and concubinage. These officials wanted Johanna to strictly function as a prostitute, not a concubine. Perhaps economics played a role here. Policing the boundary between prostitution and concubinage was economically advantageous to the Crown who could add to their coffers with every transgression. But what were we to make of the collapsing of “our” categories in this notarial annotation?

Here, we want to emphasize how being together in the archives facilitated our conversations in ways almost impossible to imagine if one of us had been there solo. It’s hard to share over email the quick slide from elation to despair when a great find turns out to be a bust. As happened in Palermo in the notary Amato Stefano’s register,

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<sup>16</sup> ARV, Mestre Racional, reg. 5983, fol. 50r. (1394). “Reebudes feytes per lo dit iusticer de fembres errades publiques e altres en la forma següents.”

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, fol. 50r. “Item reebi dissapte a X de Giner de Gocalbo de Valladolid. Item de Johana fembra publica del bordell per X com eren amich e amiga e pro lo peccant en que foren atrobats e feren ne aquells compositio ab mi present lo dit en Vicent Dutrelles fischal damunt dit per XXII solidos.”

<sup>18</sup> *Amich* and *amiga* translate into English literally as friend, from the Latin *amicus*, *amica*.



when an *amica* recorded her debt of three *atures*.<sup>19</sup> Jubilation! More evidence of the economic integration of concubines alongside married women in fourteenth-century Palermo. But, wait. She wasn't an *amica*, she was Amica. That is, her first name was Amica. Which added a new wrinkle to our categorical elision conversation. Which, because we were together in the archives, we could pick right up again at the coffee machine or later over dinner.

It wasn't just the hours in the archives themselves that set these research trips apart in our experience. It was also the evenings where, with a delicious glass of vino tinto at the table in our rented apartment, we tracked down published inventories of other potential archival sites, exchanged articles that only one of us had in our bibliographies, or talked through the implications of what we had found during the day. And out of this fruitful collaboration in the archives sprouted plans for a future **book** project on the socio-economic activities of single women in the Mediterranean and a joint article on the slippage between prostitutes and concubines."<sup>20</sup>

For us, the intellectual and personal benefits of our shared time in the archives far outweighed the downsides. It's fair to expect some friction when you spend a month working, cooking, and thinking with a friend and a colleague. It was hard when one person was finding more evidence or working with a more easily read document. It was a challenge when one of us was working more quickly and covering more ground than the other. That's important to acknowledge. The truth is that some days will be better for one person than the other (but it frequently happened that one of us found something significant for the other person, too). We can also suggest ways to mitigate some possible tensions. Carving out time for both of us to be alone was crucial. Sometimes after the archives we worked separately in cafes or one of us went for a run while the other got dinner started. Sometimes one of us just called it an early night. We both invited other folks to join us at different parts of the trip and adding a new voice to the conversation forced us to take a break from our intense archival discussions.

While anticipating one of these visits, a new dynamic entered into our collaboration: a global pandemic. We were in the habit of listening to NPR as we ate breakfast. During our mid-February stay in Palma, the coverage of a virulently contagious virus spreading across the globe occupied more and more of the segments. And at the end of the month as Susan was looking forward to a visit from her family in Barcelona, our conversations

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<sup>19</sup> Archivio di Stato di Palermo (ASP), Notai Defunti, Amato Stefano, Reg. 135, fol. 68v.

<sup>20</sup> "Fembras Publicas, Amigas and Their Amichs: Affection, Strategy and Masculinity in the Medieval Mediterranean," is under review at *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*.

at ACA boomeranged between frustrations over notarial hands and best guesses about whether they'd actually be able to come, and if they could, whether we'd all be able to leave Spain on schedule in early March. We had no idea then how much the novel coronavirus would shape our lives, and our collaboration in the very near future.

In hindsight, it is easy to see the ways that the pandemic is an enemy of our scholarly project. In a moment, colleagues scrambled to transition to emergency online teaching, parents added "homeschooler" to the list of unexpected jobs on their CVs and adult children cared for ill parents. This additional labor fell largely in the laps of women.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, we already know how this will disproportionately affect women's scholarly productivity.<sup>22</sup> Everyone grappled with the conflicting advice from within our own circles or municipal, state, and federal governments. The archives we rely upon were closed, so even if we were able to travel to them, their collections were off limits. Travel itself was restricted, as the EU cited worrying increases in COVID-19 and banned holders of US passports from entry.<sup>23</sup> Our plan to set aside in-person time to write together at the 2020 Berkshire Conference of Women Historians disintegrated when it was cancelled. There was every reason to understand and experience the pandemic as a barrier to our nascent collaborative writing process.

But we wonder if there isn't also an opportunity to see the pandemic as an ally. We are still planning future archival trips throughout the Mediterranean. But if we can't get to Europe in a timely manner, does that mean our projects must come to a screeching halt? Our tentative answer is no. The pandemic has challenged us to rethink what we might have at our disposal. We witnessed, and participated in, the flurry of requests that went out over listservs and social media for scanned copies of articles and chapters in the immediate aftermath of university decisions to move instruction online in March of 2020. In that same moment, the National Emergency Library temporarily made

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<sup>21</sup> The mounting death toll disproportionately hit communities of color. Rajiv Sethi, Divya Siddarth, Nia Johnson et al., "Who is Dying? And Why?" Edgar J. Safra Center for Ethics, White Paper no. 19, 8-12, <https://ethics.harvard.edu/files/center-for-ethics/files/19cwhoisdying.pdf>; <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latino-african-americans-cdc-data.html>

<sup>22</sup> Giuliana Viglione, "Are Women Publishing Less During the Pandemic: Here's What the Data Say," *Nature* 581, 365-366 (2020), doi: 10.1038/d41586-020-01294-9. In response to the pandemic, some universities moved immediately to freeze tenure clocks for a year.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/world/europe/eu-reopening-blocks-us-travelers.html>

hundreds of thousands of books available electronically for remote teaching and research.<sup>24</sup> Colleagues came together to share resources for teaching.<sup>25</sup> The pandemic catalyzed on a massive scale exactly the kind of radical sharing our collaboration was premised upon. For those of us who depend on archives in other countries to do our work, how can we harness that moving forward?

In each other, we have not only an intellectual partner, but a financial one, who shares the costs of archival digitization should the archives open but we can't get there. And just as we have each accumulated thousands of digital images from various archives we've studied in, so too have our medievalist colleagues who pursue archival research. Both of us have been the recipients of other scholars' generosity, a shared digital file here and there, and both of us have similarly shared photos we've taken. Has the pandemic created the moment to systemize this ad hoc arrangement? This is a complicated question. The answer certainly hits up against the inclination to hoard or protect materials, which individual scholars worked hard to procure. It is a question though, that American scholars used to easily procuring visas and enjoying unfettered access to foreign archives will have to answer.

Our adventures in Mediterranean archives are only part of this collaboration story and our analog meetings turned out to have a digital substitute. Although neither of us had much experience writing with someone else, we decided to sketch out a weekly plan to help us commit to an article on prostitute-concubines. While together in Palermo, we had drafted an outline in Google Docs that we expanded upon when we met up at the AHA conference in New York, where we presented on the same panel. Once in our respective homes after our February archival trip, we set up weekly two-hour writing sessions online to tackle different sections of the outline. The first two months were a bit hard to get into a groove of writing because it coincided with the Corona virus stay-at-home orders in late March and April of 2020, which meant not only that we were discombobulated by the current crisis but also that our home-work situations had changed drastically. We fell back on putting in individual time, sometimes meeting unexpectedly in our Google document, but made small bursts of progress nevertheless. By May, we had a regular routine of meeting online to write. We spoke every two to three weeks to work through larger issues that could not easily be dealt with in the comment section of Google docs. We frequently read what the other had written and offered suggestions. Our shared secondary source folder in Dropbox ballooned as we assigned ourselves the same reading or divided the readings between us. In the end, our article blossomed. Clearly, we had much to say! And from our joint work came the

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<sup>24</sup> <http://blog.archive.org/national-emergency-library/>

<sup>25</sup> Notably, in our field, Middle Ages for Educators includes lectures, primary sources, and teaching guides: <http://middleagesforeducators.com/>

realization that we had to write another article together--one that would dismantle a historiographical behemoth. It will be easier to disassemble an accepted and often cited model that pervades the work of medievalists as a united voice rather than as individual scholars. We are more likely to be taken seriously together because of our combined knowledge of different historiographies, our scholarship in multiple languages, and our shared time in the archives that gives us the ability to make the strongest argument possible when calling for a paradigm shift in our field.

Finding our united voice in a google document rather than sitting at a table together was one of the unexpected benefits of COVID. The pandemic pushed us to think beyond our joint and solo-authored work to how we might share our model of strategic collaboration--one that allows us to remain independent scholars but also gives us the freedom to explore and cultivate a shared intellectual garden that simultaneously enriches our individual scholarship. As with the pandemic itself, we must be frank about the barriers to our model, but we also want to underscore the creative possibilities in dismantling them. The anthropologist Anna Tsing has championed collaborative work, arguing against the “privatization” of scholarship that often leaves us adrift in our protectionary measures.<sup>26</sup> We believe in this call to action because we have seen tangible results and have found enjoyment in working together as a team. Because we bring different geographical and disciplinary strengths to our joint work, the depth of our scholarship has deepened as we are able to make more profound connections and comparisons. A key aspect to this alliance is keeping an individual research agenda while collaborating. We can always pivot to working on our own book projects in times when our collaborative work is progressing more slowly. This strategy spreads the risk so that the proverbial “eggs in one basket” is avoided.

Compelled by Tsing’s lyrical call to consider intellectual life as “the pleasures of the woodland” where a “forager can choose what to gather and can make use of the woodland’s patches of unexpected bounty,”<sup>27</sup> we have come to see our foraging in the archives as a collaborative process, from which we will benefit collectively and as individual scholars. As historians, we understand what would need to shift in our field to make this more broadly possible. First, and this is a tricky one as universities are facing shocking budget cuts as a result of the pandemic,<sup>28</sup> is the funding question. Our luck in

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<sup>26</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, 2015), 285-288.

<sup>27</sup> Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 286.

<sup>28</sup> In Maryland, for example, the first round of post-COVID budget cuts included \$131.5 million to higher education in the state, which accounts for over 1/3 of the overall cuts approved in this round. Jeff Barker, “Hogan Defers Some Cuts to State Budget, but

receiving NEH fellowships in the same year was total happenstance. A deliberate choice to pursue collaboration needs a sound economic base. The ACLS offered funding for collaborative research, but its final funding year was 2017-2018.<sup>29</sup> The NEH's Collaborative Research program provides funding for interdisciplinary, collaborative work, but the applicants are institutions, not individuals.<sup>30</sup> For our model of strategic collaboration to thrive, monies to support individuals in international archival projects have to be available.

We also have to be honest about the role that promotion and tenure play in scholars' potential hesitancy to adopt this model. If the research standard for P & T in History departments remains single-authored journal articles and monographs, then our joint-projects are only possible for the increasingly small number of historians who hold tenured positions in the academy.<sup>31</sup> And this seems a real shame. A collaborative model of research in the social sciences is adopted because it is a way to share resources and the burden of research and writing, and thus results in more timely publications. We should not reject out of hand a model of productivity because it is employed in disciplines we consider dissimilar to our own. We can modify it to work for us. Producing a single authored monograph can be an overwhelming task, but collaborative work might ensure that more people achieve tenure and promotion. Instead of relying solely on your own self-discipline as a junior faculty member juggling new courses and a heavy teaching load, someone is there counting on your contribution, the project seems more manageable, and the motivation to keep working is easier to sustain. Moreover, collaborative scholarship can be particularly useful to historians with young families or those responsible for the care of adult family members that usually occurs mid-career when many become stalled at the associate level. The benefit, then, is that it is easier to keep publications moving forward with two people propelling research and writing rather than one.

We are not so naive as to think that this model of strategic collaboration will be adopted overnight by History departments across the country, particularly by those whose reputation is founded upon the productivity of their faculty churning out one individual-authored book after another. Instead, we are hopeful that as more and more historians

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Board Approves \$413 million in Reductions Due to Coronavirus Economic Crisis," *The Baltimore Sun* (July 1, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.acls.org/Competitions-and-Deadlines/ACLS-Collaborative-Research-Fellowships>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/collaborative-research-grants>

<sup>31</sup> For the most recent survey of tenure/tenure track and contingent faculty hires in History, see <https://www.historians.org/ahajobsreport2020>

adopt a collaborative model, it will become the norm and thus our P&T process will be forced to acknowledge its value--in the same way that many departments now count a collaborative Public History exhibit as a publication equal to a single-authored article. We also recognize that this collaborative model will not work for everyone. There are challenges when there is an imbalance of power--something that is unavoidable should a junior and senior scholar collaborate. Hierarchy can lead to censoring one's own opinions, and in the worst-case scenario, an unequal amount of work shouldered by the person with the least amount of power. Ideally, collaboration works best when both scholars are at the same place in their careers because it requires above all trust and honesty. Learning to compromise and manage the vulnerability that comes from laying bare your research and writing for the intense scrutiny of a colleague, are also part of the deal. In our case, the decision to collaborate was much easier because we had each already produced a book, had tenure, and were established in our field. We could take the risk.

Given that the pandemic is likely to last for the next two-to-three years, this is the moment for historians to consider partnering up--to share archival sources and to think of article projects that are more easily tackled together than alone. We understand the gamble this entails, the vulnerabilities it surfaces, and are mindful of how much our particular circumstances enabled our strategic collaboration. As the global community accustoms itself to this new normal, though, we suggest this is the moment for scholars to be bold in how they reimagine their scholarship. Strategic collaboration is an important part of that reimagining.

Thinking with the pandemic brings us back to Dona Maria. None of the documents we read answered what malady plagued her, nor if her surgeon was ever paid. Her presence on the notarial page took on a new valence in our current age of medical catastrophes and economic disasters. Our uncertainty about her fate collides with our uncertainty about when we will be able to return to the archives, or what such a return might look like. Though wistful, we do not end here in despair. The pandemic has complicated our collaboration but has also pushed us to think beyond our shared endeavor to our field as a whole. While we miss ending our day with a friend who's ready to dig into an abundant platter of fresh fish by the beach, accompanied by a Mediterranean breeze blowing away the dust of the archives, we continue to reimagine what that collaboration might look like. In the short term, Zoom and Dropbox have replaced whispered conversations and manuscripts passed back and forth in the archives and still, our work together thrives.