SINGLEWOMEN IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

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"Mediterranean notions of honor were so strongly linked to the sexual purity and respectability of women that all women strove to be married. Indeed, spinsters had virtually no place in Mediterranean societies, as borne out both by the early age at marriage and by the extremely small numbers of laywomen who never married."[1]

We begin with this quotation and its strong and definitive claim that singlewomen were a *rara avis* in order to take on the claim that singlewomen had no place in the societies of the medieval Mediterranean. Indeed, very much to the contrary, archival investigations and a survey of literature written by scholars of medieval and early modern Iberia and Italy make clear that singlewomen were deeply interwoven into the fabric of the medieval Mediterranean.

The assumption that singlewomen and the Mediterranean are an unlikely combination is not unique to one historian. Rather, it pervades much of the literature

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[1] Maryanne Kowaleski, "Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective," in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, edited by Judith Bennett and Amy Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 44. Kowalski is not alone in understanding the Mediterranean as entirely distinct from Northwestern Europe: David Reher asserts the "deep historical roots" of the "divergent" marital regimes in "Family Ties in Western Europe: Persistent Contrasts" *Population and Development Review* 24 no. 2 (June 1998), 205; the distinct marital regimes are repeated as fact in Katherine L. French, "Young and Single in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Women's History* 12 no. 4 (Winter, 2001), 202. A recent essay claims: "In southern Europe, including southern France, Italy, and Spain, women tended to marry relatively young and move directly from their parental household to that of their husband. ***This meant that working as servants before marriage was rare.***" [our emphasis] See Jane Whittle, "Rural economies" in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 320. A collection on single life uses the postponement of marriage based on Hajnal's EMP as a reason to focus on northern Europe. See Adriadne Schmidt, Isabelle Devos, and Bruno Blondé, "Introduction: Single and the City: Men and Women Alone in North-Western European Towns since the Late Middle Ages," in *Single Life and the City, 1200-1900*, ed. Julie De Groot, Isabelle Devos and Ariadne Schmidt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3-4.

about medieval singleness and thus distorts the understanding of the options and constraints women living in the Mediterranean experienced. Here, answering a call Bennett and Froide made over twenty years ago to test theories, dive into archives and ask questions about singlewomen in the premodern world,[2] we will argue that the neglect of Mediterranean singlewomen is tied to an over reliance on a faulty, fifty-five-year old demographic claim advanced by John Hajnal. Hajnal's assertions about singlewomen and marriage patterns in southern Europe have been adopted without question by many medieval historians, which has resulted in the neglect of scholarship written by historians who work on the medieval Mediterranean. We are, therefore, challenging John Hajnal's European Marriage Pattern and its place in medieval women's history by showing that singlewomen were very much present, mobile, and economically active in Mediterranean societies. To this end, we will demonstrate how non-elite singlewomen, whether enslaved, manumitted or free born, moved throughout the Mediterranean, owned homes, made community and found employment. In so doing, we also plead that premodernists who focus on Northern Europe to be more inclusive of the scholarship focusing on the Mediterranean region, and thus avoid reifying regional differences that are not supported by the archival evidence.

The goal of this article is to demonstrate the prevalence of singlewomen in the Mediterranean, highlighting their presence in a variety of notarial and legal sources to illustrate not only their involvement in the economy but also their visibility and mobility throughout the region. We gleaned our archival sources from the port cities of Barcelona, Valencia, Palma de Mallorca, and Palermo and complement these findings with published notarial registers for Venice, Famagusta, and Crete. As gender and sexuality historians, we use a Mediterranean framework that views the region and its shores, islands, and hinterlands as one connected economically, socially, and culturally in spite of political and religious differences. Throughout the premodern period the Mediterranean functioned as an intense zone of exchange and interaction that facilitated the transmission of culture, cuisine, technology, ideas, religion, art, and goods that produced what many historians have recently argued is a "broad but distinct

[2] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past,* 27.

Mediterranean culture" that was mutually intelligible to all those who traveled its sea.[3] Following the lead of scholars who have emphasized the movement of people and a commonality of culture, we argue that singlewomen are part of the story of the Mediterranean's interconnectivity and that their socio-economic activities are signs of singlewomen's acculturation and adaptation to larger migration and economic trends in the region.[4] Given the diversity of singlewomen's lives, however, we want to avoid homogenizing their experience and instead aim to show the economic range of their activities. Many singlewomen did not escape the economic vulnerability of the poor and lived insecure lives as they moved in and out of the labor force, while others did manage to acquire some resources--enough to engage in business, to buy goods and properties, to contract their own marriage, and to hire a procurator. The breadth of their experiences are interwoven in the records, both archival and published, of Mediterranean port towns.

Tackling the Historiographic Problem

To begin, we suggest an origin story for the misunderstanding of singlewomen's place in the medieval Mediterreanean. The idea that marriage and life-cycle service in a non-kinship household made northwestern Europe distinct from southern Europe begins with the work of the demographer and statistician John Hajnal. In 1965 Hajnal argued that a distinctive northwestern European marriage pattern emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when a large population of unmarried men and women

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[3] Brian A. Catlos, "Why the Mediterranean?" in *Can We Talk Mediterranean? Conversations on an Emerging Field in Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, ed. Brian A. Catlos and Sharon Kinoshita (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1-18, at 6.

[4] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); David Abulafia, "What is the Mediterranean?" in *The Mediterranean in History, ed. David Abulafia* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2003), 11-32; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2000); Horden and Purcell, "The Mediterranean and the 'New Thalassology'," *AHR* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 722-740; Michelle M. Hamilton and Núria Silleras-Fernández, eds., *In and of the Mediterranean: Medieval and Early Modern Iberian Studies* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015).

married late in life, in their early to late twenties, and formed their own household rather than join a multi-generational household with several older married couples. While Hajnal excluded Iberia, southern France, and Baltic countries from his analysis, his expanded study of household formation in preindustrial Europe in 1982 used David Herlihy and Christiane Klapish-Zuber's work on the 1427 Florentine Catasto to show that these "traditional" multi-generational households and the early marriages characteristic of twentieth-century India, Nepal, and China were like those of medieval southern Europe.[5] The implicit message in such a comparison was that 1960s China and southeast Asia had medieval household structures and that Northern Europe was unique and more advanced because of its delayed marriage, single-family households, and a high population of life-cycle servants whose service into adulthood brought down fertility rates. The implications of his argument are clear--the European Marriage Pattern explains the economic success of modern, northwestern Europe and its history of a "uniquely European 'take-off' into modern economic growth."[6]

The impact of Hajnal's European Marriage Pattern on the study of women and marriage in medieval Europe is inescapable and continues to influence the field to this very day. To be sure, his work inspired a generation of historians, particularly women's historians of England, to look beyond the lives of married women and consider the role of singlewomen in the rural and urban economies of the late medieval period.[7] But, it

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[5] John Hajnal, "European marriage patterns in perspective," in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, eds. *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (London, 1965), 101-143; Hajnal, "Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation System," *Population and Development Review* 8, no. 3 (1982): 449-494. Hajnal defined Northwest Europe as Scandinavia, Iceland, the British Isles, the Low Countries, the German-speaking areas of Europe, and northern France.

[6] Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," 133.

[7] Much of the scholarship is from scholars who focus on England. See the introduction and various articles in Bennett and Froide's *Singlewomen in the European Past*; Judith Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender & Household in Brigstock Before the Plague* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); P.J.P. Goldberg, *Women, work, and life cycle in a medieval economy: women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300-1520* (Oxford, 1992); L.R. Poos, *A rural society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350-1525* (Cambridge, 1991); Richard M. Smith, "Geographical Diversity in the Resort to Marriage in Late Medieval Europe: Work, Reputation, and Unmarried Females in the Household

had a deleterious effect on how medieval historians engaged with each other's scholarship. By dismissing much of the Mediterranean and relying only on one census register from fifteenth-century Tuscany, he marked southern Europe as an entirely different beast from its northern counterpart--one that was not as economically advanced as the north. The implication that southern Europe was less developed and behind the rest of Europe likely reflected his times (1924-2008) and experience. A displaced Hungarian-German Jew who fled to the UK in his late teenage years, who lived through World War II and who became a British academic,[8] his impression of Spain and Italy was undoubtedly influenced by the facist regimes of Mussolini and Franco. Whatever personal views influenced Hajnal's presumptions about southern Europe, in the field of medieval history, his European Marriage Pattern gave historians who specialize in northern Europe permission to brush aside the work of their colleagues focused on the south and to double down on what has now become an entrenched belief that the societies of southern Europe are so dissimilar from the north that comparisons are rarely, if ever, undertaken.

The irony, of course, is that the premodern Mediterranean was a tremendously important center for the Western world given the population size, economic diversity,

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Formation Systems of Northern and Southern Europe," in *Woman Is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society, c. 1200-1500*, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Alan Sutton, 1992), 16-60; Richard M. Smith, "Some reflections on the evidence for the origins of the 'European marriage pattern,' in England," in Chris Harris, ed. *The sociology of the family: new directions for Britain* (Totowa, NJ, 1979); Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005). Hajnal's work is also brought into scholarship on marriage in the Middle Ages. See Martha C. Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in the Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1500* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Kim M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester University Press, 2003); Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Jane Whittle, "Introduction: Servants in the Economy and Society of Rural Europe" in *Servants in Rural Europe: 1400-1900* (Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 4-5. A recent study on economically elite singlewomen taking Hajnal's EMP as given is Andrea Bardyn, "Constrained Opportunities: Women's Involvement in the Capital Markets of Late Medieval Brabant," *Social History*, 45:3, (2020), 275-303.

[8] Michael Murphy, "John Hajnal, 1924-2008" *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy,* XIII (The British Academy, 2014), 251-269.

and complex trade networks that served as a meeting point for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. It is interesting, moreover, that Hajnal relied entirely on a graph found in David Herlihy and Christine Klapisch-Zuber's book on the Florentine Catasto of 1427 to draw conclusions about Italy and southern Europe[9] but somehow missed the work of other contemporary historians, such as Fernand Braudel, Robert Lopez, Henri Bresc, Jacques Heers, David Jacoby, and David Abulafia, whose scholarship on the Mediterranean and its trade society might have prompted him to consider the port cities of Venice, Genoa, Palermo, Naples, Barcelona, Valencia, and Mallorca as economic hubs that presented a similar scenario where large numbers of people at the bottom levels of society were delaying marriage.[10] Engagement with the Mediterranean and its

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[9] Hajnal based his analysis on the graph provided in Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's 1978 *Les toscans et leurs familles* (p.490) as stated in his footnote no. 42 of his article "Two kinds of preindustrial household formation," 488. This graph does not offer the diverse information and more nuanced details provided in the authors' textual analysis. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber offer statistics from the city of Florence in 1470 and in 1480 to show that the population of life-long spinsters had increased and that women were delaying marriage. The last sentence of this marriage section is at odds with Hajnal's argument: "In sum, the lengthening span of life and demographic recovery not only pushed upward ages at first marriage, but discouraged or prevented many young people from marrying at all." And, in the sentence before, they declare that after 1427, "the proportions of unmarried women were doubtlessly much bigger." See *Tuscans and Their Families*, 88; *Les toscans et leurs familles*, 206-207.

[10] The works of these scholars were published during the period 1965-1982, when Hajnal was crafting his European Marriage Pattern theory. Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* was first published in 1949 and then translated into English in 1972 and 1973. Edouard Baratier and Félix Reynaud published a substantial study of Marseille and its enmeshment in the Mediterranean in 1951: *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, de 1291 à 1480*, vol 2., ed. Gaston Rambert (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1951). Robert S. Lopez's *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World,* edited with Irving W. Raymond, was available in 1955 and a second edition in 1969. S.D. Gotein's *A Mediterranean Society* was published in 1967. Bresc published *Livre et société en Sicile (1299-1499)* in 1971 and several of his articles prepared the way for his *Un monde méditerranéen: économie et société en Sicile* (1300-1460) in 1986. Jacques Heers is best known for his work on Mediterranean slavery and his 1981 *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Âge dans le monde méditerranéen*. Earlier works that address trade and slavery include his *Gênes au XV siècle. Activité économique et problèmes sociaux* (1961) and *L'Occident aux XVe et XVe siècles. Aspects économiques et sociaux* (1963). In the 1960s David Jacoby published his *Société et démographie à Byzance et en Romanie latine*, a title that should have caught Hajnal's eye, and in the 1970s Jacoby published the articles that

large-scale, long-distance trade that created a powerful and influential merchant class displaying its conspicuous wealth and elegant households filled with exotic goods and considerable staff, including the tremendous numbers of slaves who were used as domestic servants in urban centers, would have called into question his decision to exclude Southern Europe from his distinct Northwest European household formation model.[11]

Because Hajnal's model of household formation was grounded in the late age of marriage and the importance of men becoming heads of household at the time of their first nuptials, evidence that women in Italy and southern Europe married in their teens, even though men married in their thirties, is used to support his European Marriage Pattern. However, much of this documentation comes from medieval people with some wealth, particularly from elites in Mediterranean societies and even those from the middling levels who were contracting marriage to complement their dynastic and business interests. Indeed, Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber readily admit that the age of first marriage in the Catasto is difficult to determine and that their estimates were likely to distort the population of life-long bachelors and spinsters. They further acknowledged that, "more serious is the fact that the sample at hand concerns for the most part the daughters of wealthy families."[12] As we know, the majority of extant medieval sources--marriage contracts and wills copied in notarial registers, marriage litigation cases, and even late medieval census records--leave out the very bottom levels of society,

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would comprise his 1979 collection *Recherches sur la Méditerranée orientale du XIIe au XVe siècle: peuples, sociétés, économies*. David Abulafia published his *The Two Italies: Economic Relations Between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes* in 1977. David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's work on the Catasto (*Les toscana et leurs familles: une étude du catasto florentin de 1427*) was first published in French in 1978 before it was translated into in English in 1985. Did Hajnal rely on the charts and tables in the 1978 publication because he did not read French?

[11] Hajnal, "Two kinds of preindustrial household formation system," 476; Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," 103.

[12] In analyzing the 1427 Catasto, Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber determined that while Tuscan men conformed to Hajnal's model for the European Marriage Pattern, Tuscan women did not. See *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), at 203, 88, 214-215.

particularly the most significant and vulnerable portion of the singlewomen population: migrant, laboring women who were not in domestic service and those who spent their lives in and out of sex work. Here again, Herlihy and Klapish-Zuber further recognized that female migrants in the Catasto were hard to "ascertain" due to the fact that "the census takers observed [these] women only casually because they were not subject to the head tax," thereby admitting that the number of young women moving to the city for work was not accurately represented in the Catasto.[13] A reliance on documents that represent the marriages of the well-to-do is not the only issue. The widespread practice of concubinage among the peasant and urban poor in southern Europe who did not have the means to contract marriage is often overlooked when considering the numbers of people who delayed marriage or never married at all. Furthermore, the significant population of enslaved women and men in Mediterranean societies have been entirely discounted from the unmarried population. This is certainly a population that delayed marriage due to their enslavement or remained unmarried for life, especially since a slave needed permission from their owner to marry and masters in general encouraged marriage after manumission.[14]

Recently, Judith Bennett has pushed back against the rosy glow of Hajnal's assumptions that an older age at first marriage meant that women in northern Europe enjoyed greater economic advantages and more freedom of choice. This positive implication of Hajnal's argument is at the core of the extremely generous reading of late medieval marriage in the North Sea region, in which economic historians have argued

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[13] Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families*, 112. Tovah Bender notes that unmarried women were ignored by the census takers of the Catasto and unmarried men were not faithfully recorded in the Catasto until their marriage. Bender believes that the number of life-long singlewomen was still low because "Tuscan women nearly universally married" and thus fit into Hajnal's European marriage pattern. See Bender, "The Case of the Missing Girls: Sex Ratios in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 4 (2011), at 166, 158, 163-166.

[14] Iris Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum* 30, no. 3 (1955), 345; William D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 90-91; Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 143-144.

that the shortage of labor after the Black Death advantaged women to such an extent that men and women experienced marriage as a "relatively democratic" institution.[15] Much to the contrary, Bennett has argued, the grinding poverty that most rural people lived through in thirteenth-century England meant that they simply could not afford to marry.[16] Poor people could not pay the priest his fees, provide a wedding feast for their guests, provision the marital couple with the material goods to start their household, or purchase the land necessary to establish a financial base from which the couple could eke out their existence.[17] Therefore, among the rural poor in pre-plague England, men and women frequently married late, if at all, because of the length of time it took them to amass the necessary economic base for marriage. So often invisible to scholars not immersed in the archives, the marriage patterns of poor rural people to whom Bennett turned her attention directly challenge Hajnal's certainty about the prosperity of the late marriers from an economic and class perspective.

Given the flaws in Hajnal's European Marriage Pattern, we can no longer continue to use an outdated model as a basis for drawing such a sharp distinction between northern and southern Europe and thereby deny the existence of singlewomen in the Mediterranean. It is their collective story we present here.

Before we move into a discussion of the archival evidence for singlewomen, both enslaved and freeborn, we define our use of the term singlewomen to show that this umbrella encompasses a spectrum of women beyond the unmarried and young adult domestic servant that the term normally evokes. Next, we outline our methodology in identifying these singlewomen to illustrate their presence in archival sources, which is frequently overlooked when scholars focus on married women, widows, or nuns. Our greater task is to illustrate the movement of singlewomen across the region and demonstrate how they participated in various socio-economic facets of Mediterranean

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[15] Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, "Girl Power: The European Marriage Pattern and Labor Markets in the North Sea Region in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period," *Economic History Review,* 63 no. 1 (2010), 3.

[16] Judith Bennett, "Wretched Girls, Wretched Boys, and the European Marriage Pattern in England (c. 1250-1350), *Continuity and Change* 34 (2019), 315-347.

[17] Bennett, "Wretched Girls," 324.

life outside of marriage. We include the significant population of enslaved and formerly enslaved women in our analysis, as they engaged in many of the same activities as freeborn migrants and local singlewomen. While enslaved and freed women shouldered a heavy burden of forced separation from their families along with social stigma, we argue that they should be considered a key demographic of the single population in the Mediterranean. Although singlewomen were not the heavyweight movers and shakers of the Mediterranean economy, their integration into all aspects of the economic life--purchasing and selling of goods and property, last wills and testaments, receiving inheritances, engaging in business, service, apprenticeship and marriage contracts, all point to a circumscribed socio-economic space that singlewomen were able to shimmy into and exploit to their advantage.

Identifying Singlewomen in the Sources

There is a not insignificant range of how historians have understood singlewomen in late medieval Europe. Bennett and Froide made the distinction between singlewomen who were "lifelong," that is to say never married, and "life-cycle," which indicated women who lived a period of their lives as single, but later married.[18] They also distinguished between singlewomen and widows, arguing that although they shared an identity of being unattached to a man, the legal and economic status of widows tended to be much more secure and advantageous than that of singlewomen.[19] And yet work on widows has revealed that they too could be just as economically insecure and impoverished as unmarried women.[20] More recently, Cordelia Beattie has

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[18] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, 2.

[19] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past,* 1.

[20] Mireia Comas-Via, "Looking for a Way to Survive: Community and Institutional Assistance to Widows in Medieval Barcelona," *in Women and Community in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, ed. M. Armstrong-Partida, Alexandra Guerson, and Dana Wessell Lightfoot (University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 177-194; M. Comas-Via, *Entre la solitud i la llibertat: Vídues barcelonines a finals de l'Edat Mitjana* (Barcelona: Viella, 2015); Susan McDonough, "Impoverished mothers and poor widows: negotiating images of poverty in Marseille's courts," *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 64-78; Sharon Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris: Gender, Ideology, and the Daily Lives of the Poor* (Ithaca: Cornell, University Press, 2002), 136-164; Isabelle Chabot,

suggested that the distinctions between married and single were quite blurry and often turned on community perception. Whether or not a woman was single depended on whether she acted single, that is, living alone, apart from a man, acting on her own behalf.[21] Beattie's suggestion, that singleness is a blurry category, is one we take up here. For our purposes, the category of singlewomen will include never married women, women whom we encounter as single but who perhaps later marry as well women who were married but whose husbands died or abandoned them. By drawing a generous line around our definition of singlewomen, we are able to include a broad spectrum of medieval women's experiences, often including those living at the lowest end of the economic spectrum, whose travels, economic interactions, and households were deeply embedded in the cultures of Mediterreanean port cities.

Acknowledging that the experience of singleness lacks a precise definition for medieval women helps us interpret our sources. The inclusion of marital status in the documents of practice relied on an unspoken partnership between individual women and the notaries whom they paid to record their wills, or acts of manumission, or acts of procuratorship. The notaries recorded the status that the women shared with them; there was no late medieval equivalent of a marriage certificate or state-issue identification card they would use to verify the women's identities. While we cannot ever be absolutely certain a medieval woman was married, widowed, or not married, we can say that women who opted to be identified in a manner that marked them as single were presenting themselves as unmarried. She chose how to identify herself to the notary, and the notary recorded that identity. Notarial practice was more or less uniform in particular locations, which suggests that women who wanted to be identified as single understood that the notarial acts would represent them that way. Such was the case in Palermitan notarial casebooks, where the practice of notaries was to mark clearly a woman's marital status as they knew it, or as it was shared with them. All women who

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"Widowhood and poverty in late medieval Florence," *Continuity and Change* 3, no. 2 (1988): 291-311.

[21] 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), 331.

paid a notary to record an *acta* in Palermo were identified as “mulier” or woman. What came next clarified their marital status. Serena, *mulier uxor,* or wife of Thomas de Messera placed her son in service with an apothecary in 1332.[22] Blanca, *mulier uxor condam Bartolomei Jaberi*, was the widow of the deceased Bartolome, who supported herself with a brisk business in rooms-for-rent in a *fondaco* in Corleone, a town forty miles from Palermo.[23] Take, for example, Parina, identified in the notarial casebook as *mulier filia quondam Magistri Nicholi Vendari* from Salerno, when she put herself into service and joined the *familia* of one Nichola de Johanne of Palermo.[24] With no mention of a mother and with her father dead, Parina was likely a single orphan who understood that domestic service was a guarantee of meals and shelter for the duration of her contract. But when one Margarita recorded her will in her sickbed in 1343, she was identified simply as Margarita, *mulier de Commora.*[25] So, for the Palermitan notaries, across at least seventy years of notarial casebooks, the identification of women remained stable. If she was married, she was a *mulier uxor*; if she was unmarried and still living under her father’s control, she was *mulier filia*, and if she was a widow, she was a *mulier uxor quondam* of her dead husband. But if she was a singlewoman who was not a child, she was a *mulier* identified with her city of origin.

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[22] Archivio di Stato di Palermo (ASdiP), notaio B. Alamannia, Stanza 1, reg. 80, fol. 75r.v. (1332).

[23] ASdiP, notai G de Pittacolis, V Stanza, no. 28 (1400-1). For her rental contract with Angelino de Ginaro and Pino de Benedeto (4 October 1400), see fol. 69r.; for her contract with Nicholas de Roma (20 October 1400), see fol. 78r; for her contract with Nicholas Grisfolino (19 January 1400/01), see fol. 122r. For the *fondaco* as tavern, hotel, and sometimes brothel see Teresa Bernardi and Matteo Pompermaier, “Early Modern Venice: The Role of Women within Inns and Lodging Houses” *Gender and History* vol. 31 no 3 (October 2019), 636. See too Henri Bresc, “La prostitition médiévale en Méditerranée occidentale. De la liberté à l’enfermement,” in *Les femmes entre violences et stratégies de liberte Maghreb et Europe du Sud* edited by Christiane Vouvey, Marguerite Rollinde and Mireille Azzoug (Editions Bouchene, 2004), 261-2.

[24] ASdiP, notaio R. de Rusticis, 1a Stanza, reg. 81, fol. 103v. (1337-48).

[25] ASdiP, notaio Filippo de Biffardo, 1a Stanza, reg. 115, fol. 68r. (1343).

The clarity of the Palermitan notarial practice is not unique even if notaries from other Mediterranean port cities are less consistent in their identification of women as *mulier* with or without an additional modifier. Sometimes notaries indicated single status by identifying a woman with her place of origin, or as an inhabitant (*habitratrix*) of the notary's town, or by linking the woman with her father, who is often deceased (*quondam*).[26] In Montpellier notaries identified single women as daughters or with what Kathryn Reyerson has called "singularly feminine naming constructions such as Johaneta Berengaria."[27] Singlewomen like Caterina and Jacoba, who called herself Florentina, both identified themselves as "*habitratrices*" (or inhabitants rather than citizens) of Venice and appear in Venitian notarial records only associated with their deceased fathers, one of whom might have been from Padua.[28] Notarial registers from Venetian Crete show a similar practice, such as the will of the sickly Guillema de Milano, a *habitatrix* of the city of Candia, and Mabilia, daughter of the former Thome Moço, who left three singlewomen, a married woman, and a formerly enslaved man small sums of money in her will.[29] And in Mallorca, too, singlewomen appear in

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[26] Joëlle Rollo-Koster has noted a similar practice in fourteenth-century Avignon: "Following the traditional medieval pattern, the *Liber Divisionis* usually identifies women through their affiliation with men. Some women are wives of (*uxor*) or simply women of (*mulier*), some are widows of (*uxor quondam, relicta, vidua*), some are daughters of (*filia or filia quondam*) and some offer no affiliation at all. The latter are the ones identified as 'single'." Rollo-Koster, "The Women of Papal Avignon: A New Source, The Liber Divisionis of 1371," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 1 (1996), 42, at 49. See also Klapish-Zuber, "Female Celibacy and Service in Florence in the Fifteenth-Century," in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, transl. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 172-173.

[27] Kathryn Reyerson, *Women's Networks in Medieval France: Gender and Community in Montpellier, 1300-1350*, (New York: Palgrave, 2016), 136. Reyerson has also found that singlewomen were "termed simply *habitatrix* (inhabitant)," and sometimes by their geographic place of origin and residence. See Reyerson, "Women in Business in Medieval Montpellier," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 119.

[28] Giorigio Tamba, *Bernardo de Rodulfis. Notaio in Venezia*, 1392-1399 (Venezia, 1974), 122, document no. 116.

[29] McKee, *Wills from Venetian Crete*, 3, doc. no. 4, and 96, doc. no. 73.

notarized acts as daughters, as did Saurina, the daughter of the deceased furrier Berenguer de Torrents.[30] That some of these singlewomen in Mallorca were immigrants can be seen in the examples of Guillemona, identified as the daughter of Arnau Costes from the diocese of Tortosa, who sold her servant the enslaved Margarite, and Constancia, identified as the daughter of Pere Vidal from the diocese of Elne that included the city of Perpignan, who contracted her own marriage to a local man.[31] Other migrant women are simply noted as "Isabel Rius from the city of Valencia," or "Johana from the kingdom of Naples formerly the servant" of X person.[32] As we interpret notarial acta from different Mediterranean ports, Cordelia Beattie's work emphasizing the performance of being either single or married informs our analysis. Women who chose to be recognized in the documents of practice we analyze below without attaching their names to that of a husband or former husband were, in the moment the act was recorded, performing singleness. In our analysis, we take into account that performance and also recognize the different constraints under which singlewomen operated. Free singlewomen might well have been so by choice, whereas enslaved singlewomen were subject to their enslavers' choices. Whether enslaved women could marry or engage in economic pursuits that looked ahead to a future when they would be manumitted was dependent on the will of their enslaver, not their own.

The Evidence for Singlewomen in the Mediterranean

In November of 1395, the wife of Pere Despluges received a license from the governor of the port to leave Palma de Mallorca to travel to the city of Valencia. She was not traveling alone; the license, in addition to including her small son, gave safe

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[30] Archivo Capitular de Mallorca (ACM), notario Gerau Coloma, no. 14700, fol. 30r, 34r-36r (1387).

[31] Archivo Real de Mallorca (ARM), unknown notary, no. 2440, fol. 37v.-38r. (1393) and fol. 66v. (1393). Normally, in Mallorca, women contracted marriage with the approval of their father and mother, and in cases where the father was deceased, with the consent of the mother, friends, and sometimes a tutor (guardian). See, for example, ARM, notario Joan Despuig, no. 4057, fol. 136v. (1396).

[32] ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2516, fol. 43r. and 44r. (1462).

passage to his nurse (*nutrix*), two formerly enslaved servants named Maurino et Esmoladora, Esmoloadora's son, an unnamed young woman, two enslaved people (male and female), and a woman named Isabel, all of whom are identified as the domestic servants of Pere Despluges.[33] Although travel in the Mediterranean is often gendered male because of the activities of sailors, captains, merchants, corsairs, and soldiers who frequently traversed this sea, here we have various women of all ages, free born and enslaved, married and unmarried, who were part of a typical Mediterranean household and experienced forced or voluntary movement across the region for employment or compulsory labor. While it is likely that Esmoladora was a single mother because she is not identified as the wife of Maurino or any other man, chances are that Isabel, the nanny, and the slave woman were not married either and certainly neither was the young woman identified as of marriageable age (i.e. a *fadrina*). Considering that Esmoladora, the nanny, and the female slave are not identified as the *uxor* or a *mulier* belonging to a man, we argue that these women were single. This Mediterranean household, then, housed and employed at least five singlewomen. If we take into account the growth of the slave trade in Mediterranean society, the immigrants looking for work, and the numbers of urban families seeking to place their daughters in more prosperous homes as servants and apprentices, we begin see that singlewomen were very much a part of the medieval urban demographic.

In many respects, households in southern European port cities were microcosms of a diverse Mediterranean society, often showcasing the ethnic, racial, and religious plurality of its free and enslaved domestics.[34] By plurality, we mean the enslaved Orthodox Christian, Muslim, and pagan Tatars, Circassians, and black Africans who in spite of their baptism and incorporation into Christian households, were likely to retain some form of their former faith and culture. The average household in late medieval Barcelona and Valencia had at least two servants but wealthy and upper-middling level

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[33] ARM, Llicències i Guiatges, G5 1393-1396, fol. 89v. (1395).

[34] A statistical sample of the religion of slaves can be seen in Josep Hernando Delgado, *Els esclaus islàmics a Barcelona: blanc, negres, llors i turcs. De l'esclavitut a la llibertat, s. XIV* (Barcelona: Consell Superior d'Investigacions Científiques, 2003), 52-54; Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars*, 134-137.

households could have several slaves, free born servants, and quite often a married or unmarried wetnurse caring for the master's children.[35] In late medieval Italy, well-to-do households normally employed two or three female servants and, in Genoa and Venice, two enslaved women as part of a household was the norm, with no household owning more than six enslaved people. Even across the sea in the Mamluk sultanate, slaveholding resembled Italian households, except for the military households of amirs who used slaves as soldiers and also owned anywhere from thirty to forty slave concubines.[36] Although Christian traders trafficked greater numbers of slaves to Islamic markets where the demand for slaves far exceeded European demand, the distinction of slavery in the late medieval Christian Mediterranean is that women made up a large portion of the slave population due the domestic nature of the labor required within the home.[37] In Italy the enslaved were brought mostly from Eastern Europe, Greece, and Central Asia and later, in much smaller numbers, from sub-Saharan Africa, but in late medieval Iberia, especially in the Crown of Aragon, Muslims from Africa and the Canary

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[35] Teresa-Maria Vinyoles i Vidal, *La vida quotidiana a Barcelona vers 1400* (Barcelona: Dalmau Rafael, 1985), 138-139.

[36] Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 61, 65-6. This holds true for the Jewish community of Cairo where, according to Gotein, "slave girls as domestic help and nurses of children were found in every well-to-do family." Gotein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1, 134.

[37] See Sally McKee, "Slavery," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 283-285, 287; Kevin D. Mummey, *Women, Slavery, and Community on the Island of Mallorca, ca. 1360-1390* (PhD. diss, University of Minnesota, 2013), 57-58; Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia,* 71-2; Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars*, 80-82; Hernando, *Els esclaus islàmics a Barcelona*, 55, 138-9, 147-152. Hannah Barker notes the preponderance of enslaved domestics in Italy and shows that the majority of slaves in Mamluk civilian households were also women; Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise,* 61, 70, 72. Evidence from Famagusta reveals a similar pattern of domestic slavery, although the Black Death increased slave labor in rural areas. See Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Chris Schabel, *Cyprus: Society and Culture, 1191-1374* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 38-9, 151-2; Angel Nicolaou-Konnari, "Women in Medieval Famagusta: Law, Family, and Society" in *Famagusta: History and Society*, vol. II, ed. Giles Grivaud, Angel Nicolaou-Konnari, and Chris Schabel (Turnhout: 2020), 89-93.

Islands began to represent larger numbers than the eastern slave population because these "Moors" were captured during raids and corsair activity against the Maghrib.[38] In her book *Enemies & Familiars*, Debra Blumenthal has highlighted how the purchase of a slave could be far more expensive than contracting the services of a free female servant even though free and enslaved domestics performed many of the same tasks within the household. As household dependents, masters and mistresses were bound to provide the same essentials--food, clothing, and shelter--which meant that the upkeep was roughly the same but the cost of a free servant did not require the same capital.[39] The high price tag for slaves, particularly young, healthy ones, meant that contracting a free domestic was more common than purchasing slave domestic labor. This was particularly true in Italy where very few households in the fifteenth century could afford more than one slave as prices steadily rose, so most households relied on free born servants and the poorer ones hired the daily labor of a man or woman. Given the expense of owning slaves, particularly young ones, the number of slaves attached to a household became a status symbol and sign of the owner's wealth.[40] Nevertheless, the resourcefulness of widows and wives illustrates how women could come together to

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[38] Sally McKee, "Domestic Slavery in Renaissance Italy," *Slavery and Abolition* 29 no. 3 (2008), 305-326; Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars*, 10-13,18-19; Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, 60-63; Hernando, *Els esclaus islàmics a Barcelona*, 7-12, 25-52; María Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, "Esclaus i lliberts orientals a Barcelona. Segles XIV-XV," in *De l'esclavitud a la llibertat: esclaus i lliberts a l'Edat Mitjana*, María Teresa Ferrer and Josefa Mutgé Vives, eds. (Barcelona: CSIC, Institució Milà i Fontanals, 2000) 171-190; Rebecca Lynn Winer, *Women, Wealth, and Community in Perpignan, c. 1250-1300: Christians, Jews, and Enslaved Muslims in a Medieval Mediterranean Town* (Ashgate, 2006), 138-142.

[39] Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars,* 80-81, 84, 86-7.

[40] McKee, "Slavery," 287, 288; McKee, "Domestic Slavery in Renaissance Italy," 312, 320; Steven Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 167; Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars*, 80, 157. The average price of a slave on Mallorca was the equivalent of a "medium-to-high priced home, and several times that of a shared dwelling or small piece of vacant land;" Mummey, *Women, Slavery, and Community*, 61. For the range of opinions of enslavers on the ideal age of the women they enslaved, see Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise*, 68.

purchase and share the labor of a female slave, perhaps when bearing the cost alone was not possible. For example, in 1450, three widows--Simona, Isabel, and Ursola--sold their thirty-year-old slave woman Johanna to a man who lived outside of Palma for the sum of twenty-four pounds.[41]

Understanding the age of enslaved women gives us a better sense of the period at which they might be manumitted because their transition to free status precipitated their participation in the economy on their own behalf and the ability to contract their own marriages. The average age of women who were bought and sold privately in Genoa and Venice tended to be between the ages of fifteen to twenty-five in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but the average age increased from twenty-one to twenty-nine years during the fifteenth century.[42] In Barcelona, a statistical analysis of the 1,196 slaves who appear in notarial records from 1391 to 1400 shows that 49% of female slaves were between the ages of twelve and twenty-four, and 37% of enslaved women were between the ages of twenty-five and forty.[43] These numbers reveal a significant population of the female slave population was over the age of twenty-three. Although it is impossible to know the age at which enslaved women were given their freedom because manumission documents, unlike slave sales, rarely provide the age of the individual, it seems likely that a good number of women who were enslaved at a younger age may have been freed in their thirties and forties.[44] For example, in

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[41] ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2507, fol. 87v. (1450). In Jerusalem, six women--two wives, two minor daughters, and two sisters--owned in common a slave that they later sold via the three proxies who represented them. See Donald P. Little, "Six Fourteenth Century Purchase Deeds for Slaves from Al-Haram Aš-Šarîf," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 131, no. 2 (1981): 326-329. See also Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise*, 70.

[42] Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise*, 68-69; McKee, "Domestic Slavery in Renaissance Italy," 307, 317-318.

[43] Hernando, *Els esclaus islàmics a Barcelona*, 55-57. For women emancipated in their forties or later, see also Eduard Sierra Valentí, "Ser esclau a la Girona medieval," *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins*, no. 54 (2013), 343-345.

[44] Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery*, 170. Epstein writes: "The ages of freed slaves are seldom supplied that it is reasonable to suppose that few of them were young." This

Mallorca, the Tatar woman Marguerite was freed at the age of forty by the Valencian merchant Jonfredo de Scales when he purchased her from a Mallorcan priest.[45] Some were freed in their mid to late twenties.[46] It was not uncommon for female domestic slaves to be freed upon their owner's death or, in the cases of enslaved women who functioned as a concubine, to be freed after the birth of their master's child.[47] For older

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group of manumitted slaves does not include the number of children born to slave masters who were freed at birth or during their childhood.

[45] ARM, Notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2518, fol. 5v.-6r. (1463). Marguerite agreed to pay Jonfredo the sum of twenty libras, the cost of her purchase, or serve him and his family for a period of four years for her freedom.

[46] The Guinean enslaved woman Joana was twenty-five when she was freed by her owner, the married woman Elionor Vellers. See Pierre Bonnassie, *La organización del trabajo en Barcelona a fines del siglo XV* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1975), 100. In another example, one Elena was freed by her Genoese owner in Famagusta at the age of twenty-seven. See Michel Balard, Laura Balletto, and Catherine Otten-Froux, eds. *Gênes et l'Outre-Mer: Actes notariés rédigés à Chypre par le notaire Antonius Folieta, 1445-1458* (Nicosie: Centre de Recherche Scientifique, 2016), doc. no. 69, 251.

[47] Blumenthal, *Enemies & Familiars*, 191-192; McKee, "Domestic Slavery in Renaissance Italy," 312, 320; McKee, "Slavery," 281; Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery*, 170-172; Nicolaou-Konnari, "Women in Medieval Famagusta: Law, Family, and Society," 93-96; Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise*, 62; Georg Christ, *Trading Conflicts: Venetian Merchants and Mamuluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2012),129. In Mallorca, the apothecary Joan de Mayano freed, in addition to two male slaves, his two female slaves in 1382: Maria, a Tatar who had previously been the slave of Pere Bovet a *taverner*, and Maria, another Tatar, who had previously belonged to Pere de Campo Precioso a former citizen of the city. See Archivo Capitular de Mallorca (ACM), notario Mateu Salsèt, no. 14713, 6v.-7r. (1382); 14v. (1382); 24r. (1382); 87v. (1383). This practice was also common in the Islamic Mediterranean. See S.D. Gotein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 133, 135; Craig Perry, "Conversion as an aspect of master-slave relationships in the medieval Egyptian Jewish community," in *Contesting Inter-Religious Conversion in the Medieval World*, ed. Yaniv Fox and Yosi Yisraeli (London: Routledge, 2017), 135-159.

women who might have been manumitted in their 50s or 60s, this group was more likely to remain unmarried for life.[48]

Women who ended up as captives were also part of this group as many had to work for years before they were ransomed or were obligated to compensate their redeemers with their labor. In the eastern Mediterranean, notarial contracts reveal that women such as Elena, a Greek captive turned slave, agreed to serve the Genoese man who freed her with five years of service in lieu of the twenty-five ducats she owed.[49] These "work-release arrangements" were also common in Mallorca, Palermo, and Famagusta, illustrating how formerly enslaved women transitioned to have a legal status that allowed them, as we will show, to pay debts, hire a procurator, acquire resources, and own property as singlewomen.[50] In sum, a remarkable number of enslaved women remained unmarried for much of their life and others were manumitted later in adulthood after their mid-twenties. Many of the women who gained their freedom continued to work as domestic servants for the term of their contracts or longer. Some married eventually, probably a good many did not. These women went on to act as their own agents and participated in the economy, so their domestic service and socio-economic activities should be considered alongside those of freeborn singlewomen.

In Mallorca where the enslaved population ranged anywhere between 16 to 19 percent and perhaps even 26 percent of Palma's residents in the fourteenth century, notarial registers reveal a high number of slave sales, manumissions, and newly freed

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[48] For example, sick and at the end of his life the Venetian Claretus Foscareno living in Crete ordered in his will that the elderly Herini, "vetera sclava mea," should be freed immediately after his death. See Sally McKee, ed. *Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete, 1312-1420*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), 254-265, doc. no. 204.

[49] Barker, *Most Precious Merchandise*, 34-35.

[50] Mummey, *Women, Slavery, and Community*, 92-3, 111. In Palermo, Blancaflor, identified as a Greek woman from Romania who was freed by the merchant Guillem Oliver, in return for six years of service. See ASdiP, notai Enrico de Citella, reg. 79, Stanza 1, fol. 60r. (1348). For Famagusta, see Nicolaou-Konnari and Schabel, *Cyprus: Society and Culture*, 154; Nicolaou-Konnari, "Women in Medieval Famagusta: Law, Family, and Society," 94-95.

women active in society.[51] Women such as Luna, a formerly enslaved Tatar woman, working as a servant in the home of the widow Caterina, appears in 1382 designating the same notary procurator as Caterina, suggesting that both women were involved in some business deals.[52] Certainly Maria Grecha, whose name denotes her former unfree status, was involved in Mallorca's society and economy. She is identified as a hostaler when appointing the notary Jaume Catalani as her procurator to mind all her affairs and to settle whatever quarrels and complaints that involved her.[53] That singlewomen hired a procurator is significant. Procurators were key legal agents in business transactions throughout the Mediterranean as they were employed to carry out the business of their clients, to draw up notarized contracts, and to defend them in litigation.[54] While married women in Genoa, Venice, Crete, Famagusta, Barcelona, and Mallorca were not infrequently appointed as their husband's procurator or they in turn appointed a procurator in their stead to help manage the family's business during a husband's absence,[55] notarial registers also show that enslaved and freeborn

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[51] Mummey, *Women, Slavery, and Community*, 51-3;

[52] ACM, notario Mateu Salsèt, no. 14713, fol. 2v.-3r., fol. 17r. (1382).

[53] ACM, notario Pera Soler, no. 14764, fol. 55r. (1403).

[54] Robert Lopez, "Proxy in Medieval Trade," in *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer*, ed. William Chester Jordan, Bruce McNab, and Teofilo F. Ruiz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 187-194; Kathryn Reyerson, *Mother and Sons, Inc.: Martha de Cabanis in Medieval Montpellier* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 144-145; Susan McDonough, *Witnesses, Neighbors, and Community in Late Medieval Marseille* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 39.

[55] Jamie Smith, "Women as Legal Agents in Late Medieval Genoa," in *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, ed. Charlotte Newman Goldy and Amy Livingstone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 113-130; Mummey, *Women, Slavery, and Community*, 94-95, 213; Alan M. Stahl, ed. *The Documents of Angelo de Cartura and Donato Fontanella. Venetian Notaries in Fourteenth-Century Crete* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 11 and 93, doc. no. 29 and 242; Nicolaou-Konnari, "Women in Medieval Famagusta: Law, Family, and Society," 104-105. For married women acting as their husband's procurators in Mallorca, see ARM, notario Pere de Olives, no. 14726, fol. 106v.-107r.; 143v.; 152v. (1372); and Antonio Ortega Villoslada, "El trabajo femenino en Mallorca. La labor de la mujer en la actividad marítima de la primera mitad del siglo XIV," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 17 (2004), 462-464.

singlewomen had the means to delegate their financial affairs, or the expectation that their business dealings or personal life might land them in court. As Kevin Mummey has argued from Mallorcan evidence, enslaved women hired procurators when they knew they "had assets and/or opportunities to be looked after, and a future to be considered."[56] Throughout the Mediterranean, we see women of modest means making the calculation that hiring a procurator to act on her behalf was worth paying a notary to draw up an act of procuratorship. For example, in Cyprus, Maria de Famagusta, the former servant and concubine of Marcus Schandar, hired the same procurator as Marcus's daughter Gozi, to represent her should anyone contest her inheritance from Marcus.[57]

Beyond designating a procurator to manage affairs, Mediterranean singlewomen made financial decisions that indicate some level of economic well-being. In 1386, a different Maria Greca from Mallorca, manumitted by her former enslaver the merchant Guillem Pont, accumulated enough capital that she could both purchase other enslaved people and then manumit them, and loan money to other enslaved people to enable them to purchase their freedom. She purchased Pere Mertell from the urban farmer (*ortolanus*) Bernat Alber for twenty-four pounds, and then freed him in the next act, while also requiring him to repay her the money she spent on his purchase.[58] And then a few weeks later, Maria lent another woman Caterina sixteen pounds to enable her to purchase her freedom from Lucia, the wife of Fransesc Maymona.[59] These two acta not only attest to Maria Greca's solvency, but also to her connection to others in the community of Mallorca's enslaved, which included other singlewomen. We see a similar

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[56] Mummey, Women, Slavery, and Community," 93.

[57] Michel Balard, et. al. *Gênes et L'Outre-Mer. Actes notariés rédigés à Chypre par le notaire Antonius Folieta, 1445-1458* (Nicosie, 2016), 129-130, 131-132, documents no. 10 and no. 12.

[58] ACM, notario Gerau Coloma, no. 14699, fol. 27r.v. (1386).

[59] ACM, notario Gerau Coloma, no. 14699, fol. 29r-v. (1386).

situation in Palermo where the singlewoman Flos manumitted her Romanian servant Nico and then Nico, in turn, promised Flos to repay the cost of his purchase.[60]

Singlewomen did not, of course, use their resources only to manumit enslaved people. They bought and sold slaves, loaned money, and ran businesses throughout the region. In just one example, Margarida, an unmarried daughter of the deceased notary Gabriel Banlenes sold a slave to a priest in Mallorca.[61] Çaneta Liocara, a *habitatrix* in Candia, sold fifty measures of wine to the notary Angelus Cariola in 1305 and in the past had leased vineyards from her land in the village of Pendamodhy to a villager.[62] A married couple in Palermo borrowed money from the singlewoman Constancia Coppula and the singlewoman Nidda loaned one Nicolo de Bayamontis four florins in 1333.[63] Also in Palermo, Margarita was another singlewoman in a position to loan money to Lanzarotta de Spara.[64] The singlewomen Bella and Massa owned houses on the same street, again in Palermo. They entered the historical record when a house between them became the subject of a dispute between creditors and debtors, and their homes were used to fix the location of the disputed property. [65] We cannot glean much from their brief mention in the conflict, but we can note that their mention as the home owners speaks to a certain level of financial security. Perhaps, too, their

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[60] ASdiP, notai Giacomo de Citella, reg. 77, Stanza 1, fol. 98v.-99r. (1329).

[61] ACM, notario Pere Moranta, no. 0415, fol. 57r. (1470).

[62] Alan M. Stahl, ed. *Documents of Angelo de Cartura and Donato Fontanella: Venetian Notaries in Fourteenth-Century Crete* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 107, doc. no. 281 (1305) and 173, doc. no. 448 (1306). For the leased vineyard, Johannes Silima of Pendanodhy recognized that he was delivering wine to the same notary Agnelus from lands that he had leased from Çaneta Liocara.

[63] For Constancia Coppula, see ASdiP, notaio Giacomo de Citella, reg. 77, Stanza 1, fol. 46r. (1328) and 62r. (1329) and for Nidda, see ASdiP, notaio B. Alamannia, reg. 80, Stanza 1, fol. 138v.-139r. (1332-3).

[64] ASdiP, notaio B. Alamannia, reg. 80, Stanza 1, fol. 99r. (1332-3).

[65] Archivio Storico di Comune di Palermo (ASCdiP), Corte Pretoriana, reg. 1, fol. 8r.-9v. (1330-1331).

proximity to each other indicated a sense of community between the two women, whose shared status as singlewomen was paired with their homeownership. In addition, a number of singlewomen appear as tavern owners, such as Marossa Pansana in Famagusta who accused a Genoese official, Captain Pietro de Marco, of failing to recover an expensive golden vessel worth thirty-five ducats and of permitting a man she denounced to the captain to leave Famagusta without paying the forty white bisants he owed.[66] Examples abound. Machalde, whose tavern was located next to the cemetery of the church of Saint James in Palermo, employed two men to sell wine in her tavern,[67] while a service contract for selling wine in a tavern belonging to Donato di Rinaldo references the fact that it had once belonged to the "woman Gemme."[68] Studies on women's activities in cities, such as Avignon, Montpellier, Marseille, Venice, and Barcelona, have noted that freeborn singlewomen, just like married women and widows, appear as food sellers, cleaners and laundresses, hostel-keepers, tavern-keepers, in the selling of lower-end merchandise, including used clothing and shoes, and laboring in the textile industry, revealing that "singlewomen did not always hold the worst jobs nor the lowest social status."[69] While more attention is often given to the married and

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[66] Silvana Fossati Raiteri, ed. *Genova e Cipro. L'inchiesta a su Pietro de Marco capitano di Genova in Famagosta, 1448-1449* (Genova, 1984), p. 16, 17, 19, 20, documents no. 20, no. 23, no. 24 (1448). Angel Nicolaou-Konnari notes many women in Famagusta were "tavern owners in their own right," and discusses the case of Marossa Pansana in "Women in Medieval Famagusta: Law, Family, and Society," 112.

[67] ASdiP, Notai Giacomo de Citella, reg. 77, Stanza 1, fol. 32v. - 33r. (1328).

[68] ASdiP, Notai Giacomo de Citella, reg. 78, Stanza 1, fol. 20r. (1331).

[69] Rollo-Koster, "The Women of Papal Avignon: A New Source, The *Liber Divisionis* of 1371," 46-51, at 51. See also Francine Michaud, *Earning Dignity: Labour Conditions and Relations during the Century of the Black Death in Marseille* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 102-124; Carmen Batlle i Gallart, "Noticias sobre la mujer Catalana en el mundo de los negocios (siglo XIII)," in *El trabajo de las mujeres en la Edad Media hispana*, ed. Cristina Seguar Graíño y Ángela Muñoz Fernández (Madrid: Asociación Cultural Al-Mudayna, 1988), 201-222; María Teresa López Beltrán, "El trabajo de las mujeres en el mundo urbano medieval," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 40, no. 2 (2010): 39-57; Ortega Villoslada, "El trabajo femenino en Mallorca. La labor de la mujer en la actividad marítima de la primera mitad del siglo XIV," 466-468; Teofilo F. Ruiz, "Women, Work and Daily Life in Late Medieval Castile," in *Women at Work in Spain*, ed. Marilyn Stone and Carmen Benito-Vessels (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 109-113; Chojnacka,

widowed women involved in local lending activities, singlewomen of humble backgrounds also appear as moneylenders.[70] When martialed together, the archival evidence from Mallorca, Valencia, Palermo, Famagusta, and Crete, and these city-focused studies expose not only the presence and visibility of singlewomen in the Mediterranean but also their involvement in the economy beyond life-cycle domestic service.

Singlewomen, freeborn and formerly enslaved, had access to credit in the medieval Mediterranean. When Margarita needed money in Salemi, she turned to the Jewish moneylender Simonet Faber who lent her three gold *unicas*, which Margarita repaid in full, as the quittance the notary recorded attests.[71] In Barcelona, the "libera e alforna" Magdalena, who had been emancipated by her owner the merchant Johan de Muntros, borrowed twenty-seven Barcelonan pounds from the tavern owner Raymundo Gassuli.[72] And in Palermo, another emancipated Maria Greca repaid a small loan she had borrowed from Guillelmo Praensci, while Bona, a former slave from Croatia received a substantial loan of money, one *onze* of gold and some small change, from the Genoese Giovanni Barbaro in order to purchase her freedom from a Perpignan merchant.[73] Although Bona, like many enslaved women, borrowed or worked off a debt to secure her freedom, we often don't know why the women needed the money, or what their relationships were to the men from whom they borrowed it, but in each case, these formerly enslaved women were acting as a single woman, whose credit was such that

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Working Women of Early Modern Venice, 45-47, 97. See also Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 115, 118, 123.

[70] Reyerson, "Women in Business in Medieval Montpellier," 132-133, 137. For poor women involved in lending small amounts of cash, see also William Jordan, "Jews on Top: Women and the Availability of Consumption Loans in Northern France in the Mid-Thirteenth-Century," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978), 43-45, 50, 52-55.

[71] ASdiP, notai Defunti G. Pittacolis, reg. 5, Stanza 5, fol. 69v-70r. (1403).

[72] Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona (AHPB), 58/2 Bernat Nadal, fol. 23v. (1388).

[73] ASdiP, notaio B. Alamannia, Stanza 1, reg. 80, fol. 134v. (1333); ASdiP, notaio Giacomo de Citella, Stanza 1, fol. 39r.v. and fol. 40v. (1328).

men like Guilelmo, Raymundo, and Giovanni perceived them to be good credit risks in the first place.

Other documents point to formerly enslaved singlewomen engaging in the same activities as freeborn singlewomen. Yet another Greek woman in Mallorca, the unmarried Margarita Greca "francha et libera," placed her son Joan Greci in 1381 as an apprentice for six years to the woolen weaver Leonard de Pinu.[74] So too did the singlewomen Simona, identified as a *mulier Catalana* (Catalan woman) and Contissa di Miraldino, both citizens of Palermo who placed their sons in service.[75] Singlewomen are not only acting on behalf of their sons in regards to service contracts; sometimes they also are contracting their own labor. A 1389 document attests to the fact that Constancia worked as a wetnurse for a Barcelona merchant and her wages for this service, twenty-two *libras*, functioned as the foundation of her dowry when she married Petrus Poal, a migrant from Tarragona.[76] Constancia's marriage confirms that singlewomen in cities, like many peasant women who had sex and children before matrimony, were still able to marry. In Salemi, a town southwest of Palermo, for example the singlewoman Antona Labruna put herself into service for two years to Nicholas Gerardi while he was in Sicily or in "foreign parts."[77] It is quite possible that Antona was actually contracting a disguised concubinous relationship with Nicolas, which might explain why she was expected to travel outside of Palermo. Take, for

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[74] ACM, notario Joan Clavell, no. 14649, fol. 171r. (1381).

[75] ASdiP, Notai Giacomo de Citella, reg. 78, Stanza 1, fol. 162v. (1332) and fol. 180r. (1332).

[76] AHPB, notario Joan Eiximenis, no. 29/3, fol. 13r. (1389). For peasant women in Catalunya and singlewomen in Barcelona who engaged in a concubinous relationship prior to marriage and had children out of wedlock, see Michelle Armstrong-Partida, "Concubinage, Illegitimacy, and Fatherhood: Urban Masculinity in Late Medieval Barcelona," *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (2019): 1-25. See also Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 20-21, 22.

[77] ASdiP, notai Defunti G. Pittacolis, reg. 5, Stanza 5, fol. 90v.-91r. (1403). A similar example is that of Elisabet Parés who at the age of twenty-four put herself into the domestic service of a merchant household in Barcelona for a year. See Bonnassie, *La organización del trabajo en Barcelona*, 105.

example, a contract from Corsica where Johaneta Oliveti agreed to serve the Venetian Marco Bentrame and accompany him as his *amaxia* (lover) for the next six years to "all the places and lands you will travel" in return in return for food, clothing, and a cash gift of ten Genoese pounds.[78] In various port cities like Palermo and Mallorca, it was not uncommon for immigrant women to enter into concubinous unions with foreign and local men in pacts that very much resembled service contracts. A woman simply identified as Marina Maçana from the region of Venice entered into a contract with the Barcelona merchant Guispert Ballester where she committed for an indeterminate amount of time to serve him in his home and take care of all his business in return for food, clothing, shoes, eleven sous a month, and Guispert's promise that he would keep her healthy and uninjured (*sanam et egram*). Marina also promised not to abandon him or his home for another, nor leave for a higher salary.[79] Even if Antona and Marina were not contracting a concubinous relationship, these were independent women, no longer girls needing a proxy for a contract, negotiating the terms of their work service.

Evidence that formerly enslaved women were able to acquire some modest resources from their active roles in the economy can be seen in marriage contracts and in their wills. Pere Grecus, the former slave of a Mallorcan apothecary recognized that his wife Caterina, "francha, libera, et alforra," brought thirty-four *libras* in money, clothing, and household goods to their marriage.[80] Another Caterina, also a former slave, specified in her marriage contract to the widower and urban farmer Bernat Albert that she contributed thirty *libras* to their union, twenty of which were the value of her clothing and a smaller sum of ten *libras* in currency.[81] In a third example, when Maria, formerly enslaved and then emancipated by the merchant Raphael Massot and his wife Catherine wed the formerly enslaved George Mogeri, she brought a dowry of thirty

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[78] Gian Luigi Barni, "Un contratto di concubinato in Corsica nel XIII secolo," *Rivista di storia del diritto Italiano* 22 (1949): 131-155.

[79] ARM, Notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2515, fol. 65v.-66r. (1460).

[80] ACM, notario Mateu Salsèt, no. 14713, fol. 87v. (1383).

[81] ACM, notario Guerau Coloma, no. 14702, fol. 59v. (1392).

libras to their marriage.[82] So it seems the "going rate" for a dowry of a formerly enslaved woman in Mallorca, at least, was around thirty *libras*.[83] Such a small dowry sum is in sharp contrast to the daughter of a wax candle-maker who received two hundred *libras* for her dowry or that of a Mallorcan mariner who married his daughter to a sailor from Naples with a dowry of one hundred *libras*.[84] To put the marriages of formerly enslaved women further in perspective, evidence from fifteenth-century Valencia and Florence shows that laboring free women earned their marital assets through domestic work.[85] In Valencia, in particular, dowries ranged from twenty to one-hundred *libras* for the daughters of farmers and artisans in Valencia. The value of such a dowry indicated their lower status and their labor outside of the natal household, especially when a good many entered into one domestic service position after another to acquire enough marital funds.[86] Formerly enslaved women were clearly part of this work force and were likely to be older when they married because their laboring years as free and paid domestics

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[82] ARM, notario Joan Castels, no. 4545, fol. 23v (1465).

[83] Other examples include Caterina "de nacione Rossorum fraqua et alforra" who brought thirty pounds to her marriage to Martino Bartholomei, a former slave, and Anna "de nacione Burgarorum fraqua et alforra" and the former servant of the merchant Nicolau Sunyer who brought thirty pounds to her marriage to Gaspar Monge, also a freed Tatar man. See ARM, notario Joan Castell i Pere Moranta, no. 2553, fol. 97v.-98r. (1464). For more examples of formerly enslaved women marrying with dowries worth 30 *libras*, see ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2515, fol. 157v., 172v. (1460).

[84] ARM, notario Joan Castell i Pere Moranta, no. 2553, fol. 68r.v. (1464); ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2515, fol. 163v. (1460). In this register, a mariner from Venice married Bartomeva, the daughter of a Mallorcan weaver, who brought a one hundred *libras* dowry to the marriage, and Johantea, the daughter of a priest, received a one hundred *libras* dowry from her father to marry the fisherman Joan Martí. See ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2515, fol. 181r. (1460).

[85] Klapisch-Zuber, "Women Servants in Florence during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," 68; Dana Wessell Lightfoot, *Women, Dowries and Agency: Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 2-3, 8.

[86] Wessell Lightfoot, *Women, Dowries and Agency*, 66, 70-73, 116-120. The average labouring-status dowry for artisan and peasant women in the city of Valencia, according to Wessell Lightfoot, was twenty to forty pounds, which was "ten to fifty times lower than the average dowry of merchant, patrician, and noblewomen," (p.73).

(when they could earn the resources for marriage) were prolonged due to their enslavement.

As the comparatively small dowries suggest, the singlewomen we have identified in the Mediterranean largely subsisted at the lower ends of the economic scale, making small loans, saving for small dowries, and working for small sums. Our evidence suggests that singlewomen in the Mediterranean lived economically difficult lives, more like the challenging experiences Bennett analyzed in "Wretched Girls," than the economically empowered singlewomen in de Moor and van Zanden's argument, although we have pointed out women with greater resources who did not fit that pattern.[87] We've also found evidence that being a singlewoman was not an economic death sentence. Singlewomen had money to lend, to manumit enslaved people, and in more rare cases, to leave significant legacies. Yet singleness was certainly no guarantee of an economically easy life. While Rollo-Koster and Reyerson's work made clear that not all Mediterranean singlewomen were poor, other scholars connect singleness with economic hardship in the region. In the town of Manosque, for example, approximately forty mile northeast of the port city of Marseille, Maryse Guénette reconstructed the lives of thirty-two itinerants who came before the criminal court in the first half of the fourteenth century, accused of crimes including adultery and theft. All of them were women, and all of them single. In Manosque at least, to be a vagabond, to live a life without a fixed abode characterized by economic insecurity and social censure, was to be a singlewoman.[88] From these criminal court records, Guénette argued that itinerant singlewomen were more than economically vulnerable, but marginalized because they had neither a home nor a man to offer them status.[89] While the economic fragility of singlewomen in Manosque resonates with the evidence we

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[87] See notes 14-15 above.

[88] Maryse Guénette, "Errance et solitude féminines à Manosque (1314-1358)," in *Vie privée et ordre public à la fin du moyen âge: études sur Manosque, la Provence, et le Piémont (1250-1450)*, edited by Michel Hébert (Aix-en-Provence, 1987), 23-43.

[89] Guénette, "Errance et solitude," 38.

have found elsewhere, our sources do not suggest that to be single was to be without community or a sense of belonging.

Singlewomen accrued material goods and developed affective networks, which they marked in their final wills and testaments. In Palermo and its surrounding territories, it was unremarkable for singlewomen to turn to a notary to record her last will and testament. Take, for example, the will of Rosa, an inhabitant of Salemi. In addition to the typical legacies to a parish priest to assure prayers for her soul, Rosa's will reflected her familial connections and obligations. She provided provisions (*alimenta*) for her minor granddaughter Viola through the sale of a workshop (*apotheca*) Rosa had owned, and left legacies to a nephew and his wife, while designating a second nephew her universal heir.[90] In Crete, Agnes Milumercan, living in the port city of Candia, did not have any family members to entrust her last wishes or belongings. She appointed two men as her executors and bequeathed a gold ring to the married woman Michalete, presumably her friend, and very small amounts of money to the poor. One imagines that Agnes must have understood the trials of living in poverty because her bequests are distinct in that she specifically gave money to "pauperibus mulieribus," to the liberation of three paupers from prison, and finally for the marriages of "poor women."[91] Also in Candia, Chali, the woman formerly enslaved by Nicolai Vasmulo, appointed Chali, the widowed daughter of her former enslaver, as her heir and executor in 1329, outlining the bequests owed to her from the estates of two married women and the sums of money she had lent to two other singlewomen.[92] We want to be appropriately cautious to avoid overinterpreting one document because we recognize the dangers of overlaying the hierarchies inherent in enslavement with familial language.[93] Yet hints

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[90] ASdiP, Notai Defunti Stanza 5, G. Pittacolis, reg. 5, fol. 136v-137r. (1403). The will does not mention Viola's parent who perhaps was dead or estranged from Rosa.

[91] McKee, *Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete*, vol. 1, 198, doc. no. 156.

[92] McKee, *Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete*, vol. 2, 533-534, doc. no. 411. "

[93] For a recent exploration how free women of color used final testaments to define and support "the boundaries of kinship," see Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), Chapter 6, quotation on 188-9.

from the Mediterranean point to the ways in which enslavement and family creation could overlap. The North African Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju manumitted an enslaved woman Asha, then married and had three children with her.[94] While marriage between an enslaver and a formerly enslaved person was exceedingly rare, sexual relationships between free men and enslaved women was common, if laced with coercion, and often resulted in children.[95] When the freed woman Chali named the daughter of her former enslaver as her heir and executor, she also left a legacy of the strange bonds that enslavement created. Clearly some form of dependence, if not trust or friendship, existed between these two women named Chali and the formerly enslaved woman's will gives us insight into her relationships and moneylending.

Singlewomen's wills are evidence of their enmeshment in overlapping networks of support. Lucia, a singlewoman from the town of Corleone in Sicily, who designated her brother as her universal heir, began her will with an extensive inventory of her goods, covering four folia of the notary's casebook, which included clothing, textiles, and table decorations (mensalia).[96] A singlewoman herself, Lucia's will makes clear she was part of an affective network that included married and unmarried women. Her specific legacies recognized Paula, the wife of Philip de Pactis, the unnamed wife of Bernardi Liberti along with the singlewomen Margarita de Presto and Perna de Trayna, and two women identified as their father's daughters, Axa the daughter of Jacme Dondani and the unnamed daughter of Frederici de Truxa. Lucia left these women items of clothing; chemises (*camisa*), a pair of hose (*caligarum*), a tunic (*tunica*). These items had monetary value, of course, and could be sold on or pawned, and thus served to

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[94] Elizabeth Lambourn, *Abraham's Luggage: A Social Life of Things in the Medieval Indian Ocean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 37, 67.

[95] Baker, *Most Precious Merchandise,* 82-84; Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars*, 87-93; McKee, "Slavery," 281, 282, 290; Winer, *Women, Wealth, and Community in Perpignan*, 148.

[96] ASdiP, notaio G. de Pittacolis, V Stanza, reg. 46, fol. 55r.-57r. (1444).

provide some financial benefit to the legatees.[97] But these items were also deeply personal. They had adorned Lucia's own body. And when she recognized Paula, Margarita, Perna, Axa and women unnamed in her will, she signaled her affective bonds with them, that would potentially outlast her life. Lucia's will recognized her community, which included women both married and unmarried.

Our final example of a singlewoman's will is from the Greek island of Chios, a Genoese colony from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. There, a singlewoman Isabella, who migrated from the town of Valenza in the Piedmont, lived in a house with the widow Maria de Mylitène that was owned by one Antonio de Asornio. In her analysis of Isabella's 1488 will, the historian Laura Belleto suggests she must have been a woman of some significance on the island. As evidence, Belleto offered Isabella's appointment of an island notable as her executor and the sizable value of the inventory of her goods, largely expensive jewelry.[98] It is quite possible that Isabella had received these gifts from a concubinous relationship, where documents show that women were entitled to leave the relationship with their clothing and jewelry. While the bulk of her last will and testament was devoted to inventory rather than legacies, Isabella did recognize two important relationships in her final bequest. She recognized a local hospital as one beneficiary, and her other legatee was the widow Maria, with whom she lived. Belleto speculated this recognized help that Maria had offered Isabella during the latter's illness, prompted her to write her will.[99] Perhaps Isabella felt more than gratitude, and was recognizing a bond forged of cohabitation and a shared experience of living on the spectrum of singleness. Or perhaps the legacy was a recognition of the women's romantic relationship, a bond of love and attraction whose

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[97] Daniel Lord Smail, *Legal Plunder: Households and Debt Collection in Late Medieval Europe.* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 4.

[98] Laura Belleto, "L'émigration féminine de Gênes au Proche-Orient au XVe siècle," *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes: Xe-XVe siècles* Actes du Colloque de Conques (October, 1999), 307-08.

[99] Belleto, "L'émigration féminine," 307.

living arrangements "might particularly have offered opportunities for same-sex love."[100] We cannot know, although the bequest invites scholarly speculation.

Thus far, we have concentrated on the economic integration of singlewomen, whether freeborn or liberated from slavery. Economic well-being was not, as we know, guaranteed for Mediterranean singlewomen. Evidence for this difficulty lives in the service contracts for very young girls and in the court fines administered to women who lived on the margins of poverty. In Barcelona, Mallorca, and Palermo, some parents and relatives placed very young girls, around the ages of six to eight, into domestic service. The widowed Pareta placed her six year-old daughter Antonina into the household of a Mallorcan merchant; the eleven year-old Bevenguda was put into the service of a merchant and his wife for seven years by her widowed mother Bevenguda and her paternal grandmother Bevenguda for a sum of ten *libras*; and a father contracted a service agreement for his six year old daughter to a baker in Barcelona.[101] Placing a child into a foreign household and work environment at such a young age is likely an indication of financial stress because most girls were put into domestic service around the ages of eleven to thirteen.[102] In most of these contracts for prepubescent girls, they were promised only food, clothing, and shelter but not the payment of a wage at the end of their service.[103] The benefits to their families then, was not that the girls would contribute to the natal family's household earnings with their contracted labor, but the economic burden of another person to feed and clothe was passed onto the girls' employer. The sources do not exist for us to trace these girls as they move into adolescence and adulthood. Some of them would have died while still in service either

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[100] Judith Bennett, "'Lesbian-like' and the Social History of Lesbianism," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol 9, no. 1/2 (Jan-April 2000), 9.
[101] ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 2511, 24r. (1466); ARM, notario Bernat Contestí, no. 114r. (1467); Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona (AHPB), notario Tomás de Bellmunt, no. 79/3 41v. (1401).

[102] Wessell Lightfoot, *Women, Dowries and Agency*, 57; Bonnassie, *La organización del trabajo en Barcelona*, 105; Michaud, *Earning Dignity*, 141.

[103] Michaud, *Earning Dignity*, 135; Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958-1528* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 102.

from disease or a workplace accident, and for those who survived, it seems unlikely that their economic prospects would have changed dramatically for the better.[104] Once their service contracts were fulfilled, we surmise Antonina and Bevenguda joined the ranks of those singlewomen for whom the financial obstacles to marriage were simply too hard to overcome. This version of singledom reflects the more dour economic prospects for singlewomen that Judith Bennet has explored in the northern European context.[105]

We have plenty of evidence that free and formerly enslaved women were also among the destitute in medieval cities. Their poverty was often the reason these women made their way into the extant records. In Barcelona, Elicsen Sarda, identified as a "fembra mendicant et fort pobre" (a very poor beggar woman), most likely a migrant from Sardinia as her last name suggests, was fined eleven sous for stealing grapes from a vineyard.[106] Municipalities worked hard to limit the impoverished populations within their walls. A 1323 city statute in Barcelona ordered the expulsion of foreign beggars from the city and specified that both men and women who spoke a foreign tongue should not be permitted to beg, indicating that the city was accustomed to seeing immigrant women in need and seeking alms.[107] In 1374 the Consell de Valencia promulgated a similar statute when they ordered that "all foreign and vagabond men and women, Christians as well as Jews and Muslims from all nations," who did not have the resources to purchase food, should be expelled from the city.[108] While women from

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[104] See Carol Lansing, "Concubines, Lovers, Prostitutes: Infamy and Female Identity in Medieval Bologna," in *Beyond Florence: The Countours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. Paula Findlen, Michelle M. Fontaine, and Duane J. Osheim (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 88, 91-2; and Nicholas Terpstra's *Lost Girls: Sex and Death in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 49, 52-60, 148, 151.

[105] See n. 14 above.

[106] ACA, Mestre Racional, subveguerie Barcelona, no. 1547, fol. 46r. (1371).

[107] See María Piedad Espitia Molina, "Pobreza y caridad en el barrio de la Ribera siglos XIV-XV," *Ex novo: Revista d'història i humanitats* 3 (2006), 67-68.

[108] See Rafael Narbona Vizcaíno, "Las leyes de pobres en la metrópolis. Mendigos, miserables, trabajadores en Valencia, 1306-1462," *Clio & Crimen* 9 (2012), 234, doc. no. 32.

various walks of life traveled the Mediterranean, it is clear that the search for opportunity and employment did not always pay off and that many could find themselves begging for assistance in a foreign land.

Another focus of the magistrate's attention was the overlap between female poverty and sex work, an overlap we see in both the foreign and local populations of singlewomen. Given the ubiquity of Tatar slaves throughout the Latin Mediterranean, it is not a surprise to find the formerly enslaved Costança la Tartra fined, alongside other Valencian prostitutes, for keeping a male friend in the brothel.[109] Indeed, a number of migrant singlewomen, such as Maria the daughter of Johan Alfonso from Castille, was among the poor population and identified as a *fembra miserable* when she was fined for illegal sex work in Valencia. Local women also counted among this group as Johanna and her mother Mari Serrana were likewise identified as *persones miserables* when they were brought to Valencia's royal court for engaging in sex outside of the brothel.[110] Importantly, however, the nexus of poverty and sexwork was not the exclusive focus of municipal authorities. Other destitute singlewomen appear before the courts, such as Rosa Sarda, a "persona pobre," who was unable to pay the court's fine for calling a Christian woman a Jew in a verbal confrontation.[111] It wasn't only the city authorities who focused their attention on the poor, so too did the city's residents. Poor and vulnerable women were easy targets as we see in the example of Francesca Figera, a "dona vidua e miserable," who was beaten on the streets of Barcelona by the wife of a baker.[112] We want to be clear, however, that poverty was not an automatic target on the backs of Mediteranean singlewomen, who while lacking economic resources did not lack strategic thinking. The women themselves used the city's courts to ameliorate their circumstances. One such example was the unmarried Caterina, "pobra e miserable

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[109] Archivo Real de Valencia (ARV), Mestre Racional, no. 5974, fol. 5r. (1383).

[110] ARV, Mestre Racional, no. 5979, fol. 13r., 14r., 15r.v. (1387).

[111] ACA, Mestre Racional, no. 1513, fol. 52v. (1342).

[112] ACA, Mestre Racional, subveguerie Barcelona, no. 1547, fol. 29r. (1370).

persona," identified as the daughter of Johan de Toledo in the city of Valencia who, somewhere between the age of eighteen and twenty, or exactly the age by which Southern European women were all supposedly married, was requesting a change in tutor, perhaps to ameliorate her lack of funds.[113] Eulàlia, the "poor" daughter of the notary Pere Salom, who appealed to the king Joan to force her father to provide a dowry for her to marry because she was older than twenty-five years old, is another example.[114] These brief mentions of impoverished singlewomen and their encounters with magistrates are tantalizing and suggestive. Taken together with the evidence of more prosperous singlewomen lending money, manumitting enslaved people and running small businesses, they suggest that numbers of women in the Mediterranean did not marry at all or delayed marriage, just as women did in Northern Europe. Until historians and demographers reknit these two histories, our understanding of the differences between Northern and Southern Europe will remain calcified and inaccurate.

Conclusion

We conclude with a return to the vignette of the wife of Pere Despluges and the five singlewomen she employed or enslaved traveling from Mallorca to Valencia, showing both their mobility and presence in Mediterranean space. They were far from the only singlewomen to make that journey. Several months later in February of 1396 Raimundeta de Savila from the village of Berga and Isabel Johana, two singlewomen who appear to be traveling together, also received a license to board the first ship leaving Mallorca for Barcelona that day.[115] Likely both women were migrants, for at least Raimundeta was from the Catalan Pyrenees, and these women had made their way to one of the most important entrepôts of the Mediterranean to find work. It is not surprising that documents record women as travelers, migrants, and vagabonds. In 1401, arriving by ship, Clara Alfons and a woman named Alianor, both from Castile,

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[113] ARV, Justicia Civil, no. 1932 (Curatelas y Tutelas) M2 fol. 33r. (1450).

[114] Teresa-María Vinyoles, *Les barcelonines a les darreries de l'edat mitjana* (Barcelona, 1976), document no. 34, p. 168-169.

[115] ARM, Llicències i Guiatges, G5 1393-1396, fol. 100v. (1396).

received permission to enter Barcelona's port. We do not know their port of embarkment. Was it Seville or ports further afield connected to the Crown of Aragon, like Perpignan or Palermo, where Castilian women are often found? What we do know is that both women were identified as "women of the world" (*mulieres mundarum*).[116] To be sure, this label was not meant to be flattering, as their "worldliness" implied not only their itinerant lifestyle but also their familiarity with the world of men, perhaps in the same way that a "common woman" imparted a suspect status. But these women are further proof of those Mediterranean women who lived and worked outside marriage, of women driven by desperation or adventure to seek new opportunities.

Our goal has been to draw attention not only to the mobility of women in the Mediterranean, but to dispel the myth that in southern Europe women moved directly from their parents' household into the marital home. Singlewomen in fact existed in significant numbers, especially when we consider the numbers of enslaved and formerly enslaved women who remained in domestic service throughout their adult lives and those who attained their freedom and thereafter continued to work to acquire the funds to marry. In a broad sense, the experiences of women who worked outside the natal home before marriage and who delayed marriage were shared in Northern Europe and the Mediterranean. That said, we do not want to flatten regional variation in our call to integrate the experience of Mediterranean singlewomen with those of Northern European. One difference may be that singlewomen in the Mediterranean traveled farther distances and into the Islamic world as we have examples of European, especially Genoese women, serving as companions in funduks for Genoese, Sicilian, and Marseillan merchants in Tunisia and other locations in North Africa, but one can image that singlewomen in the north also traveled and migrated along trade routes and settled in European cities belonging to the Hanseatic League.[117]

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[116] ACA, Real Patrimonio, Batlle General de Catalunya, vol. 1067, fol. 67v. (1401).

[117] Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 145-146. Monica Chojnacka highlights women who traveled outside of Venice, not only within northern Italy but also across the Adriatic to Ragusa and "in foreign lands." See Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 115-120.

Undoubtedly, there will be differences in singlewomen's lives that center around regional economic opportunities, local customs and culture, the rural and urban divide, and significant disruptive moments that may have offered favorable circumstances to work and travel, such as the economic impact and movement of people during the various Crusades or the aftermath of the Black Death, that only further research can discover. The sources themselves might vary considerably, given the widespread, Roman-law based notarial culture was a creature of the European Mediterranean.[118] Recent work on living arrangements and material culture of unmarried people's households may also prove enlightening when comparing wills, debt collection inventories, and illegitimacy inventories from different parts of Europe.[119] With this in mind, we must abandon the notion that marriage or the nunnery was the destiny of all women in southern Europe so that we can move beyond the superficial and actually note the substantive distinctions that only real comparative work can offer. The European Marriage Pattern, moreover, is an artificial stumbling block that has created yet another artificial criterion--one that uses the experiences of women in England and the Continent as the standard for medieval women's lives that all other women's experiences are measured against. To remedy this, the scholarship on premodern women should do more to integrate the experiences of women from all parts of Europe so that our conclusions speak to larger issues and have a greater impact on what we can say about socio-economic patterns in medieval people's lives.

In our contemporary world, as we grapple with the terrible consequences of global economic inequity, the role of the Mediterranean as a space for the welcoming and the rejection of refugees--from war, from poverty and economic pressures--is again in the news. Journalists and activists have made us aware of the gendered dimensions of this migration. Contending with the role of singlewomen, often poor and even destitute, becomes ever more critical as historians seek to have their expertise

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[118] Resources such as the Documentary Archeology of Late Medieval Europe (https://dalme.org/) will be important for nuancing these regional differences.

[119] Inneke Baatsen, Julie De Groot, and Isis Sturtewagen, "Single Life in Fifteenth-Century Bruges: Living Arrangements and Material Culture at the Fringes of Urban Society," in *Single Life and the City, 1200-1900*, 179-202; Smail, *Legal Plunder.*

recognized in the quest to come up with policy solutions to the current crisis. Gender inequity has a long history and in this study we call for a dismantling of false barriers that make studying that inequity even harder.[120] Before we can fully integrate them into our analyses, we must acknowledge that singlewomen were a significant presence, if not economic force, in the premodern Mediterranean in the same manner that singlewomen in England, France, and elsewhere were visible as domestic servants, as single mothers, as women who lived alone or together in homes and in communities.

Particularly in a period when the World History and Global Middle Ages "turn" should be encouraging medievalists to think beyond the parochial to the connectivity and diversity of medieval peoples, and especially in light of literary scholars who are reconsidering the existence of racist ideologies in medieval European society, the time has come to abandon sharp and facile distinctions between northern and southern Europe. The scholarship on women's and gender history in southern Europe and the Mediterranean is advancing quickly, and rather than dismiss it once again as alien and non-normative, it should be incorporated into a broader view of Europe in the Middle Ages so that Iberia, southern France, and Italy stand on equal footing with the rest of Europe in reflecting the diversity and full spectrum of women's participation in medieval society.

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[120] See Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 105-107.