

# Slavery, Vagrancy and Poverty. A Journey between Picaresque Fiction and Social Control in Early Modern Valencia

Fabrizio Filioli Uranio  
*University of Roma Tre*

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to relate slavery, vagrancy and poverty in the Valencia of the Early Modern Period. These are liminal concepts and the archival documents show not only how a subject could pass from one status to another during his life, but also how the stories told by the slaves in the confessions in front of the *Baile General* often represented a picaresque fiction that already the Spanish literature of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and in particular the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, had highlighted as typical of the behaviour of the low Spanish society of the *ancien régime* and of the importance of social control over certain types of behaviours. Finally, the case of the Valencian slave Abdala is treated. This is a case of particular interest because in 1686 the Baile donated him in charity to the convent of the barefoot Trinitarians of the city of Valencia.

## 1. Introduction

In *ancien régime* societies the concept of personal power and the chances that an individual could hold it depended on several factors: the resistance he encountered in his attempt to legitimize himself; competition from other parties; what the community thought of him; the support that religious power granted him; prosperity itself within society etc. One of the main factors necessary for the emergence of a strong power was the existence of slavery within the society. By “internal slavery” we mean, as Alain Testart points out, the reduction into slavery of individuals by

other members of the community, either for a conviction or for the impossibility of paying debts, or even for the decision to become voluntarily slaves<sup>1</sup>.

While we can generally agree with this statement by Testart, on the other hand his reasoning continues on how one individual can enslave another. This happened because the slave was “poor” and this, according to Testart, highlights when a society was not in solidarity and was traversed by tensions that threatened the existence of that same society.<sup>2</sup>

This article intends to trace a new line of investigation and show how, not only slavery and poverty are two legally different concepts, but also that issues such as wandering, poverty and slavery were issues that represented a constant concern for the States of *ancien régime*, and in our case of the Catholic Monarchy, and which could only be a threat if they were not controlled from a political, social and regulatory point of view.

If the slave is a “poor” individual in social relations, as Orlando Patterson points out,<sup>3</sup> it is also true that in the Spanish case, and specifically in that of the Kingdom of Valencia, slavery was very well regulated. This means that, since the main reason for introducing slaves into the Kingdom was capture – for example the Muslims who were taken during a war action –, it was in any case necessary to prove that they were slaves of *bona guerra*. The presentation and the declaration in front of the *Baile General* that it was a *bona guerra* taking, made the capture valid.<sup>4</sup> The *trait d’union* between a poor individual and a slave can be represented by those subjects who, although free, tried to submit themselves to voluntary servitude, that is to say those who were legally poor (they were not integrated in any society) and who precisely because of this condition they as-

<sup>1</sup> A. Testart, *L’origine de l’État. La servitude volontaire*, Vol. II, Paris, 2004, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death. A Comparative Study*, With a New Preface, Harvard, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> V. Graullera Sanz, *La esclavitud en Valencia en los siglos XVI y XVII*, Valencia, 1978, p. 57.

pired, through voluntary servitude, to become part of a certain social group.

## 2. Runaway slaves who “go out into the world”

The integration within an *ancien régime* society, even if it could take the form of a strongly asymmetrical dependence, as in the case of slavery, guaranteed local belonging to a subject, an aspect that distinguished a slave from a poor individual, that is from one who had no social bonds, not even the bond of belonging to a master. The ‘social death’ that Patterson talks about slaves is a slippery concept, because slaves not only had a direct social relationship, albeit one of dependence, towards their master, but often they could also count on a certain knowledge of local community and therefore belonging, albeit marginally, to this community. Furthermore, the slaves were also able to create a social network among themselves, with the idea of “resistance” towards their masters at the base, and this could sometimes lead to the formation of real families made up of slaves.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, a “poor” individual had no connection, no “place of belonging” and could not even count on asymmetrical relationships.

The concept of poverty in the *ancien régime* was widely debated and the aspect that interests us here is that a “poor” was not so much the one who had no economic means, but one who did not belong to any body of social defence. Therefore, the non-registration in a specific family or social environment made a person poor or miserable.<sup>6</sup> The poor needed a guardian, a person fully in possession of all his rights and who could represent them publicly: the *Baile General* of the Kingdom of Valencia. The *Baile* was the administrator and judge of the royal patrimony and income. Not only. It was also the

---

<sup>5</sup> O. Grenouilleau, *Qu'est-ce que l'esclavage? Une histoire globale*, Paris, 2014, pp. 349-350.

<sup>6</sup> See: S. Cerutti, *Étrangers: étude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime*, Montrouge, 2012, p. 235.

ultimate protection for minors, widows, the elderly and the poor: *E axí la cort oyrà lo poch com lo gran, el pobre com lo rich.*<sup>7</sup> The poor, whose condition is certified by multiple legal sources, starting with the urban statutes of the *ancien régime*, responded to a series of privileges attributed to them by a rather ancient genealogy characterized by a constant that goes beyond chronological boundaries: the protection towards poor individuals were manifested directly through acts of political government.<sup>8</sup> If the category of “poor” is already “invented” by the bishops in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the legitimizing capacity of the protection towards them passed successively through the protection of the temporal power, of the sovereigns and, in our case, of the *Baile*.

We can try to draw a line that unites the liminal concepts of poor, slave and vagabond. As for the Kingdom of Valencia, there are many testimonies of slaves who admit to having wandered for some time. For example, the moreno slave Juan Pablo de la Cruz in 1670 declared that:

*Es esclau de Salvador del Aguila Boter de la ciutat de Malaga y haura cosa de dos anys que sen fuixque de la cassa del dit son amo y anat divagant per lo mon y ha vent vengut a la pnt ciutat havra cosa de quatre o cinch dies.*<sup>9</sup>

In his confession Juan Pablo de la Cruz admitted that after leaving Malaga and before arriving in Valencia, he wandered the world (*divagant per lo mon*) for two years. It is not the only case of wandering slaves that we encounter in the documents of the *Bailía*.

The Arab Fran.co Saymon in 1675 argued that:

<sup>7</sup> M. Peset Gil, “Els furs de València. Un texto de leyes del siglo XIII”, in F.J. Palao Gil and M.P. Hernando Serra (eds.), *Los valencianos y el legado foral. Historia, sociedad, derecho*, Valencia, 2018, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> S. Cerutti, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

<sup>9</sup> “He is a slave of Salvador del Aguila Boter from the city of Malaga and two years ago he fled from the house of his master and has wandered the world and has come to this city four or five days ago”. Archivo del Reino de Valencia (from now on ARV), *Real Cancilleria*, Real 629, Venta de esclavos (1666-1686), ff. 36r.-36v, 1670.

*Es natural alarp ahon lo portaren chiquet a Portugal ahon lo feren christia y el batecharen en la Ysglesia Mayor de la Vila de Casa Regne de Portugal y desde dit temps fins cosa de cinch anys a esta part servio a Don Juan Carvajal de la Casta del qual seu fuga y anat divagant per diverses ciutats y viles del Reyne de Castilla y havra cosa de un any poch menys que arriba a la present ciutat desposa a treballar en la casa de misericordia a hon al present tambe treballava y en lo dia de huy haventlo enviat al convent de Sant Domingo per un poch de vi pera la dita Casa de Misericordia lo an capturat en un carrer que está prop lo mercat y lo an portat pres en les presons de Sen Arcis per haver confessat com al present també confessa ser esclau.<sup>10</sup>*

Once again, the slave in question argued that, after escaping from the service of Don Juan Carvajal de la Casta, he wandered through different cities of the Kingdom of Castile. In general, the runaway slaves of Castile and Andalusia tried to reach the Mediterranean coasts and specifically the Kingdom of Valencia. The aim was either to be able to cross the *Mare Nostrum* and return to Barbary or to blend in with the vast population of Moorish origin that populated the Valencian territory. The fugitive slaves mostly came from the south and the center of the peninsula. Those arriving from the south passed through the towns of *Fuente la Higuera* and *Puerto de Almansa*, while those from central and northern Spain passed through *Buñol* and *Puerto de Buñol*, locations where the capture of runaway slaves was quite frequent. If they had managed to cross these locations, they would have sought refuge in different parts of the Kingdom, especially in those areas where they thought they

---

<sup>10</sup> "He is an Arab native, from where someone took him as a child to Portugal, where he was converted to Christianity and baptized in the *Iglesia Mayor de la Vila de Casa*, Kingdom of Portugal, and from that moment until five years ago he served Don Juan Carvajal de la Casta, of whom he fled and has been wandering through various cities and towns of the Kingdom of Castile and one year ago he arrived in the present city, then to work in the House of Mercy, where to the present day he also worked and today they had sent him to the Convent of Sant Domingo because they needed some wine for the said House of Mercy, he was captured in a street that is near the market and they have taken him prisoner in the Sen Arcis jails for having confessed how to the present day he also confesses to being a slave". Ivi, f. 91r. and f. 93r., 1675.

could find more shelter, or they could decide to continue towards the destination they had set for themselves by crossing the Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly interesting is the case of Amet, who in 1671 declared that:

*Lo dit moro dix en la sua llengua la qual la interpreta un altre moro, que es de Sale terra de moros de hon sen ana a la Mamoza que es una fortaleza del Rey de España y de alli amb un navio frances sen ana a Cadiz a hon estigue cosa de quintze dies treballant al Arsenal y en apres sen ha vengut denes la pnt. ciutat a buscar amo y que no te amo algu al qual haya servit como a esclau.*<sup>12</sup>

Amet did not speak Spanish, and, in his place, an interpreter recounted his stories, whose point of greatest interest. In the *Bailía Court* the official language was Valencian, although Castilian, French, Italian, probably Arabic, and therefore all Mediterranean languages in general were also used. However, no languages were spoken from more distant regions, such as those of the Atlantic coasts of the African continent, from where a large number of slaves came. In this case, translators were used, probably slaves who had already lived in Valencia for some time, and who came from the same remote places as the new subjects. If a translation was not obtained, it was limited to collecting the testimonies of the merchants who had captured the new slaves.<sup>13</sup> In any case, about whether Amet told the whole truth or not, the interesting thing is that he claimed to have come to Valencia to look for a master (*buscar amo*). We are facing an example of voluntary servitude. I repeat that, regardless of the veracity of Amet's words, the possibility of voluntarily sub-

<sup>11</sup> V. Graullera Sanz, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> "The Moor said in his language, that it is interpreted by another Moor, he is from Sale, the land of the Moors, from where he has gone to La Mamoza, which is a fortress of the King of Spain and from there with a French ship he has gone to Cadiz where he stayed fifteen days working at the Arsenal and then he has come to the present city to look for a master and he has no master whom he has served as a slave". ARV, *Real Cancellaria*, Real 629, Venta de esclavos (1666-1686), ff. 51r.-51v., 1671.

<sup>13</sup> V. Graullera Sanz, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

mitting to a master was something that should not surprise us. The social uprooting of Amet, the fact that he had lived in different cities and that, probably, he had fled from the arsenal of Cadiz, are all reasons that could force him not so much to live as a vagabond and fugitive slave, but to seek a new master. In 1671 he said that *no te amo algu al qual haya servit como a esclau* (he has no master to whom he has been a slave), which could mean that he was a free man, but that at that time, due to little events lucky he had been confronted, he wanted to find a master to whom he voluntarily submit as a slave. Whether he was lying (and therefore was actually a runaway slave) or was telling the truth (that he was a free man who was looking for a master to voluntarily submit to), is not important, because in any case Amet would have been ceded by the *Baile* to a new master, thus preventing him from turning into a vagabond and a poor man.

### 3. Wanderers and the poor: a picaresque lifestyle

From this point of view, it is good to reflect on the social control operations that the *Bailía* of the Kingdom of Valencia carried out within its territory and its subjects. The legislation and decisions taken on wandering, in order to eradicate this scourge from the different Kingdoms that made up the Spanish Monarchy, leads us to reflect on the connections between slavery, poverty and wandering. If the slave was a subject on the margins of society, but who was still rooted in a certain reality (domestic slavery, in the galleys, in the fields, etc.), the poor was an individual without ties, neither family nor of a social order and that he had as a solution to survive either that of voluntarily becoming a slave or that of wandering and begging. At this point, however, the power of control by the authorities intervenes, also because the cases of “false poor” were quite frequent. Not only. The picaresque social model of life, and therefore of a subject unwilling to work, impostor, beggar, etc., is so widespread in the Catholic Monarchy of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that it became a mainstay of Spanish literature of the Early Modern Period.

Picaresque literature deals exactly with the relationship between rulers and ruled; the social norms of the different groups; of the dominant moral norms and of individual paths and destinies. If in any case it is a literary form created by the *élites*, it is also an expression of his conceptions of power during that era. And in fact, it stages miserable and marginalized social environments, such as poor people, vagabonds and petty criminals.<sup>14</sup> Also interesting is the linguistic register that these texts use and that was typical of the language of the “criminals” protagonists of the works themselves. Also, for this reason they are an important document of the social life of that period and are a real object of sociological and criminological analysis of the environments of bandits and prostitutes, their destinies and their lives.<sup>15</sup>

In some ways the picaresque tale represents the crisis of the social morality of Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The bearer of this message of denunciation is the *picaro*, vagabond and rascal, who carries out various professions, from beggar to thief, passing through that of the servant and who represents a type of hero and anti-hero typical of Spanish literature of the time.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the trajectory of *Lazarillo de Tormes* is particularly interesting from the biographical point of view. Lazarillo was born on the banks of the Tormes river, and his parents were from Tejares, a village near Salamanca. There, his father worked for fifteen years in a mill, until he was caught stealing and was therefore sentenced to exile. He then participated, at the service of a nobleman, in one of the two Spanish expeditions to Djerba (either that of 1510 or that of 1520), where he died. Lazarillo’s mother was therefore forced to put herself at the service of the *élites* of Salamanca, where she worked as a cook and washerwoman. She then had an intimate relationship with a black slave, with whom she had a second child. Later she and her lover were

---

<sup>14</sup> B. Geremek, *La estirpe de Caín. La imagen de los vagabundos y de los pobres en las literaturas europeas de los siglos XV al XVII*, Madrid, 1991, pp. 235-236.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 237.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, p. 240.

convicted of theft. She then she began to work in an inn, where Lazarillo began to help her until she sold him as a slave to a blind beggar who was passing through Salamanca.<sup>17</sup>

The humble origin of Lazarillo follows him along his entire trajectory. His father was a thief and a bandit; his mother was the maid of a black slave; his brother was an illegitimate child and moor; his mother and second father were convicted of theft, a crime in which Lazarillo himself participated. This difficult inheritance is exemplified by the sentence pronounced by his mother at the moment of separation: *Válete por ti mismo* (assert yourself with your own strength). Lazarillo's entry into "life" took place after a few stages that represent a sort of training ground for social life.<sup>18</sup> The blind man taught him the art of begging, while the next stage of his life was in the service of a miserly priest, a service that lasted six months – in which he suffered from hunger –, after which he went to the service of a beggar knight and, for this reason, he again had to use the techniques taught him by the blind man to beg. Later, he served other masters. Finally, he began to work as a free man and to walk the "right path": he became a water seller, sharing the profit with his superior, the chaplain of the cathedral of Toledo, who provided him with a donkey, a whip and containers for the water. He then managed to save enough money to buy "good people" robes and a sword. He then became a crier and by the will of his protector, the archdeacon of the church of San Salvador, he married his servant, a marriage that actually covered the concubinage of the archdeacon with the servant. In any case, Lazarillo took advantage of the situation, without giving importance to the rumours that were going around the city: he had finally decided to join the Spanish society. The port where he landed was his job and the benefits of his wife's prostitution.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 242.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, pp. 242-243.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, pp. 243-244.

#### 4. Between fiction and reality

The case of Lazarillo, albeit fictional, is a case of social integration; nevertheless, the way he reproduces Spanish society, and the lower classes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is very interesting. We can find what we read in the Lazarillo in the testimonies of some slaves introduced into the Kingdom of Valencia.

35-year-old Jaen stated for example that:

*Es moro, de nacio turch i que haura cosa de un any que fuix que en la ciutat de Cartaixena de las Galeras de España y de alli se vinigue a la vila de Elig, ahon ha estat cosa de huit u nou mesos, se ne vint en la cassa de la Duquesa de Gandia, y que en james ha tengut amo ni es estat esclau de ningun, i que vennissen a la pnt. ciut. feren aprehensio de aquell en lo desusdit terme.<sup>20</sup>*

Once again, we are faced with life stories, true or presumed such, in which a fugitive slave narrated his adventures and tried to demonstrate his presumed freedom. In this case the slave claimed to have escaped from the arsenal of the galleys of Cartagena and from there he reached the city of Elche. After living 8-9 months in Elche, he reached the house of the Duchess of Gandía, and claims he has never been a slave to anyone. The *Baile* did not believe his claims and sold it for the price of 37 Valencian pounds. Other stories are much more complex and tell of even greater vicissitudes, as in the case just reported by di Franc.co Saymon or that of Cristophol Velazquez, who in 1683 stated that:

*Es lliure y no es esclau y que no conegue a sos pares si be servi desde chiquet en la casa de D. Fernando de Revasco de dita villa de Fragenal de la sierra ahon estigue per espai de setse anys y despues de mort aquell ha hanat divoagant per lo mond, y lo mes del temps se ha ocupat en ser peix-*

---

<sup>20</sup> "He is a Moor, of Turkish nation and one year ago he fled from the city of Cartagena from the Galleys of Spain and from there he came to the city of Elche, where he has lived for eight or nine months, he came to the house of the Duchess of Gandia, and he never had a master nor he was a slave of anyone, and he came to the present city of Valencia and was imprisoned from that moment until today". ARV, *Real Cancilleria*, Real 629, Venta de esclavos (1666-1686), f. 68r, 1672.

*cador, y anant servant de mariner, y ha estat y fet dos viatges a les Indies servint de grumet en los Navios y que sols ha oit dir que a sa Mare le decyen Cecilia y no sab si era esclava o lliure y que el haver venout al loch del Grau es estat pera acomodarse en alguna barca pera peixcar y anar per lo Mar y que la noticia que fe es que esta bautizat en esta Parrochia de Santa Catharina de dita vila.*<sup>21</sup>

Aside from claiming that he was not a slave and did not know his parents, Cristophol Velazquez also claimed that he served – he does not specify how – in Don Fernando de Revasco’s home in Fragenal de la Sierra – in Extremadura – and then wandered around the world (*ha anat divagant per lo mond*) working mainly as a fisherman and then as a sailor and who even embarked on two expeditions to the Indies. He concluded his story by saying that he did not know if his mother was a free woman or a slave and that her name was Cecilia, and that he had come to the Grau (seaside district of Valencia) to be a fisherman and that he had been baptized. Again, the slave was not considered a free man and the *Baile* sold him for 24 pounds and 10 sous to Antoni Benacer of Gandia.

There are cases in which the slave admitted that he was a fugitive, like Ali, a natural of the city of Algiers, who in 1670 argued that:

*Es natural de Alger y que haura cosa de dos anys que el varen capturar en lo mar y el portasen a vendre a Sivilla ahon ha estat servint a son amo que es deya y nomenava Juan Pedro el qual muri cosa de mig any ha y en apres haura cosa de mes y mig que sen fuixque de la casa del dit son amo y sen ha vengut divagant finis tant lo han capturat y pressat.*<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> “He is free and he is not a slave and he doesn’t know his parents, he served as a child in the house of D. Fernando de Revasco of the town of Fragenal de la Sierra where he lived for seventeen years and after the death of his master, he has gone wandering the world, and for most of the time he has occupied himself with being a fisherman, and has served as a sailor, and he went two times to the Indies, serving as a young sailor on the ships and that only he has heard that his mother is called Cecilia and he doesn’t know if she was a slave or free and that having come to the neighborhood of El Grau he has been to settle in a boat to fish and go by the sea and he told that he was baptized in this Parish of Santa Catharina of said city of Valencia”. Ivi, ff. 111r.-111v., 1683.

<sup>22</sup> “He is a native of Algiers and two years ago he was captured at sea and they took him to sell him in Seville, where he has served his master, who is from there and was

Thus, Ali was an Algerian who in 1668 was captured and taken as a slave to Seville, where he was sold to Juan Pedro, who died in mid-1669. At that moment Ali left the house of his former master and, after wandering for different time, he arrived in Valencia where he was captured: the Baile sold him for the price of 20 Valencian pounds to Don Joseph Villaroja y Faxardo.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. Social control

The “picaresque” tales of the slaves represent the ‘litmus test’ of Early Modern Spanish low society. What we can read in the *Lazarillo de Tormes* – whose anonymous author belonged to the Spanish *élite* – we find it on a smaller scale also in what the slaves could confess in front of the *Baile*. This mixture of reality, fiction, runaway slaves and vagabonds, poor in search of a master or fake poor who tried to escape the reins of power, found however a bastion that was difficult to overcome: the social control exercised by the monarchical authority. That of wandering was perceived as a priority of public order and already the Valencian humanist Juan Luis Vives, in his treatise *Il modo del sovvenire a’ poveri*, argued that:

*E chiusa la benignità de molti, non avendo egli [i poveri] in che modo sustentarsi, sono costretti alcuni ad essercitare i ladronecci, et nelle città, et fuori ancora nelle strade; altri nascostamente furano; le femmine poscia, le quali sono di buona età, gettata da parte la vergogna, non possono conservare l’honestà, ma la vendono per vilissimo pretio, né più si possono rimuovere dalla pessima et abominevole consuetudine. Le vecchie altresì subito appigliansi a roffianecci, et a quelli aggiugonvi gli stregamenti et malie. I figlioli poi dei poveri sono vie da piccioli malissimo istituiti, gettati là dinanzi alle sacre chiese, o pure vagabondi, né stanno presenti agli uffici santi, né alle predicazioni, né si sa ancora dietro o a che legge o a che ordine vivano, né che oppenione della fede et de costumi habbino.*<sup>24</sup>

called Juan Pedro, who died six months ago and later, a month and a half ago, he fled the house of his master and he wandered until he has been captured and imprisoned”. *Ivi*, f. 44r, 1670.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> “And closed the kindness of the many, since they [the poor] have no means to support

The causes that could lead to poverty were many, such as epidemics, wars, high price inflation. In the case of the Kingdom of Valencia, its population suffered several plague epidemics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some famines and floods of the Júcar, Segura and Turia rivers in the years 1632, 1651 and 1676. To this we must add the costs of the war in Catalonia, the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609 and an important demographic decline. All this could lead to misery and misery and hunger were seen as possible nuclei of social tension.<sup>25</sup>

False poor were masters of deception and being the protagonists of petty criminal acts. They were also adept at begging, showing physical defects – real or alleged – in order to generate compassion from those around them. The laziness of the poor, their indolence and their contempt for work were among the worst vices. In addition, they used to roam the markets, with the aim of committing petty thefts or stealing food. They could later sell the goods they had stolen. In 1604 in the Kingdom of Valencia it was established that the punishment of the whip for these criminal acts was commuted to a fine of 50 Valencian pounds or to three years of exile. The second time a fake poor man was found guilty he would always have to pay 50 pounds or accept a three-year rowing sentence aboard the king's galleys. It could also happen that he was sentenced to perpet-

---

themselves, some are forced to practice thieves, and in the cities, and still outside in the streets; others secretly steal; afterwards the females, who are of a good age, cast aside their shame, cannot keep honesty, but sell it for a very low price, nor can they be removed from bad and abominable custom. The old women also immediately cling to pimping, and to those are added witchcraft and spells. The children of the poor are then very badly instituted from an early age, thrown there in front of the sacred churches, or vagabonds, neither are they present at the holy offices, nor at preaching, nor is it yet known behind or what law or order they live, nor what opinion of the have faith and customs". J.L. Vives, *Il modo del sovvenire a' poveri*, Venezia, 1545, pp. 15-18. This is the first Italian translation of Vives, 1526. For the text that I have quoted, I refer to: R. Morozzo della Rocca, "Vecchio e nuovo nell'immagine della povertà agli inizi dell'età moderna", in A. Monticone (ed.), *La storia dei poveri. Pauperismo e assistenza nell'età moderna*, Roma, 1985, pp. 14-16.

<sup>25</sup> D. Guillot Aliaga, "¿Vagabundos o delincuentes? Estudio de la pobreza en el Reino de Valencia", in R. Franch Benavent, F.A. Robres and R.B. Sánchez-Blanco (eds.), *Cambios y resistencias sociales en la Edad Moderna. Un análisis comparativo entre el centro y la periferia mediterránea de la Monarquía Hispánica*, Madrid, 2014, pp. 183-184.

ual galley service, which meant *la mort civil çoes que servixca permanent en galera a sa mort*.<sup>26</sup> Wandering was therefore poorly tolerated, since it was seen as the refusal to work: it was therefore the antechamber of criminal acts, such as petty thefts and other crimes. As we have already mentioned, there was a legal tradition, not only within the Spanish Monarchy, but also in other European States, which pursued fugitives – whether they were servants or slaves – and which gave even greater weight to the suspicions that revolved around vagabonds. In France, for example, in 1496 King Charles VIII ordered to send vagabonds, similar to what happened in Spain, as convicts of the royal galleys and, over the course of the following century, the use of these individuals at the oar reached an ordinary dimension and not extraordinary, also because of the fleet's need to have enough arms at the oar.<sup>27</sup>

Migrations, the abandonment of the family circle, placed an individual outside of social ties rooted in a specific reality. All these aspects led the society to suspect these subjects.<sup>28</sup> The hostile attitude towards vagabonds also found its origins within the Church itself, which during the medieval period could not stand the *clerici vagantes* who refused to fit into the ecclesiastical structures. The Church condemned them, superimposing their figure on that of the wicked and of those who did not accept to submit to ecclesiastical surveillance and obedience. In a society founded on dependence and asymmetrical relationships, these clerics remained without a superior and were therefore excluded from social ties: hence the association between wandering and social marginality.<sup>29</sup>

Wandering and often the "status" of a beggar was demonstrated by the subject by real professional techniques, including a certain type of clothing. Indeed, the iconography shows us the beggars dressed in rags and often barefoot, and in satirical and picaresque

---

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 189.

<sup>27</sup> B. Geremek, *Truands et misérables dans l'Europe moderne (1350-1600)*, Paris, 1980, p. 87.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, pp. 83-84.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

literature there is often the motive of the poor man who sells the clothes received in charity and keeps the rags for himself, because in this way he could better attract the attention of passers-by and receive their sympathies. Precisely for these reasons, both picaresque literature and anti-beggar legislation have dealt abundantly with the tricks committed by these subjects.<sup>30</sup>

What is certain is that real beggars also existed and their activity within society was integrated through various corporate organizations. Particularly widespread were, for example, the brotherhoods of the blind. The statutes of the latter in Barcelona and Valencia, during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, provided for different forms of mutual support within the guilds: the loan of the companion (*lazarillo*), mutual assistance and the sharing of the collected alms.<sup>31</sup> It is no coincidence that one of the main characters of the *Lazarillo de Tormes* was a blind man and it was he who taught Lazarillo the techniques of begging and how to deceive passers-by. Documents of a legal nature – and more – confirm the image offered by the picaresque literary genre.

## 6. Conclusions

In 1686 Abdala, whose status as a fugitive slave or not is really unclear, argued in front of the Baile that:

*Sen vingue de Madrid debes de la present ciutat y a la que fonch dos llegues mes ensa de Molina li ixqueren alcami sis lladres y el robaren llevansli un vestit que portava molt bo de drap de Olanda que tambe loy dexá son amo y los cent y cinquanta reals de a huit que li havia donat lo dit son amo.*<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> B. Geremek, *La pietà e la forca. Storia della miseria e della carità in Europa*, Bari, 1986, pp. 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> “He has come from Madrid to the present city and at two leagues from the city, near the village of Molina, six thieves attacked him and stole him a dress that he had, a very good one from Holland, who also gave it for him his master, and one hundred and fifty reales de a hocho that his master had donated to him”. ARV, *Real Cancilleria*, Real 629, Venta de esclavos (1666-1686), f. 131v., 1686.

Abdala, who was over 65 and who reached Valencia dressed in rags, was given in charity by the *Baile* to the convent of the barefoot Trinitarians of the city.<sup>33</sup> His story is truly paradigmatic in this liminal study of slavery, vagrancy, poverty and picaresque fiction in Early Modern Valencia. From his confession (December 7, 1686, the day before the Immaculate Conception) we can learn more about his history. Twenty-three years earlier, in 1663, he had been captured by a fleet of five Dutch ships, at *Capo Blanco*, near the city of Tarifa (Andalusia), while he was engaged in privateering aboard an Algerian ship. He and his son, Amebillo, were taken to the city of Puerto near the Portuguese raya (probably Puerto de Santa María, in Andalusia), where they were sold. They were then bought by a Franciscan religious, Father Martín Vito. In the first months of 1686, Father Martín, now ill and a week before his death, granted Abdala freedom.<sup>34</sup> Abdala received his charter of liberty, 150 *reales de a ocho* and a *drap d'Oland*. The now free and lonely slave – his son had been freed two years earlier and had returned to Algiers – decided to go in search of his cousin, who was a slave of the Count of Monterrey in Madrid. When he reached Madrid, he was told at the count's house that his cousin had already returned to Barbary. Abdala then decided to set out for Valencia, perhaps to settle there permanently or perhaps to seek an escape route to return to Algiers. He was then robbed at the village of Molina, whose parish priest later gave him a *camisa vella, a saragueles y una armilla de drap pardo, molt vells que son lo que porta damunt*<sup>35</sup> (an old shirt, a saragüell,<sup>36</sup> and a brown drape jacket, which is all he wears) and finally managed to get to Valencia, where he was first imprisoned and later given in charity to the convent of the barefoot Trinitarians.<sup>37</sup>

Abdala's story is the "litmus test" of the parable of a subject

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, f. 132r.

<sup>34</sup> V. Graullera Sanz, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> ARV, *Real Cancilleria*, Real 629, Venta de esclavos (1666-1686), f. 132r., 1686.

<sup>36</sup> The saragüell was a typical Valencian trousers, wide and short. In this regard, see: V. Graullera Sanz, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>37</sup> ARV, *Real Cancilleria*, Real 629, Venta de esclavos (1666-1686), f. 132r., 1686.

who, in a way not very different from *Lazarillo de Tormes*, led his life with alternating fortunes and with different identities. First a slave, then a free and vagabond man, saved by the charity of the parish priest of Molina – or so he argued, since we cannot exclude that it was Abdala himself who sold the precious clothes given to him by Father Martín Vito to reach Valencia in rags as a beggar and in search of charity -, finally arriving at its safe harbour which, unlike the Lazarillo – whose story was absolutely in line with the anticlerical Erasmian rhetoric of the first half of the 16th century – is represented by a convent.

The confessions of the slaves in front of the *Baile* were the means they had to try to convince him that they were free men. In this sense we can venture a comparison between these confessions and the letters of remission presented by Natalie Zemon Davis.<sup>38</sup> Zemon Davis, in the introduction of her book, explains how the investigations in the French archives have allowed her to distinguish different narrative techniques used by the accused of crimes of different kinds and which had to serve not only to defend themselves, but also to find forgiveness and grace from the authorities and sometimes from the sovereign himself. The author also superimposes these documents on the literary production of the Renaissance, looking through a precise cultural analysis which were the structures underlying the creation of the stories of the accused. The tools that Zemon Davis used for French cases can also be used for the Spanish Monarchy and for the testimonies of Valencian slaves. If on the one hand the literary production by the Iberian *élite*, as in the case of the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, shows the picaresque characters of the Spanish world, on the other hand the confessions of the slaves testify of a circulation of stories told and adapted from time to time, with the hope of obtaining grace from Baile or at least of being recognized as free men.

In the conclusions of his work, Zemon Davis asks about a pos-

---

<sup>38</sup> N. Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives. Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*, Cambridge, 1988.

sible convergence between the tales of remission and literary creation and highlights how often a humble language, typical of the gift-giving,<sup>39</sup> was used in the dedications of Renaissance tales. This also happened in the confessions of the Valencian slaves, who through hyperbolic stories, but still structured in such a way as to show how life had not been particularly generous with them and that through a thousand adventures, they had reached Valencia as free men and they tried not to be subjected to the regime of slavery. If most of the time they were not believed, it is also true that in an extraordinary case, that of Abdala, whose story must have appeared plausible to the authorities, the slave reached his haven through an incredible gift-giving move, deed by the *Baile* who donated it in charity to the convent of the barefoot Trinitarians of the city.

## Bibliography

- CERUTTI S. (2012), *Étrangers: étude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime*, Montrouge.
- COLOMBO E.C. (2019), "Premessa", in *Quaderni Storici*, 162, pp. 601-617.
- FILIOLI URANIO F. (2021), "L'economia della carità e i 'beni fuori mercato': il caso di uno schiavo valenciano", in *RiMe. Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, 8/I, pp. 175-192.
- GEREMEK B. (1991), *La estirpe de Caín. La imagen de los vagabundos y de los pobres en las literaturas europeas de los siglos XV al XVII*, Madrid.
- (1986), *La pietà e la forca. Storia della miseria e della carità in Europa*, Bari.
- (1980), *Truands et misérables dans l'Europe moderne (1350-1600)*, Paris.
- GRAULLERA SANZ V. (1978), *La esclavitud en Valencia en los siglos XVI y XVII*, Valencia.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ivi, p. 113. About gift-giving see: E.C. Colombo, "Premessa", in *Quaderni Storici*, no. 162, 2019, pp. 601-617. Regarding Abdala's case, look specifically: F. Filioli Uranio, "L'economia della carità e i 'beni fuori mercato': il caso di uno schiavo valenciano", in *RiMe. Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, no. 8/I, 2021, pp. 175-192.

- GRENOUILLEAU O. (2014), *Qu'est-ce que l'esclavage? Une histoire globale*, Paris.
- GUILLOT ALIAGA D. (2014), "¿Vagabundos o delincuentes? Estudio de la pobreza en el Reino de Valencia", in R. Franch Benavent, F.A. Robres, R.B. Sánchez-Blanco (eds.), *Cambios y resistencias sociales en la Edad Moderna. Un análisis comparativo entre el centro y la periferia mediterránea de la Monarquía Hispánica*, Madrid, pp. 183-191.
- MOROZZO DELLA ROCCA R. (1985), "Vecchio e nuovo nell'immagine della povertà agli inizi dell'età moderna", in A. Monticone (ed.), *La storia dei poveri. Pauperismo e assistenza nell'età moderna*, Roma, pp. 1-25.
- PATTERSON O. (2018), *Slavery and Social Death. A Comparative Study*, With a New Preface, Harvard.
- PESET GIL M. (2018), "Els furs de València. Un texto de leyes del siglo XIII", in F.J. Palao Gil, M.P. Hernando Serra (eds.), *Los valencianos y el legado foral. Historia, sociedad, derecho*, Valencia, pp. 27-51.
- TESTART A. (2004), *L'origine de l'État. La servitude volontaire*, Vol. II, Paris.
- VIVES J.L. (1526), *De subventione pauperum*, Bruges.
- (1545), *Il modo del sovvenire a' poveri*, Venezia.
- ZEMON DAVIS N. (1988), *Fiction in the Archives. Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*, Cambridge.