

Date: 1513, March 16.

Theme: A freed black woman and her son, black as well, obtain license to travel to the Indies after presenting their deed of freedom

Source: PARES, Portal de Archivos Españoles—Archivo General de Indias, CONTRATACIÓN, 5536, L.1, - 117 Recto - Imagen Núm: 233/524 (Folio 225r.)

Spanish imperial authorities in the port cities of Seville and Cadiz kept a considerably systematic record of the individuals traveling between the Spanish metropolis and the Americas in the 1500s. This folio or page of the passengers' register books shows how a freed black woman and her son decided to leave Spain at the beginnings of the 1510s to travel on their own across the Atlantic to the earliest Spanish colonies of the Americas, most likely passing by or staying in La Española.

This record indicates that Catalina and her son Diego, in order to be allowed to travel, showed their deed of freedom to the authorities that controlled the traveling, and this confirms the practice of manumission that some former black slaves occasionally benefited from. Also the mention of mother and son as travelers not associated to or under the control of anybody else tells us about a black family exercising their freedom in search of existential alternatives different from the Iberian social world they were leaving behind, which they probably associated with an experience of social subjection and where those that knew them probably would also see or associate them with the status of enslavement and the social stigma of inferiority attached to it

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