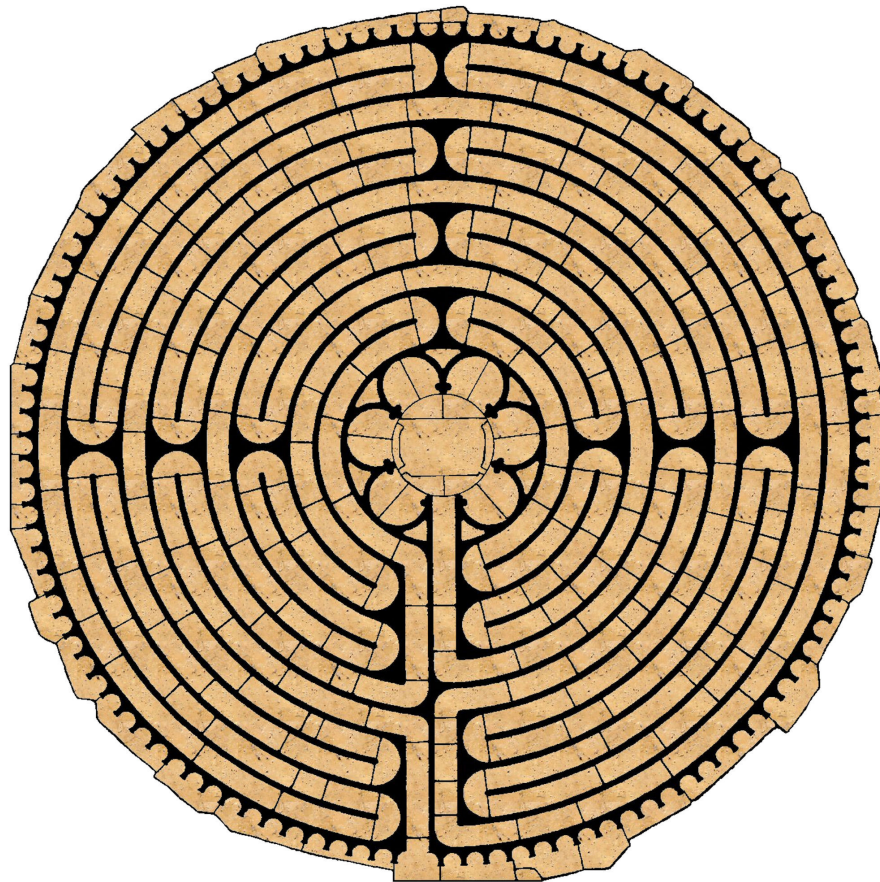


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John K. Moore. *Mulatto.Outlaw.Pilgrim.Priest. The Legal Case of José Soller, Accused of Impersonating a Pastor and Other Crimes in Seventeenth-Century Spain.* The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World 75. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020. pp. 359. ISBN 978-90-04-41777-9.

There are not many books like this one: it reads like a novel; it is exquisitely written; it is full of suspense and bursting with important new information. John K. Moore's *Mulatto.Outlaw.Pilgrim.Priest* consists of two parts. The first, divided into seven chapters, traces the pilgrimage and trial of José Soller, a mulatto who was arrested in Ourense (Galicia) in 1593 after having completed his journey to Santiago de Compostela. This intriguing figure, whose history and trial has been unearthed by Moore, was accused of impersonating a priest and suspected of being a runaway slave. He was held for months at the Royal Jail and was tried and sentenced. This is a most useful and important book since it will make available one of the few narratives of people of color that we possess from seventeenth-century Spain. Indeed, the second part of the book is equally fascinating since it edits all the trial documents and includes an English translation which is very readable and accurate. The bilingual edition is particularly helpful since it could be used as text in courses dealing not just with Spain, but also in seminars on race in the early modern world. And, these documents are accompanied by many relevant charts and a wealth of images, such as a map reconstructing Soller's route from Lisbon to Santiago and then to Ourense; a copy of the pilgrim's passport; a copy of Soller's diploma; and images of many of the places to which he traveled as a pilgrim.

John K. Moore commences his story at the moment of José Soller's arrest in some vineyards south of Ourense by Bernardo de Pando, the deputy sheriff who finds him: "delousing himself half naked, holed up in an old house" (9). He carried with him all the appropriate documents and obtained all necessary signatures as he went along the road, culminating with his *compostela*, his pilgrim's diploma where he is listed as "Don Joseph Soller, Priest of the Indies" (5). After completing the pilgrimage, now supposedly on his way to Rome, he had a barber Antonio González Siabal, "re-shave" his tonsure, a sign that he was a priest; and a tailor, Pedro de Castro, prepare clerical vestments. Still, he aroused suspicion of impersonating a priest and as a mulatto was thought to be a runaway slave.

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Taken to jail, he is tried for this and other offences. His chances of acquittal are slim since he is at the bottom of the social hierarchy, being both poor and of a skin color that raises suspicion. At some point during his trial he intimates that he did pretend to be a priest because “he is exhausted from repeatedly being arrested while he travels as he perpetually is assumed to be a runaway slave” (28). Throughout the book, Moore explains the difficulties of mulattoes and Afro-descended people in Iberia, since they were most often seen as slaves, and even with the proper documents, the *carta de alforria* or free papers were barred from many professions and even from universities -- there were still a very few who overcame these barriers such as Juan Latino (45-46).

John K. Moore carefully studies the documents in search of José Soller’s voice. He listens to it out through the many uncertainties in Soller’s story. This critic claims that many of the changes in detail provided by the prisoner are by design, establishing a parallel between the elusive nature of his narrative and “the slippery mode of the Creole storyteller” (38). Moore further asserts that this is a form of resistance, by throwing off and confounding the authorities. In fact, even the origins of Soller are confusing since he claims to come from Italy and Naples, but also from Santo Domingo in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Other than that he cannot be from two places at once, Soller also raises doubts about his origins in a Caribbean island, since Santo Domingo was part of the Viceroyalty of Peru. Another geographical mystery emerges when he tells that he went to Lisbon from Zafra, even though he started out in Madrid. Zafra is by no means a direct route from the Spanish court to Lisbon. Moore seeks to solve this puzzle by pointing out that the monastery of Guadalupe is on the way from Madrid to Zafra, so that Soller could have been undertaking a previous pilgrimage, one that makes perfect sense since it has a Black Madonna which had many New World manifestations.

Moore’s carefully researched narrative also provides many details dealing with the pilgrimage to Santiago. He pinpoints that Soller undertook his journey as a Lenten affair, beginning in Lisbon one week after Ash Wednesday on February 11, 1693, and arriving at his first destination Santarém on February 17th. He makes it to Santiago on March 25, three days after Easter Sunday: “During Lent, all are made equal in their abstinence... Pilgrimage involves hardship and deprivation, trials and challenges, and it is a time for repentance and penitence” (81). Soller, then,

seems to be in tune with Lenten pilgrimage – although the question remains if he is a “false” pilgrim, using the route and its rituals for personal gain. After all, may be exploiting dress as well as hospitality.

The book is remarkable for the way it reconstructs events through primary manuscript materials. Indeed, we are just beginning to study questions of race in the early modern world and this volume contains a key primary text on the subject. Discussions of the trial by Moore are also invaluable. He explains, for example: “the cases of the Spanish courts were organized according to a system of privileges that differentiated individuals by status, lineage, birthplace, place of residence, school, type of employment, and so on. In other words, there were not any universally applied criteria but rather different rules for different types of people... The privilege of an individual emanated from the group to which he or she belonged...” (21). In this case, the final sentence was not as dire as we would have expected for someone without privilege. Condemned as a vagrant his sentence was at the lower end of what was possible. Curiously, pilgrims were often associated with vagabonds and there was a long history of legislation against these wonderers, often accused of being false pilgrims (179-80). His sentence was to serve two years in the galleys without pay: “It seems improbable that Soller’s sentence would have been based on ethnicity, but the ruling surely was based on class since members of the nobility and clergy could not be sentenced to the galleys or any other type of forced servitude” (181).

As it turns out, Soller was able to escape prison and his future life and journeys remain a mystery. Moore explains: “Flights from jail were the norm the proximity to Portugal made such escapes fairly easy and common” (190). Moore speculates that in fleeing, Soller might have attempted to travel as far as Rome, since he claims to want to go on pilgrimage there; he could also have gone to Coimbra, where stated he was heading. The third possibility proposed by Moore is the most intriguing. He could have sought refuge in Couto Mixto: “Had it maintained its autonomy... Couto Mixto today might have acquired a status similar to that of the principality of Andorra... as well as a set of privileges.... Including the right to asylum.... Couto Mixto was a unique political borderland that for centuries resisted colonization by any other nation” (204). In this remote and mountainous borderland between Portugal and Spain, which included three main towns, Soller could have lived there safely with others

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that fled strict hierarchies. Considered a safe haven for outlaws, it was certainly welcoming to vagabonds.

This is just one more enigma to be added to the many mysteries relating to José Soller a mulatto pilgrim and outlaw in late seventeenth century Iberia. Although much of his life and his intentions remain a mystery, John K. Moore has presented us with a fascinating story, one which he contextualizes and sets with learned elegance in the years of decline of the Spanish Empire. Although we will keep wondering about his profession, his motivations, where he came from and where he was headed, we will always remember the voice of this wily storyteller, as now retold, through his records by John K. Moore. This is a suspenseful and rewarding read, one that is the result of intense archival study, but one that hides its immense erudition through a clear style and a delightful way of telling. This book is a must-read for scholars in a number of areas, from race, to history, to Hispanic studies, and will have a deep impact in our appreciation of early modern culture.

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