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**Conscripting the breast: lactation, slavery and salvation in the
realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca, c. 1250–1300**

Rebecca Winer (Villanova University)

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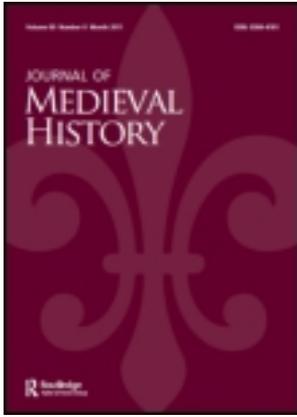
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Rebecca Lynn Winer ^a

^a Department of History, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085, USA

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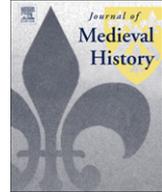
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Conscripting the breast: lactation, slavery and salvation in the realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca, c. 1250–1300

Rebecca Lynn Winer

Department of History, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085, USA

A B S T R A C T

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This essay examines the ideals and practices surrounding motherhood and wet nursing in the realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca c. 1250–1300. Despite powerful messages — from ecclesiastical pronouncements to lay devotional manuals to artwork in churches — that linked maternal breastfeeding to an educative and caring ideal of mothering, social and economic pressures on wealthy urban and knightly women to remain as sexually available and as fecund as possible caused a shift to increased use of wet nurses, many of whom were of Muslim origin. Although the latter would have been nominally baptized, in practice, if not normative legal ideal, they maintained their enslaved status no matter how many children they bore. Indeed, it is possible that such women's bodies were doubly exploited: first, as sexual chattel available to their masters and other men, and then, having been made pregnant, as nursing mothers whose own children could be put away in favour of their mistresses'. Only fragmentary examples of such women 'conversing' with one another have been found, but the observations offered here open up to the historian's view a social scenario in which we know many conversations among women must have taken place.

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E-mail address: rebecca.winer@villanova.edu

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Around 1275 the Catalan lay moralist, mystic, and rationalist theologian Ramon Llull (c.1232–1316) wrote the *Doctrina pueril* (*Instruction for children*), a guide to moral living addressed to his son Domènec who was then between eight and twelve years old.¹ Many years before Llull had left his wife and children, as well as his position as seneschal to Jaume of Majorca, to become an evangelist tertiary of the Order of St Francis.² After his conversion to the spiritual life this former troubadour composed 243 works on mystical, theological, philosophical and scientific subjects aimed at the clergy, his (educated) non-Christian targets and the laity written respectively in Latin, Arabic and Catalan (his native vernacular). Llull wrote the *Doctrina pueril* in Catalan to be accessible to laymen and their families.³ He incorporated his knowledge of natural science, medicine and personal experience as a father to develop a philosophy of childrearing.⁴ His ideas, couched in a thorough catechism and devotional guide, were geared at producing a child with the physical health, moral habituation and mental reason needed to reach salvation.

Llull devoted chapter 91, entitled, with an intentional double meaning, ‘Concerning education/nutrition’ or ‘The manner in which a man should bring up/feed his son’, to summarising his views on childrearing.⁵ Here feeding images appear alongside instructions on childcare as the author presents a mixture of domestic and moral advice on nurturing the child’s body and soul. In terms of right behaviour, fathers are advised not to expose their children to romances, songs or musical instruments that encourage them to be lustful.⁶ To preserve their children’s budding intellects and overall bodily health fathers should ensure that spicy food never be served, as it could overheat their humours and damage their developing brains, and nor should rich food, which would lead them into ill health, gluttony and lust later in life.⁷

For Llull one food in particular straddles the metaphoric divide between moral education and physical nourishment: human milk. He makes no explicit statement in favour of maternal breastfeeding or about the way a father might go about choosing a wet nurse; but instead charges fathers (he projects the narrative into the future and addresses his son grown up and become a father) to guard their children against the bad influences of poorly brought-up men or evil-living servant women.⁸ Fathers must not permit such people to reside in their homes or come in contact with their impressionable children when they are out and about. Alongside his stress on protecting children spiritually, Llull underlines the health benefits and moral properties of human milk for infants. He warns against allowing the women of the house to wean an infant too early (before one year of age) and introduce solid food (or coddles) into the diet. He maintains that doing so causes children to contract ringworm (the Catalan phrase also

¹ Ramon Llull, *Doctrina pueril*, ed. Gret Schib (Barcelona, 1972). The bibliography on Llull is extensive; standards in English include Mark D. Johnston, *The evangelical rhetoric of Ramon Llull: lay learning and piety in the Christian west around 1300* (Oxford, 1996); J.N. Hillgarth, *Ramon Llull and Lullism in fourteenth-century France* (Oxford, 1971), an up-to-date bibliography can be found at the Ramon Llull database supported by the Universitat de Barcelona at <<http://orbita.bib.ub.es/ramon/>>; accessed 21 December 2007. For a brief, accessible history of Llull’s life and work, see David Abulafia, *The western Mediterranean kingdoms 1200–1500: the struggle for dominion* (New York, 1997), 94–101.

² Llull’s missionary career received recognition from the papacy and royal funding, see Robert I. Burns, ‘Christian-Islamic confrontation in the west: the thirteenth-century dream of conversion’, *American Historical Review*, 76 (1971), 398–400.

³ The *Doctrina pueril* is one of many spiritual manuals for laypeople written after the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. The *Somme des Vices et des Vertus* (or *La Somme le Roi*) written in 1279 for King Phillip III (‘the Bold’) of France by his confessor the Dominican Lorenç d’Orléans is the most famous. Both circulated widely in medieval Catalunya, see Joan Santanach i Suñol, ‘“Cové que hom fassa aprendre a son fill los XIII articles”: la *Doctrina pueril* com a tractat catequètic’, in: *Literatura i cultura a la Corona d’Aragó (segles XIII–XV). Actes del III col·loqui ‘problemes i mètodes de literatura catalana antiga’, Universitat de Girona, 5–8 juliol de 2000*, ed. Lola Badia, Miriam Cabré and Sadurní Martí (Barcelona, 2002), 419–30.

⁴ See Pierre-André Sigal, ‘Raymond Lulle et l’éducation des enfants d’après la “Doctrina pueril”’, *Raymond Lulle et le Pays d’oc* (Cahiers de Fanjeaux, Toulouse, 1987), 117–39.

⁵ Llull, *Doctrina pueril*, chapter XCI De nutriment or De la manera segons la quall hom deu nodrir son fill, 217.

⁶ Llull, *Doctrina pueril*: romansos e cansons, estruments e les altres coses qui donen moviment de luxúria. 218. For the common scholastic view of Llull’s contemporaries (and to the mid-fourteenth century) on sexual passions as ‘physical phenomena with physiological causes and remedies’, see Bonnie Kent, ‘On the track of lust: *luxuria*, Ockham, and the scientists’, in *In the garden of evil: the vices and culture in the Middle Ages* ed. Richard Newhauser (Toronto, 2005), 349–70.

⁷ Llull, *Doctrina pueril*: E salses forts cremen les humors e destroexen lo cervel e la calor natural, 219.

⁸ Llull, *Doctrina pueril*: Home qui vulla bé nodrir son infant no deu tenir en son alberch home mal nodrit, per ço que son fill no prena mal nodriment. E tal dona lexa sa filla, com va de fora, que valrria més que l’amenàs. E sabs per què? Per ço que no cregués la mala serventa, 220–1.

has the meaning of ‘to become mean and stingy’) and be afflicted by abscesses, if not killing them outright.⁹ Llull’s associations of milk with charity, generosity (opposites of meanness and stinginess) good upbringing, and the overall inculcation of moral character in the young are clearly evidenced in this text.

Llull maintained that human milk possessed morally formative properties and his interpretations were followed by later medieval and renaissance authors in the Iberian peninsula.¹⁰ These were more than simple metaphor: breastfeeding was at the heart of all high medieval conversations about motherhood. Throughout western Europe powerful messages — lay devotional manuals, medical advice, ecclesiastical pronouncements and artwork in churches — linked maternal breastfeeding to a moral and caring ideal of mothering. According to religious authorities the ideal mother was the Blessed Virgin Mary whose breastfeeding of the infant Jesus brought her perfect joy. Physicians overall stressed the health benefits to the child of maternal breastfeeding and defined maternal nursing of infants as the major moment when a mother made her imprint on her child’s morality and character. In sharp contrast, in spite of his eloquent exploration of the moral virtues inherent in milk, an elite man like Ramon Llull, a former royal courtier, would not have expected his wife to breastfeed their children. Women of the knightly class and elite urban background normally did not. A complex series of social directives, including religious counsel against sexual intercourse with nursing women and the desire to increase a family’s number of live births (and possibly a fear that the milk of a parturient was ‘unhealthy’ during the first few weeks after labour), meant that from 1250 on wet nursing was becoming widespread.

During the thirteenth century the slave trade was also on the rise among Christians of the western Mediterranean with Iberian Muslims as the pre-eminent source of people enslaved. Hence many unfree women of Muslim origin nurtured elite Christian infants even if many other wet nurses were free, poor Christian peasants or members of the urban working poor. Milk siblings (biologically unrelated children nursed by the same woman)¹¹ were not usually permitted, since women were not believed to be able to produce enough milk for both babies. As one master said in Barcelona in 1400, he had to give his unfree wet nurse’s child away so she would devote her full attention to nursing his son.¹² Thus wet nursing resulted in the displacement of the children of enslaved mothers, servant women and peasants from the breasts of their mothers. The Muslim background of some wet nurses, and their position as birth mothers to children whose fathers were often of uncertain identity, thus both existed as potential sources of domestic and societal tension.

Slavery and wet nursing

Llull lived in a society where the largest supply of wet nurses could be found in the newly enslaved Muslims of Majorca. He was born in 1232 in Majorca City (now called Palma), after the King Jaume I of Aragon (‘James the Conqueror’) took the island from the Muslims in 1229, but before there was a large Christian peasant population. During the later thirteenth century the enslaved may have made up as much as 30% of the population there.¹³ The source of the enslaved who inhabited almost every

⁹ Llull, *Doctrina pueril*: En lo comensament que l’infant és nat, d’entrò que ha presa força e calor naturall, no deu ésser nodrit sinó ab let tan solament; cor altre viande no li cové, per ço cor la calor natural no és en sa forssa e no pot coure la vianda. E per aço són los infantz tinyoses e enpustermats, con hom lus dóna per força la vianda que nature no pot coure; e per la pusterma moren molts infants qui viurien sit ant no menjaven ne bevien., 218. This may also be a reference to St. Paul’s discussion of his introduction of moral Christian ways to the newly converted community at Corinth, see 1 Cor. 3:1–2.

¹⁰ See Emilie L. Bergmann, ‘Language and “mothers” milk: maternal roles and the nurturing body in early modern Spanish texts’, in: *Maternal measures: figuring caregiving in the early modern period*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot, 2000), 105–20.

¹¹ Based on surveys of canon law it is usually thought that relations through milk were not considered significant in the medieval west. For an anthropological survey of milk kinship circles in the Islamic world see Jeremy MacClancy, ‘The milk tie’, *Anthropology of Food*, 2 (September, 2003), <<http://aof.revues.org/document339.html>>, accessed 21 December 2007.

¹² Josep Hernando i Delgado, ‘L’alimentació làctia dels nadons durant el segle XIV, les nodrisses o dides a Barcelona, 1295–1400, segons els documents dels protocols notariais’, *Estudis històrics i documents dels arxius de protocols*, 14 (1996), 39–157, document no. 268. This work is a digest of the contents of the 271 surviving notarial documents concerning free and enslaved wet nurses from Barcelona from between 1295–1400. It draws on the protocols of three archives, Barcelona, l’Arxiu de la Catedral; Barcelona, l’Arxiu Històric de la Cuitat de Barcelona and Barcelona, l’Arxiu Històric de Protocols.

¹³ Charles Verlinden, *L’esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale*, 2 vols (Bruges, 1955–72), vol. 1, 348–51.

prosperous Christian home on the Island was exclusively conquered Muslims and recent converts from Islam.¹⁴

From its conquest to 1276 Majorca was part of the realms of Aragon. The realms of Aragon is a modern name given to the territories that Jaume the Conqueror, king of Aragon and count of Barcelona, (1213–76) inherited and amassed through his military campaigns: essentially Catalonia, Aragon, Montpellier, Majorca and Valencia.¹⁵ In 1276 Lull's home city became the sea capital of the appanage kingdom of Majorca which 'the Conqueror' left to his son Jaume of Majorca; Perpignan served as his land capital and its final key territory was the lordship of Montpellier.¹⁶ Though politically the kingdom of Majorca was separated from other Catalan territories until 1343 the Catalan-speaking world was always culturally unified. Thus Lull's writings and ideas circulated widely through its towns and beyond. This region's economic and cultural heyday took place during the political age of these two kingdoms. For example, during the later twelfth-century Perpignan initially served as a crucial economic crossroads between southern France and the Iberian Peninsula but by the mid-thirteenth century was a hive of its own commercial activity and a centre for international trade.¹⁷

Crusade and slavery went hand in hand throughout the realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca, captives constituted one of the most lucrative spoils of the Christian conquests of the Balearics, Valencia and Murcia.¹⁸ The crown retained the right to profits from penal servitude for Muslim subjects and judicial penalties that would have resulted in death or severe disablement for Muslims were thus often commuted.¹⁹ Sales of 278 Muslim individuals on the Island of Majorca survive from 1239–77 alone and the number sky-rocketed after the wholesale enslavement of the people of Minorca in 1287.²⁰ In fact,

¹⁴ José Maria Ramos y Loscertales, *El cauterio en la corona de Aragón durante los siglos XIII, XIV y XV* (Zaragoza, 1915), 149–70; Rebecca Lynn Winer, *Women, wealth, and community in Perpignan: Christians, Jews, and enslaved Muslims in a medieval Mediterranean town* (Aldershot, 2006), 136–44.

¹⁵ For the realms (or crown) of Aragon see Thomas Bisson, *The medieval crown of Aragon: a short history* (Oxford, 1986).

¹⁶ For the kingdom of Majorca see David Abulafia, *A mediterranean emporium: the Catalan kingdom of Majorca* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁷ For the commercial history of medieval Perpignan and Roussillon, see David Abulafia, *A mediterranean emporium*; Richard W. Emery, 'Flemish cloth and Flemish merchants in Perpignan in the thirteenth century', in: *Essays in medieval life and thought in honor of A.P. Evans*, ed. Richard W. Emery, J.H. Mundy and B.N. Nelson (New York, 1955), 153–66. Pierre Macaire, 'Les relations commerciales entre Majorque, Collioure et Perpignan au Xve siècle', in: *Majorque, Languedoc et Roussillon de l'antiquité à nos jours: LIII congrès de la fédération historique du Languedoc méditerranéen et du Roussillon* (Montpellier, 1982), 77–90. Juan Reglá Campistol, 'El comercio entre Francia y la Corona de Aragón en los siglos XIII y XIV y sus relaciones con el desenvolvimiento de la industria textil catalana', in: *Actes del primer congrés internacional de pirenétistes* (Zaragoza, 1952), 47–60. Guy Romestan, 'Draperie roussillonnaise et draperie languedocienne dans la première moitié du XIVe siècle', in: *XLIII congrès de la fédération historique du Languedoc méditerranéen et du Roussillon* (Montpellier, 1976), 75–103 and 'Perpignan et les foires de Pézenas et de Montagnac aux XIVe et XVe siècles', in: *Pézenas: Ville et campagne, XIIIe–Xxe siècles: XLVIII congrès de la fédération historique du Languedoc méditerranéen et du Roussillon* (Montpellier, 1976), 75–103; Philippe Wolff, 'Deux centres catalans au moyen âge: Barcelona et Perpignan', *Medievalia*, 7 (1987), 109–24.

¹⁸ The general bibliography on slavery in the realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca includes several classics and a growing number of impressive recent works: See Debra Blumenthal, 'Implements of labor, instruments of honor: Muslim eastern and black African slaves in fifteenth-century Valencia' (unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Toronto, 2000); *De l'esclavitud a la llibertat: esclaus i llibertats a l'Edat Mitjana: actes del col·loqui internacional celebrat a Barcelona, del 27 al 29 de maig de 1999*, ed. Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol and Josefa Mutgé i Vives (Barcelona, 2000); Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques au moyen âge dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris, 1981); Josep Hernando i Delgado, *Els esclaus Islàmics a Barcelona: Blancs, negres, llors i turcs. De l'esclavitud a la llibertat (S.XIV)* (Barcelona, 2003); Roser Salicrú i Lluç, *Esclaus i propietaris d'esclaus a la Catalunya del segle XV: L'assegurança contra fugues* (Barcelona, 1998); Ramos y Loscertales, *El cauterio en la Corona de Aragón*; Verlinden, *L'esclavage*.

¹⁹ Robert I. Burns, *Islam under the crusaders: colonial survival in the thirteenth-century kingdom of Valencia* (Princeton, 1973), 158–9, 161; John Boswell, *The royal treasure: Muslim communities under the crown of Aragon in the fourteenth century* (New Haven, 1977), 50–6, 346–52; Mark Meyerson, 'Slavery and the social order: Mudejars and Christians in the kingdom of Valencia', *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*, 1:1 (1995), 149–53.

²⁰ Ricard Soto i Company, 'El primer traffic esclavista a Mallorca', *L'Avenç*, 35 (1981), 60–5; Elena Lourie, 'Anatomy of ambivalence: Muslims under the crown of Aragon in the late thirteenth century', in: *Crusade and colonisation: Muslims, Christians and Jews in medieval Aragon* (Aldershot, 1990), 1–77 and Larry J. Simon, 'The church and slavery in Ramon Lull's Majorca', in: *Iberia and the Mediterranean world of the middle ages: studies in honor of Robert I. Burns, SJ, vol. 1*, ed. Larry J. Simon (Leiden, 1995), 345–63.

during the second half of the thirteenth century the realms of Aragon functioned as the major supplier of unfree labour to the urban centres of the western Mediterranean.²¹

The form of slavery practiced quickly became a feminised one. From the thirteenth century on women were preferred to men in the Mediterranean slave markets in general and in those of the realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca in particular.²² The ability of an enslaved woman to breastfeed was often mentioned in later medieval slave sales because of the demand for wet nurses.²³ The existence of enslaved wet nurses, alongside free women, is documented as early as Llull's lifetime, for example, in Perpignan in the 1280s Jaume Mascharós, a burges — that is, a member of the urban elite who intermarried with the courtiers and local knights — owned an enslaved woman who wet nursed his child.²⁴ And in his testament of 12 July 1266, among his many slaves, the Barcelona patrician Romeu Durfort remembered his *baptizata* wet nurse with a legacy of 20 sous and charged his heir to maintain her for the rest of her life.²⁵ While the Majorcan courtier Berenguer Seba, resident in the mainland town of Perpignan when he died on 7 May 1273, left a bequest to his daughter's wet nurse Geraldá, who was a free woman, probably of low social status, since she is only identified by her first name.²⁶

It is difficult to find evidence of conversations between Muslim and Christian women in the thirteenth-century realms of Aragon and kingdom of Majorca. The one environment where born Christians and Muslims, or those of Muslim origin, regularly encountered each other was within the domestic sphere as mistresses and slaves. In fact, the trace of a relationship between a born Christian woman and a woman of Muslim descent is preserved from the prosperous, northern Catalan-speaking town of Perpignan during this period. On 28 March 1280, the burges Simona, wife of Guillem de Codalet, manumitted her *baptizata* (convert from Islam) Esclarmonda and all children born of Esclarmonda as well as the woman's future descendants.²⁷ The documentary record reveals nothing else about the relationship between Simona and Esclarmonda but I suggest that the mention of Esclarmonda's children signals the possibility that she was wet nurse to those of Simona. An elite woman freeing a slave often had an established relationship with that slave. In Barcelona in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries some elite women brought enslaved women with them into their marriages as dowry property, with the slaves serving them and caring for their children.²⁸ Furthermore, unlike in Italy, in

²¹ Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and traders in Muslim Spain: the commercial realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900–1500* (Cambridge, 1994), 234–5.

²² Winer, *Women, wealth, and community*, 149. See also Susan Mosher Stuard, 'Ancillary evidence for the decline of medieval slavery', *Past and Present*, 149 (1995), 3–28; 'Single by law and custom', in: *Singlewomen in the European past, 1250–1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and M. Froide (Philadelphia, 1999), 106–26; 'To town to serve: urban domestic slavery in medieval Ragusa', in: *Women and work in preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington, 1986), 39–55.

²³ In 'L'alimentació làctia', Hernando i Delgado, lists 67 outright sales, temporary sales and rentals of slaves cum lacte, see documents nos 133, 135, 138, 139, 142, 146, 149, 150, 151, 153, 156, 159, 166, 175, 176, 177, 179, 182, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 194, 198, 199, 201, 203, 204, 206, 207, 208, 209, 211, 212, 215, 216, 218, 219, 220, 222, 227, 231, 240, 242, 243, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 251, 252, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 262, 265, 269, 269, 270. These documents increase in number and in relation to contracts of free wet nurses from 1370 on and especially in the later 1380s. It seems with the cost of labour rising steeply in the generations after the Black Death, buying a slave was not much more of a financial burden than hiring a free wet nurse. For Perpignan see Guy Romestan, 'Femmes esclaves à Perpignan aux XIVe et XV siècles', in: *La femme dans l'histoire et la société méridionales (IXe–XIXe s.)* (Montpellier, 1995), 195. The use of slaves as wet nurses was also commonplace in fifteenth-century Valencia, see Blumenthal, 'Implements of labor', 264–72.

²⁴ Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales, series 1B, 19, f. 1v. See also Winer, *Women, wealth, and community*, 134, 144, 148–50, 154–5.

²⁵ Carme Battle i Gallart, 'Els esclaus domèstics a Barcelona vers 1300', in: *De l'esclavitud a la llibertat*, ed. Ferrer i Mallol and Mutgé i Vives, 278.

²⁶ Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales series 3E1, notarial register 3, f. 30–30v. See also Winer, *Women, wealth, and community*, 155.

²⁷ Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales series 3E1, notarial register 8, f. 19v: Simona, uxor G[uillelmi] de Codalet, voluntate dicti mariti mei, per me etc affranquisto, libero et absolvo Sclearmundam baptizatam meam et omnes dece[n]dentes, liberos natos et nacturos, et omnia bona sua ab omni servitute et a bono animo etc. faciens ipsam liberam et quittam, ita quod ego nec mei nichil sibi vel suis (vel in bonis suis) petere possimus racione servitutis nec ullo alio modo faciendo pactum tibi scriptori etc... et dictus G[uillelmi] de Codalet hec laudo etc. See also Winer, *Women, wealth, and community*, 142, 151; and 209, note 70 For the thirteenth-century meaning of *baptizata* primarily as enslaved or freed person who converted from Islam see Carme Battle i Gallart, 'Els esclaus domèstics a Barcelona vers 1300', in: *De l'esclavitud a la llibertat*, ed. Ferrer i Mallol and Mutgé i Vives, 278: batejada, és a dir esclava sarraïna.

²⁸ Battle i Gallart, 'Els esclaus domèstics', 276–7.

fourteenth-century Perpignan and Barcelona elite women often appear as the main actors negotiating contracts with the wet nurses who cared for their children,²⁹ implying that they exercised some control over this sphere. In spite of their link to each other, however, the relationships of Simona and Esclarmonda to the men around them and the reproductive expectations of their society often cast them in conflicting roles. In this society elite Christian mothers were to bear legitimate children and enslaved Muslim women who bore children were urged to convert, watch their masters send their infants to be nursed by someone else, and then serve as wet nurses to the heirs of their masters and mistresses.

Simona, wife of Guillem de Codalet, acted in her own right concerning her slave, but she received her husband's official approval of her actions, as is recorded in the final clause of the manumission. Alongside the moral and physical merits of milk for children, the need for a man to exert control over the women involved in the upbringing of his children from birth is another of Lull's major themes. Wives were given more respect than servants but they could not be left to their own devices where children were concerned. The only advice for the rearing of girls, as opposed to boys, in the entire *Doctrina pueril*, notes that women are accustomed to leave their daughters at home whenever they go out when they should not. Thus their husbands are admonished to correct them and instruct these mothers to take their daughters along with them instead, lest the girls stay at home under the influence of immoral servant women.³⁰ Moreover, in his spiritual romance *Blanquerna*, after young Blanquerna has been weaned by the wet nurse, whom his father Evast (a paragon of fatherhood) chose and mother Aloma supervised, Evast has to watch and correct Aloma herself. Aloma has a tendency to feed the boy the wrong foods, the kinds of sweets and roasted meats that Lull also warned about in the *Doctrina*.³¹ If Blanquerna's mother had her way in this matter her kind of upbringing would not nourish her son but lead him into a life of ill-health and sin (gluttony and lust). With oversight from Evast Aloma dresses and feeds Blanquerna, but she is never left in charge of the most important aspect of the boy's education, his moral upbringing. According to Lull women's domestic roles and interactions with each other were to be structured by men.

One impetus behind Lull's desire for control was the assumption that potential antagonism existed between a wife and her household domestics. In the case of an enslaved wet-nurse there might be friction over her pregnancy and natural child. These antagonisms cannot be documented for the thirteenth century realms of Aragon but are apparent for later centuries. Trial records, notarial contracts concerning wet nurses and last wills and testaments from after the Black Death all afford glimpses of the potential turmoil to society and family that might ensue when married masters became the fathers of their slaves' children. In Perpignan in a 1456 trial record the ecclesiastical officials in charge of the Hospital of St Joan, the major charitable institution that took in foundlings, appealed to the city fathers for financial help. They claimed that they had to employ 54 wet nurses to feed all the children in their care because 'masters impregnated their household slaves and then sent their children to the hospital'.³²

²⁹ For a widow hiring a married wet nurse see Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales series 3E1, notarial register 42, f. 39v. For Barcelona see Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia', where 28 of 100 contracts from before 1375 were made between two women (employer/buyer and wet nurse), the majority of whom were both wives. For the utter dominance of fathers in Italian wet nursing contracts see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood parents and milk parents: wet nursing in Florence, 1300–1530', in: *Women, family and ritual in renaissance Italy*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1985), 143: 'hardly ever is the mother mentioned'.

³⁰ See note 9 above.

³¹ Ramon Lull, *Libre de Blanquerna escrit a Montpellier devers lany M.CC.lxxxiii*, ed. Antoni Maria Alcover (Obres de Ramon Lull, 8, Palma de Mallorca, 1914; repr. 2002), chapter 2, 13–14. See also *Blanquerna: a thirteenth century romance*, translated from the Catalan of Ramón Lull by E. Allison Peers (London, 1926), 39. For background on this text see Mark D. Johnston, 'The good upbringing of Ramon Lull's *Blanquerna*: appropriation and misrecognition as social reproduction', *Essays in medieval studies: proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association*, 12 (1995), <<http://www.illionismedieval.org/EMSVOL12/johnston.html>>, accessed 21 December 2007.

³² From the notes of the archivist Julien-Bernard Alart (1824–80), Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales series 2J1/6 1456 (Procès de l'hôpital Saint Jean de Perpignan): los amos emprenyaven les esclaves de llur casa y despres enviaven llurs creatures en lo espital, cited in Alain Bournet and Aymat Catafau, 'Esclaves musulmans et maîtres chrétiens à Perpignan et en Roussillon au Moyen Age', in: *Perpignan l'histoire des musulmans dans la ville (du Moyen Age à nos jours): recueil des communications du colloque du 7 et 8 avril 2005* (Perpignan, 2005), 82, note 38. See also Jean-Auguste Brutails, 'Etude sur l'esclavage en Roussillon du XIIIe au XVIIe siècle', *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 10 (1886), 402, note 45, where this same incident is described slightly differently and cited as coming from an early modern transcription of the original document, now lost (Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales, Rubriques de Puignau, notaire, VIII, f.112 V).

In a court case from fifteenth-century Valencia a master claimed that when his slave identified him as the father of her child his wife refused to speak to him or sleep in the same bed with him for seven months.³³ Another master from fifteenth-century Valencia told his tenant farmer he would not acknowledge that the children his slave had born were his own because of the tensions this would cause with his wife. In particular this master feared his wife would not allow this enslaved woman to wet nurse their legitimate children.³⁴

Fleshing out the position of the enslaved wet nurse for the later thirteenth-century is a challenging task because the documentation is sparse and fragmentary. It is one well worth undertaking for those invested in conversing with the minority. It was only during the thirteenth century that the enslaved consisted mainly of people of Muslim origin; during the later middle ages slaves came from many different backgrounds and regional areas, including: north Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the areas around the Black Sea, the Dinaric Alps, Sardinia and Greece. Determining the unfree wet nurse's position in relation to that of a paid nurse also involves some speculation. Elsewhere I suggest that free-born Christian women were sometimes able to parley the highly disdained work of wet nursing (not unlike prostitution in its commodification of a woman's body) into some advantage for themselves and their families, while during the thirteenth century this seemed to have been less true for enslaved women.³⁵ There was certainly a spectrum of experiences for free and unfree wet-nurses. Judging from the evidence from later centuries at the top of the spectrum of free wet nurses was the lucky rural individual who worked for a wealthy urban or noble household, living in and creating important links of patronage for herself and her family. Next came those who took children from private families into their homes. At the bottom seem to have been municipal wet-nurses, who cared for abandoned children. For instance, in the second half of the fifteenth-century, judging from the Montpellier evidence, municipal wet nursing appears not to have been highly remunerated and was the preserve of the wives craftsmen and labourers of humble status.³⁶

The spectrum of experience for enslaved women seems to have run from the slave concubine who was freed by her master along with her child,³⁷ to the enslaved wet-nurse who served a prosperous family for years and gained freedom (although the fates of her children might have been continued enslavement, sale or abandonment), to the slave woman sold away from her household along with her newborn infant from whom she soon also was parted. For the enslaved wet nursing could sometimes be a path to freedom, but not an easy one.³⁸ There are several examples from fourteenth-century Barcelona of women who bought their way out of slavery through serving for years as loyal wet nurses to the children of their masters or others.³⁹

It cannot be forgotten, however, that wet nursing was linked to the sexual exploitation slave women experienced as conquered others. Most free wet nurses were married women this was very seldom the case for the enslaved.⁴⁰ John Boswell was the first to emphasise the common sexual exploitation of Muslim women and its tie to slavery in this region and the findings of Mark Meyerson and David

³³ See Blumenthal, 'Slaves molt fortes, senyors invals: sex, lies and paternity suits in fifteenth-century Spain', in: *Women, texts and authority in the early modern Spanish world*, ed. Marta V. Vicente and Luis R. Corteguera (Aldershot, 2003), 28.

³⁴ Blumenthal, 'Implements of labor', 270.

³⁵ Winer, *Women, wealth, and community*, 148–56.

³⁶ See Leah L. Otis, 'Municipal wet nurses and fifteenth-century Montpellier', in: *Women and work in preindustrial Europe*, ed. Hanawalt, 83–93. For the modern period see Fanny Fay-Sallos, *Les nourrices à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1980).

³⁷ Hernando i Delgado, *Els esclaus islàmics*, On 17 May 1373, a merchant of Barcelona freed his concubine, upon her weaning of their child: Constantiam, servam et captivam meam, que fuisti de genere saracenorum, et Petrum, filium tuum, 411–2. For the free *barragana*, or mistress of an unmarried man, in high medieval Iberia see Heath Dillard, *Daughters of the reconquest. Women in Castilian town society, 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1984), 20.

³⁸ Bearing a child to one's master did not always convey freedom, although in Valencia a child born to a slave, if her master publicly acknowledged his paternity was to be freed with her or his mother. Blumenthal finds the 12 paternity suits filed between 1450–1500 to be an indication that bearing children to one's master was a common route to freedom, I am more sceptical, as is Brian Catlos. See Blumenthal, 'Slaves molt fortes', 19 and Brian Catlos, *The victors and the vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050–1300* (Cambridge, 2004), 255–6.

³⁹ See Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia', document nos 26, 96, 106, 120, 166, 231, 240, 256.

⁴⁰ For the fourteenth century in Barcelona this free married women predominate see Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia'. In her classic article describing the wet nursing system as whole for late medieval Florence, Klapisch-Zuber stresses that in Italy also married wet nurses were most common, see 'Blood parents and milk parents', 142.

Nirenberg have established this exploitation beyond a doubt.⁴¹ According to the *Furs*, the law code of Valencia redacted under the direction of Jaume the Conqueror in 1239, the only check to the existence of Muslim prostitutes was that they were supposed to be common, public women, not private mistresses of individuals.⁴² As Nirenberg has aptly argued in the medieval realms of Aragon the sexual exploitation of enslaved Muslim women 'reiterated those very acts of conquest and degradation that formed much of the basis for Iberian Christian ideas of masculinity and honour'.⁴³ thus the authorities never wanted to see a Muslim mistress supplant a Christian wife. Use of enslaved, newly baptized Muslims as wet nurses was akin to their use as mistresses and prostitutes. Hence the late medieval *remenças*, or Catalan serfs, complained in one breath against the sexual exploitation and forced wet nursing of their women as humiliating and soul destroying abuses.⁴⁴

Masters also feared that the household would be dishonoured through the sexual liaisons of enslaved women with other men both inside and outside the household.⁴⁵ When Lull interpreted the 'law' of Muhammad to his son in the *Doctrina pueril* he stressed what he viewed as the lustful nature of the prophet's personal life and teachings about paradise.⁴⁶ Sexual immorality was something he viewed as characteristically Muslim. In the general population this notion may have served as a rationale for the sexual exploitation of the 'lustful' Muslim slave woman or decrying of her rampant sexuality.⁴⁷ Such a woman could then be redeemed through baptism followed by her master profiting from the by-product of her milk. Any embarrassment could be hushed up through her removal from the household along with her newborn as soon as she recovered from labour (or earlier) through a precipitous public sale.⁴⁸

The fates of some enslaved women's children can be documented from Barcelona from the 1380–1400. Some of these children were given away outright as land might be in Roman legal grants between two free individuals (*donationes inter vivos*), others were sent out to wet nurses so their own mothers could be hired in that capacity (some are referred to in the documents as 'little bastards' not a promising sign that they would be treated well), still others ended up in foundling hospitals, and some few made it home as slaves after weaning by their wet nurses in the countryside.⁴⁹ Boswell has found that

⁴¹ John Boswell, *The royal treasure: Muslim communities under the crown of Aragon in the fourteenth century* (New Haven, 1977), 70–1, 348–51; Mark Meyerson, 'Prostitution of Muslim women in the kingdom of Valencia: religious and sexual discrimination in a medieval plural society', in: *The medieval Mediterranean: cross-cultural contacts*, ed. Marilyn J. Chiat and Kathryn L. Reyerson (St Cloud, MN, 1988), 87–95 and David Nirenberg, *Communities of violence: persecution of minorities in the middle ages* (Princeton, 1996), 183.

⁴² *Fori antique Valentiae, edition critica*, ed. Manuel Dualde Serrano (Madrid-Valencia, 1950–67), rubric 9, under article 1, the king's second legal addition, 22.

⁴³ Nirenberg, *Communities of violence*, 141. See also Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques*, 214–24 and for the sexual conquest of Muslim women as being tied to conquest of land see Amy G. Remensnyder, 'Christian captives, Muslim maidens, and Mary', *Speculum*, 82 (2007), 642–77, especially 665.

⁴⁴ Paul Freedman, *Images of the medieval peasant* (Stanford, 1999), 244–5.

⁴⁵ See Blumenthal, 'Slaves molt fortes'; Bournet and Catafau, 'Esclaves musulmans', 83, note 42: a legal warning given in 1423 to a man because he received an enslaved woman into his house.

⁴⁶ Lull, *Doctrina pueril*, chapter LXXI, article 8, en paradís haüan paria de fembres... Mafumet fo home molt luxuriós..., 163–4.

⁴⁷ A suggestive parallel is provided by the antebellum American south where commonplace stereotypes about the sexuality of enslaved women accompanied their frequent sexual exploitation, see Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a woman?* (New York, 1985), 'Jezebel and Mammy: the mythology of female slavery', 27–61 and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the plantation household: black and white women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 290–9, 308–9, 315–17, 319–20, 322–33, excerpted in: *Slavery in American society*, ed. Lawrence B. Goodheart, et al. (Lexington, MA, 1993), 166–93.

⁴⁸ Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia', presents many late fourteenth-century sales (many through brokers) of women with newborn infants, see document nos 176, 177, 187, 192, 199, 204 (Hernando i Delgado states the child was seven years old, a typo perhaps for seven months?), 207, 216, 242, 251, 255. Blumenthal, 'Slaves molt fortes', 17, cites the punishment of a 'whoring' slave through beating her, then selling her away from the family thus intentionally ensuring she would never see her infant son again, 'in order to cause her even greater distress'.

⁴⁹ Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia', document nos 117: slave toddler returns home; 125, 173 and 266: wet nurse caring for a slave infant, 225 and 268: two newborns are given away.

as the thirteenth century wore on abandonment of children rose significantly and by the time Lull died in 1316 foundling hospitals began to be established throughout his cultural region.⁵⁰ Judging from the Italian evidence, the mortality rates in such institutions were usually catastrophic as was the effect on the population of children of rural areas from which wet nurses were recruited.⁵¹ A hint of the callous attitude of the wealthy to the children of wet nurses can be found when the Catalan sea adventurer Ramon Muntaner (1256–1336) describes the emergency provision of wet nurses for the royal Prince Jaume, whose mother died in childbirth in Sicily in 1315. Here he describes the two understudy wet nurses to the primary nurse he took on board for the prince: 'I had two others put on board the ship, with their infants, so that if the one died the others should be ready. And I put these two on board with their infants, in order that their milk should not spoil, rather they should suckle their infants every day until they were wanted'.⁵² Although the welfare of the royal infant was clearly of national importance and travel by sea perilous, perhaps necessitating extreme measures, the lack of concern for the wet nurses' children is still striking.

I suggest that Lull's highly specific provisions regarding the need for fathers to monitor the physical, 'moral', and religious well-being of their legitimate offspring embody not only general medieval ideas of misogyny but also stem from the lived realities of a society that often depended on newly baptized Muslims for the care of its infants. When juxtaposed with documents of practice, Lull's statements create only the appearance of contradiction or surprise. The ideology they evince aims instead to reconcile a series of imperatives in medieval Iberia at this time regarding the status of human milk that linked breastfeeding to an educative and caring ideal of mothering via the figure of the lactating *Madonna*, with an everyday practice that dictated that mothers rarely nursed their children, entrusting that labour instead to Christian wet nurses of low social status or recently baptized enslaved women who, during the thirteenth century, were all of Muslim origin. In order to understand Lull's statements I will explore the nature of slavery in the realms of Aragon at this time, the place of the enslaved wet nurse in the system and juxtapose these with the canon law regulating breastfeeding within marriage, medical knowledge concerning the properties of human milk and its effects on infants, iconography of lactation in the period and portrayals of royal nursing mothers in vernacular literature. The tensions between ideal and reality take us to the heart of the gender, religious and cultural politics in these thirteenth-century Catalan-speaking lands.

Choosing a *baptizata* as wet nurse: 'complexion', religion, morality and health

Despite her unmarried and enslaved status, according to the medical understanding of the day, through her milk a *baptizata* as wet nurse became a biological extension of the child's mother. The medical literature emphasized that a child's wet nurse should look as much like his or her mother as possible and, to quote Aldobrandino of Siena, have a 'good colour of mixed red and white'.⁵³ Thirteenth-century natural philosophers also tied humoral complexion in with skin colour and made

⁵⁰ John Boswell, *The kindness of strangers: the abandonment of children in western Europe from late antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1988), 324. The first testamentary bequest to the hospital for orphan children in Perpignan dates from 16 March 1326, see Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales series 3E1, notarial register 37, fs. 12v–13. There is a break in the notarial record from 1287–1320s and the grant is a supplemental gift of cheap cloth to make the children clothing, which implies that hospital was already relatively well established, see Winer, *Women, wealth, and community*, 151.

⁵¹ See Richard Trexler, 'Infanticide in Florence: new sources and first results', *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1 (1973), 98–116; 'The foundlings of Florence, 1395–1455', *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1 (1973), 259–84 and Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood parents and milk parents', 140.

⁵² *The chronicle of muntaner*, ed. Anna Kinsky Goodenough, 2 vols (London, 1920–21), vol. 2, 642–3 (changes to translation are mine); *Les quatre grans cròniques*, ed. Ferran Soldevilla (Barcelona, 1971), chapter CCLXVIII, 907: jo n'haguí d'altres dues, qui ab llurs infants mis en la nau, per ço que si la una fallia, que les altres fossen aparellades; e per ço les hi mis ab llurs infants, estrò ops les haguéssem.

⁵³ William MacLehose, 'A tender age': *cultural anxieties over the child in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries* (Columbia University the e-Gutenberg series, New York, 2006), chapter 1, section 60 and note 134, citing from *Le régime du corps: de maître Aldobrandin of Sienna: texte français du XIIIe siècle*, ed. L. Landouzy and R. Pépin (Paris, 1911; repr. 1978), 'K'ele ait boinne couleur meslee de rouge en blanc.

pronouncements in favour of light skinned wet nurses. Albertus Magnus (c.1193–1280) claimed that ‘black women are hotter’ making them good sexual partners, but, according to Michaelis Scotus (died c.1232), not good mothers, nor possessed of the ample quantity of milk typical of cooler — that is, paler-skinned, women.⁵⁴ If these ideas passed into the realm of lay people, as did much of the university ideas on gender,⁵⁵ they would have contributed to a demand for lighter skinned wet nurses. Indeed there was a tendency in thirteenth-century Perpignan to baptize enslaved women of lighter skin colour more frequently than their darker skinned counterparts. Was this tendency related to the desire to use these *baptizatae* as wet nurses? Unlike those of the later middle ages, thirteenth-century contracts do not mention whether a woman sold into slavery was lactating, nor do they give specifics concerning a woman’s age or whether not she is pregnant; they do list whether a woman is a Muslim or convert and describe her as having white, olive/mulatto or black skin colour.⁵⁶ All of the baptized slave women mentioned in sales contracts whose skin colour is mentioned are described as white.⁵⁷ White women seemingly were considered to most resemble their owners’ wives.

Also like the nursing’s birth mother the wet nurse had to be a Christian. From the Third Lateran Council of 1179 on, Muslim and Jews were prohibited from breastfeeding Christian children.⁵⁸ Such a prohibition certainly held force in Castile from the mid-thirteenth century on — the Cortes of Valladolid in 1258 and of Jerez in 1268 are notable examples that both explicitly prohibit wet nursing across religious lines.⁵⁹ In the realms of Aragon the ban originated in the Council of Tarragona in 1239 and passed into the important municipal codes both the *Costums* of Tortosa (redacted in 1279) and the *Furs* of Valencia.⁶⁰

The thirteenth century is understood as the age of the ‘dream of conversion’ — the idea that the entire non-Christian world was there to be converted and that this mass conversion could be speedily effected, something Lull’s work epitomised.⁶¹ Yet even in the thirteenth-century real problems sometimes intruded on this dream. A major one was the continuing inability to fully and comfortably assimilate converts.⁶² Thus the liminal status of the wet nurse as convert could well have contributed to Lull’s insistence that these women remain under the watchful eye and control of a Christian male head of household. Fear about the degenerate character of wet nurses (in terms of both sexuality and religion) surfaces in his description of the perfect wet nurse. In *Blanquerna* he states that the protagonist was fed by a wet nurse who was ‘chaste and of good moral character, because the thing that one must most avoid in the breastfeeding of infants is if the wet nurse is in poor health or if she is

⁵⁴ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference in the middle ages: medicine, science, and culture* (Cambridge, 1994), 163–4 and 144 respectively. See also Peter Biller, ‘Black women in medieval scientific thought’, in: *La pelle umana/The human skin*, issue of *Micrologus: natura, scienze e società medievali. Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, 13 (2005), 477–92. Biller reveals the complexity of this issue. He notes a fundamental link between scholastic views of women’s sexuality and their milk production as well as a contradiction between the views of Aristotle that a black woman’s milk was healthier than that of a light-skinned woman as against the views of thirteenth-century thinkers.

⁵⁵ Susan Mosher Stuard, ‘The dominion of gender, or how women fared in the high middle ages’, in: *Becoming visible*, ed. Renata Bridenthal et al. (Boston, 1998), 142–4.

⁵⁶ For the debate about the degree of discrimination against individuals because of skin colour in the medieval Mediterranean see Winer, *Women, wealth and community*, 140–1; Catlos, *The victors and the vanquished*, 234 and Núria Silleras-Fernández, ‘*Nigra sum sed formosa*: black slaves and exotica in the court of a fourteenth-century Aragonese queen’, *Medieval Encounters*, 13 (2007), 546–65. (The exotic beauty of some black slave women was prized by members of fourteenth-century Spanish royal courts.) I thank Dr Silleras-Fernández for allowing me to read her article before its appearance in print.

⁵⁷ Winer, *Women, wealth and community*, 141–2.

⁵⁸ See also Valerie Fildes, *Wet nursing: a history from antiquity to the present* (Oxford, 1988), 39–40; *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*, ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC, 1990), online at <<http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum11.htm#canons>>, accessed 21 December 2007: Third Lateran Council, Canon 26: ‘Jews and Saracens are not to be allowed to have Christian servants in their houses, either under pretence of nourishing their children or for service or any other reason’.

⁵⁹ Dillard, *Daughters of the reconquest*, 207.

⁶⁰ *Historia del derecho en Cataluña, Mallorca y Valencia: código de las costumbres de tortosa* ed. Bienvenido Oliver y Esteller, 4 vols (Madrid, 1876–81), vol. 4, book 1, rubric IX, article 2, 56: lueu ne sarray no poden ne deuen auer nodrices crestianes. See also *Furs* of Valencia, rubric 8 article 2, 21: Judei vel sarraceni non teneant vel habeant seruites Christianos vel Christianas vel nutrices.

⁶¹ Burns, ‘Christian-Islamic confrontation in the west’.

⁶² Robert Ignatius Burns, ‘Journey from Islam: incipient cultural transition in the conquered kingdom of Valencia (1240–1280)’, *Speculum*, 35 (1960), 337–56; Catlos, *The victors and the vanquished*, 234–52.

in a state of [mortal] sin or has very bad vices'.⁶³ Lull's statement against the wet nurse being in 'a state of [mortal] sin' also supports the conclusion that the need for wet nurses was an impetus for encouraging the conversion of enslaved Muslim women.

Indeed baptizing one's slaves was considered a good deed in and of itself and an archetypal example of how a good master should act. In his *Libre de contemplació* (*Book of contemplation*) written around the same time as the *Doctrina pueril* c.1273/4 Lull argues for using force to convert enslaved Muslims: 'Jesus Christ has given to all Christians the power to constrain some Muslims who are slaves ... and by force to teach them our religion... for just as a child must learn a lesson from fear of the teacher, [so] the infidels through fear of Christians learn and understand'.⁶⁴ Nor did a slave's conversion cost the master very much. According to the thirteenth-century law codes baptism had its benefits: the enslaved could not be freed by testament if they did not convert and there was some reluctance to sell baptized slaves away from the family, but baptism did not convey freedom to slaves, even those of Jews, these people just had to be sold to Christian masters.⁶⁵ In thirteenth-century Perpignan the only grant a slave received upon baptism was a token gift. June 1261, Countess Arsenda of Salses remembered her newly converted slave in her will but she did not free him. As one of her numerous charitable donations — this wealthy noble widow gave away a total of 1250 sous — the countess presented just seven sous six denars to 'my slave whom I recently baptized'.⁶⁶ This was enough to buy an item or two of basic clothing and perhaps new shoes, but not freedom. The average slave in Perpignan in the latter half of the thirteenth century cost over 200 sous.⁶⁷

Ecclesiastical advice, medical thought and wet nursing practice

Based upon a physiological explanation of the nature of breast milk one would think that maternal breastfeeding would have been actively emphasised by both Church leaders and physicians. Around 1245 the Franciscan Bartholomaeus Anglicus, an influential instructor at the University of Paris, who was widely read in the realms of Aragon, set forth influential views in his encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum*. In the womb an infant's body was formed out of his or her mother's blood, but the process of development was not complete at birth. After the child was born the mother's uterine blood was pushed up through natural heat to her breasts turning white and becoming milk in the process. The child continued to develop by imbibing that maternal blood, now become breast milk.⁶⁸

Overall the Church did advocate maternal breastfeeding. High medieval hagiographers, those of St Bernard of Clairvaux and St Catherine of Siena being notable examples, celebrated the biographical detail that their subjects had been breastfed by their own mothers.⁶⁹ Church counsel was ambivalent, however. The advice of canon lawyers and parish priests that a nursing mother

⁶³ Lull, *Blanquerna*, chapter 2, 13: honesta e de bona vida, perque cosa es ques deu molt evitar en lo alletar del infants si la dida es de mal sana, e que estiga en peccat o que haja en sí mals vicis. See also *Blanquerna*, trans. Peers, 38.

⁶⁴ I have altered Mark D. Johnston's translation from, 'Ramon Lull and the compulsory evangelization of Jews and Muslims', in: *Iberia and the Mediterranean world of the middle ages*, ed. Simon. He gives the Catalan there in 14, note 43: [Jhesu Crist] ha donat poder a [tots los cristians] que destrenya[n] alguns sarraïns qui son catius... e per forsa lur fassa mostrar la nostra creensa ... car si axí com l infantó qui per paor del maestre ha a retre la lissó, los infeels aprenien e entenien per paor de [tots los cristians]. Brackets indicate abbreviations Johnston extended from the original text in Ramon Lull, *Libre de contemplació*, (Obres original del illuminat Doctor Mestre Ramon Lull, 8, Palma de Majorca, 1914), 34. Lull also flirted with the idea of removing free Jewish and Muslim children from their parents' custody to teach them about Christianity, although he admitted that this was not practical since the parents would flee the country. See Harvey J. Hames, *The art of conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the thirteenth century* (Leiden, 2000), 107.

⁶⁵ Battle i Gallart, 'Els esclaus domèstics a Barcelona vers 1300', 273. The banning of Jews owning slaves who converted to Christianity was not fully observed until well into the fourteenth century see Catlos, *The victors and the vanquished*, 257–8.

⁶⁶ Perpignan, Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales series 3E1, notarial register 1, f. 10v. The date is damaged, the contract was drafted between 18 and 23 June 1261.

⁶⁷ Winer, *Women, wealth and community*, 158.

⁶⁸ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, chapter 5, De hominis corpore, sub section De mamilla 34, ed. W. Richter (Frankfurt, 1601, repr. 1964): Nam sanguis per concavam venam ad cor veniens, et deinde ad pectus tendens ad mamillas penetrat. This text was a standard in the realms of Aragon (personal communication by Michael Solomon).

⁶⁹ Fildes, *Wet nursing*, 42.

should not engage in intercourse was mitigated by their direction to a married woman to comply whenever her husband requested that she pay the marriage debt.⁷⁰ Thus according to the thirteenth-century consensus on canon law a nursing mother was not punished for having sexual intercourse within marriage per se — that is, once 40 days after the delivery of her child had passed,⁷¹ since as a wife, her obligation to fulfil the marriage debt was almost absolute.⁷² However, later twelfth-century canon lawyers and thirteenth-century legal commentators did roundly condemn married people for engaging in sex for any non procreative reason.⁷³ These conflicting religious directives must have been experienced by lay people as very confusing and difficult to respond to in practice.

The medical literature circulating during the later thirteenth century was equally contradictory. Although there was a strong consensus that maternal nursing was optimal for preserving the child's health and encouraging proper development there was also general agreement that during the days following labour the mother's milk was not the best nourishment.⁷⁴ This may account for one of the names for colostrum in Catalan: 'dead milk'⁷⁵ Not to mention the sales of most slaves *cum lacte* after their infants were 15 days old.⁷⁶ Furthermore the quality of the milk an infant was fed was a major focus of concern in treatises that dealt with paediatric illness.⁷⁷ A major fear concerned the corruption of the nursing woman's milk, as Bartholomaeus Anglicus put it concerning a wet nurse: 'From the good disposition of nourishing milk, a good consistency of the offspring occurs, and the reverse, from the corruption of the blood of the wet nurse inevitably the little body of the child or infant is damaged.'⁷⁸

It is from this understanding that Lull's insistence that the wet nurse be in good health comes. In his novel *Blanquerna* he states that the protagonist's nurse was 'healthy in her person and that from her milk the child was made healthy'.⁷⁹ The desire for a wet nurse in good health was commonplace. Again when the Catalan captain Ramon Muntaner was charged with finding women to care for the crown prince when his mother died in childbirth, he carefully chose two governesses of distinguished lineage

⁷⁰ George Duby, *Medieval marriage: two models from twelfth century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore, 1978), 42: Ivo of Chartres (c.1040–c.1116) declared that it was unlawful for a woman to engage in sexual intercourse before her child was weaned, but by the thirteenth century his represented a dissenting opinion. By the eighteenth century in northern France the priestly counsel had completely changed and now urged a nursing mother whose husband wanted to resume conjugal relations to have him hire a wet nurse if he could afford to do so. J.L. Flandrin, *Families in former times* (Cambridge, 1979), 206.

⁷¹ George Duby, *The knight, the lady, and the priest. The making of modern marriage in medieval France* (London, 1984), 28.

⁷² James A. Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), 283 and note.116: 'The obligation to provide sexual service at the demand of the other party was nearly absolute — according to Rolandus [Bolognese canonist fl. 1150], for example, if one party demanded the marital debt during times set aside for prayer, the other spouse was bound to oblige.'

⁷³ Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian society*, 281–88, 448–50.

⁷⁴ MacLehose, 'A tender Age', chapter 1, section 55: Muscio maintained that this milk 'could not provide sufficient nourishment' and that the mother should give her infant to a wet nurse 'until her complexion is made temperate'. On the content and transmission of Muscio's text (an abbreviation and reworking of material derived from the late antique physician Soranus of Ephesus) see Anne Ellis Hanson and Monica Green, 'Soranus of Ephesus: *Methodicorum princeps*', in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, part II, Band 37.2 ed. W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin, 1994), 968–1075.

⁷⁵ Ilet morta, see under Ilet in *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*, ed. Antoni Maria Alcover and Francesc de B. Moll (Palma de Majorca, 1968), <<http://dcv.iecat.net>>, accessed 21 December 2007.

⁷⁶ See Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia', documents nos 177 (15 days old), 207 (one month old), 176, 192 (two months old), 187, 255 (four months old).

⁷⁷ MacLehose, 'A tender age', chapter 1, section 60 and notes 138 and 139: Rhazes' *De curis puerorum*, *Passiones puerorum* and *Ut testator yprocras*.

⁷⁸ MacLehose, 'A tender age', chapter 1, section 70, note 160, citing from Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, chapter 6 subsection 4, 238: Ex bona autem dispositione lactis nutrimentalis, bona fit consistentia prolis, et converso, et ex corruptione sanguinis nutricis necessario laeditur corpusculum pueri vel infantis... I have completed his translation based on the original.

⁷⁹ Lull, *Blanquerna*, chapter 2, 13: sana en sa persona per tal que de sana let fos criat. *Blanquerna*, ed. Peers, 38. For late medieval Italian fathers and mothers, in Italy, it was the 'freshness' of the milk, that is, that it come from a woman a few months after parturition, that was the factor that mattered most. See James Bruce Ross, 'The middle-class child in urban Italy, fourteenth to early sixteenth century', in: *The history of childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York, 1974), 185–6 and Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood parents and milk parents', 140.

and with many children of their own but was interested in the good health and supply of milk only concerning the woman who nursed the infant: 'and the infant had a good wet nurse of good constitution, (who was from Catania) and nourished him abundantly.'⁸⁰

In addition to a stress on the nursing women's general good health, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, along with most medical authorities whose works circulated in later thirteenth-century Europe, held that for nursing women (mothers or wet nurses) an early pregnancy would harm both the foetus and the nursing.⁸¹ Writing around 1285, Aldobrandino of Siena claimed that a nursing woman (here the wet nurse) 'should not sleep with a man, since it is the thing which most corrupts milk... because a pregnant woman kills and destroys the child when she breastfeeds'.⁸² By the late thirteenth century then, although the medical authorities stressed that maternal breastfeeding was best were the mother to remain continent, they clearly and strongly advised against a mother nursing if she were going to recommence marital relations with her husband. The wet nurse was paid to provide uncorrupted milk and thus to abstain from sexual relations during the time period when she cared for the nursing. The married wet nurses of late medieval Barcelona often had to swear an oath this effect (with their hands on the gospels) as did their husbands.⁸³

Indeed in practice in medieval Iberia it was a commonly held belief that a wet nurse who engaged in sexual intercourse before weaning was liable to sour her breast milk and even to render it poisonous, killing the child she was feeding. From the twelfth century on law codes throughout Iberia prescribed very high penalties for wet nurses who spoiled their milk by engaging in sexual intercourse and whose infant charges died, even fining them for homicide.⁸⁴ The wet nurses were treated as if they had murdered the children — an expression of the anger, feelings of betrayal and injury which masters felt when they were unable to control their wet nurses' intimate relations. Upon being found pregnant, the municipal ordinances of late medieval Barcelona sought the financial ruin of the wet nurse, at the very least. She would lose her salary and also be fined 200 sous, while if caught her sexual partner had to pay 500. Such enormous sums were probably far beyond the means of such a woman, her husband or lover.⁸⁵ In the supremely misogynist *Spill o Libre de les dones*, the fifteenth-century Valencian physician Jacme Roig vents his spleen on all the incompetent and irresponsible wet nurses whose filthy habits and living produced unhealthy milk, which he believes, killed his son.⁸⁶ Fear of the sexuality of the wet nurse meant those who could afford it preferred to have the women who breastfed their children reside with them; in their own homes the wealthy master could supervise the wet nurse's behaviour and make certain that she was doing nothing which could affect the quality of her milk.⁸⁷ This is why, despite the religious and moral ambiguity, some members of the urban elite may even have favoured using their own slaves or those of a neighbour above any other wet nurse because they believed they could control the sexuality of these women.

Roig also blamed elite women's vanity for their reluctance to wet nurse.⁸⁸ Medical treatises in the vernacular did list remedies for those who wanted to make their breasts smaller and firmer (thus perhaps to counteract the effects of aging, pregnancy or breastfeeding), but these remedies are relatively

⁸⁰ *The chronicle of muntaner*, 642; *Quatre grans cròniques*, 907: E l'infant havia bona dida e ben complexionada, qui era de Catània, que el nodria molt graciosament.

⁸¹ MacLehose, 'A tender age', chapter 1, section 70.

⁸² MacLehose, 'A tender age', chapter 1, note 165, citing from *Le régime du corps*: et soi garder qu'ele ne gise a home, car c'est li cose qui plus corrunt le lai , et por cou qu'ele ne deviegne encainte, car femme encainte quant ele alaite tue et destrait les enfans.

⁸³ See Hernando i Delgado, 'L'alimentació làctia', 51, note 21: non agnoscam dictum maritum meum nec aliquem alium carnaliter, no. 256 (1 September 1399) and interim no agsocam carnaliter dictam uxorem meam, no. 2 (22 February 1300).

⁸⁴ Dillard, *Daughters of the reconquest*, 179. Homicide fines and exile, for those who could not pay, were mandated for Castilian wet nurses whose poisoned milk caused an infant's death.

⁸⁵ Teresa-Maria Vinyoles i Vidal, 'La mujer bajomedieval a través de la Ordenanzas Municipales de Barcelona', in: *Las mujeres medievales y su ámbito jurídico: il jornadas de investigación interdisciplinaria* (Madrid, 1983), 146.

⁸⁶ Michael Solomon, *The literature of misogyny in medieval Spain: the arcipreste de Talavera and the Spill* (Cambridge, 1997), 90.

⁸⁷ Klapisch-Zuber makes this point for Italy see 'Blood parents and milk parents', 136.

⁸⁸ Solomon, *The literature of misogyny*, 89. This is my interpretation of Roig's wife's statement that if she nurses her child her body will wither away.

few and far between in comparison to those concerning skin and hair.⁸⁹ It seems that a more important factor behind the practice of later thirteenth-century families to employ wet nurses thus was the desire of prosperous people to have a son; since infant mortality was high, they attempted to increase the number of live births by hiring wet nurses to breastfeed babies, leaving a wealthy wife free to become pregnant as often as she could. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has shown for the fifteenth-century that the marital fertility of elite Florentine women slowed when they had produced a sufficient number of sons.⁹⁰ Although breast-feeding does not inhibit fertility in all women, modern physicians have established beyond doubt that when nursing frequently (at least every four hours)⁹¹ the hormone prolactin, isolated in 1977, is secreted by mothers; and prolactin usually prevents conception for at least six months, if not longer. Since medieval children were breastfed for around two years, the natural spacing between births would thus be around two years and nine months.⁹² Women who did not feed their own children were able to get pregnant much sooner, with their children often a year or so apart in age.

Iconography of breastfeeding

Although overall consonant with canon law on marriage and received medical wisdom, to some degree the lay practice of breastfeeding still conflicted with the Church's programme of increased stress on the humanity of Christ and devotion to the Virgin since mother Mary was always believed to have nursed her child. Art served as a vehicle for the ecclesiastical hierarchy to influence the mores of the laity. All Christians attended churches where breastfeeding images were commonly used to convey religious ideas through sacred painting and sculpture. One of the most ubiquitous and powerful images of a breastfeeding mother was the lactating *Madonna*.

The iconography of the *Madonna lactans* was often intended to serve as a visual symbol of the Eucharist.⁹³ For the west during the high and later middle ages the eucharistic symbolism of the Virgin's breast followed a natural philosophical understanding of the tie between a mother and child. Thus the milk that nourished the Christ child was perceived as an analogue for the sacred blood that flowed through his veins. In later thirteenth-century Catalonia the ecclesiastical discourse enabled another reading of these images as well, one where the Blessed Virgin Mary's breastfeeding is linked to *caritas*, mercy and by extension to good motherhood. A survey of the surviving works of art makes the polyvalence of this potent image clear. The *lactans* (or *Mare de Déu de la Llet* in Catalan) was one of the most popular devotional and liturgical images of high medieval Iberia.

The *Madonna lactans* image was frequently and prominently encountered in illuminated manuscript, sculpture, fresco, wall and panel painting. By reviewing dozens of depictions of lactating *Madonnas* from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries of Iberian and northern Italian origin catalogued in the Princeton Index of Christian Art by cross-referencing the categories 'Virgin Mary and Christ Child,' and 'suckling' it became clear to me that the image also appeared in a variety of devotional situations. As pilgrims to Santiago de Compostella entered the great church they were met by Holy

⁸⁹ M. Monserrat Cabré i Pareit, 'La cura del cos femení i la medicina medieval de tradició llatina: Els tractats "De ornatu" i "De decorationibus mulierum" atribuïts a Arnau de Vilanova, "Tròtula" de mestre Joan, i "Flos del tresor de beutat," atribuït a Manuel Díez de Calatayud' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Barcelona, 1994), 247, 310 ('Tròtula' de mestre Joan de Reimbamaco, fifteenth century) and 375–6 ('Flos del tresor de beutat,' fifteenth century).

⁹⁰ See Christiane-Klapisch-Zuber, 'Le dernier enfant: fécondité et vieillissement chez les Florentines XIV^e–XV^e siècles', in: *Mesurer et comprendre: Mélanges offerts à Jacques Dupaquier*, ed. Jean-Pierre Barder, François Lebrun, and René Le Mée (Paris, 1993), 277–90 (I thank Monica Green for this reference). Valerie Fildes also suggests that the desire for larger families was linked to the aristocracy's employment of wet nurses (as early as the 1000s). Fildes, *Wet nursing*, 34.

⁹¹ See 'Consensus statement: breastfeeding as family planning method', *The Lancet*, 8621 (1988), 1204 cited in Avner Giladi, *Infants, parents and wet nurses: medieval Islamic views on breastfeeding and their social implications* (Leiden, 1999), 59.

⁹² For the natural spacing of births in a preindustrial European peasant population, where mothers nursed their own children see Dorothy McLaren, 'Marital fertility and lactation, 1570–1720', in: *Women in English society, 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London, 1985), 33.

⁹³ See Elizabeth S. Bolman, 'The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* revisited', in: *Coptic studies on the threshold of a new millennium II, proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, 27 August–2 September, 2000* (Leiden, 2004), 1177–8. Beth Williamson, 'Liturgical image or devotional image? The London *Madonna* of the firescreen', in: *Objects, images, and the word: art in the service of the liturgy*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, 2003), 306.

Mary suckling her child at the *Puerta de las Platerías*.⁹⁴ In thirteenth-century Iberian manuscripts devoted to the Blessed Virgin a scene with her breastfeeding her son was rarely omitted. During the later thirteenth century King Alfonso El Sabio ('the Wise') of Castile wrote a series of courtly devotional poems, with corresponding illustrations and music, entitled the 'Cantigas de Santa Maria', which includes matchless illustrations, six of which depict the nursing scene.⁹⁵ Under some circumstances popular devotion to the Virgin Mary as nursing mother was tied to conversion ideology in thirteenth-century Iberia. In *Cantiga* 46 an entire village of Muslims was converted by the miracle of the milk that poured forth from the breasts of a painted image of the *Madonna lactans*.⁹⁶ The lactating *Madonna's* protective and intercessory powers also account for her appearance on statutes of confraternities such as that of the Catalan S. Domènec de Tàrrrega along with the evangelists and archangels (see Fig. 1).⁹⁷ Altar frontals, not only those dedicated to the Blessed Virgin but to any saint male or female, were also commonly decorated with the nursing scene, as in the frontal of the hermitage and sanctuary of the *Mare de Déu* of Rigatell (originally thought to come from Betesa) from the diocese of Lleida in Catalonia during the second half of the thirteenth century (see Fig. 2) (indeed from the 1240s on throughout Europe local ordinances specified that images of the Virgin and Child had to be displayed in some artistic form in every parish church).⁹⁸

The use of the image of the Virgin lactans on altar frontals is particularly interesting. Altar frontals were painted panels that were used in celebrating the mass. There is still some debate as to the specific placement and use of these liturgical art objects. Based on northern French, English and Italian evidence, Beth Williamson has argued that an altar frontal served to focus the attention of the worshipper, while the priest was elevating the host with his back to the congregation, thus accentuating the liturgy.⁹⁹ In contrast, Manuel A. Castiñeiras González, conservator of Romanesque art in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona argues convincingly for the Catalan evidence that altar frontals were only displayed occasionally possibly on major feast days and were otherwise kept covered on the altars.¹⁰⁰ Whether hanging before the altar or laying upon it the Eucharistic associations of this iconography of the lactating Virgin thus aptly enhanced its function at a dramatic liturgical moment. The liturgical meaning of the iconography would have been most forcefully and clearly conveyed to the laity in an altar frontal like that of the *Mare de Déu* at Rigatell where the mother and child group are in a central position and are surrounded by images from the Blessed Virgin's life.

The Eucharistic associations with the lactating *Madonna*, although liturgically apt for an altar frontal, are not sufficient to explain her place in the related *Gia* altar frontal painted in Catalonia during the second half of the thirteenth century.¹⁰¹ This altar frontal is dedicated to St Martin of Tours. It comes from the second half of the thirteenth-century, and like the frontal of Rigatell it was created by a member of the Lleida school of painters and has a distinctive stucco effect in its background;¹⁰² it is currently housed in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona, (see Fig. 3). This painted panel is 100 cm tall and 146 cm broad.¹⁰³ The painter combined pigments with a silver paint that originally gave this

⁹⁴ Peter Bloch, 'Representations of the *Madonna* about 1200', in: *The year 1200: a symposium at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1975), 498.

⁹⁵ The index of Christian art, Princeton University includes six references when 'Virgin Mary and Christ Child' and 'suckling' are cross referenced for the *Cantigas*.

⁹⁶ *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, ed. Walter Mettmann, 2 vols (Vigo, 1981), vol. 1, 234–6.

⁹⁷ Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Cancilleria, Pergamins, Jaume I, 1970.

⁹⁸ Richard Marks, *Image and devotion in late medieval England* (Stroud, 2004), 61.

⁹⁹ Beth Williamson, 'Altarpieces, liturgy, and devotion', *Speculum*, 79 (2004), 341–406. See also Henk van Os, *Sienese altarpieces, 1215–1460. Form, content, function*, 2 vols (Groningen, 1984–90).

¹⁰⁰ I wish to thank Manuel A. Castiñeiras González for providing me with a copy of his article 'Catalan Romanesque painting revisited: the altar frontal workshops', before its appearance in print in *Spanish medieval art: recent studies*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Tempe and Princeton, 2007), 119–53.

¹⁰¹ For the altar frontal of *Gia* see 'Frontal de *Gia*', *Catalunya romànica*, 27 vols (Barcelona, 1984–98), vol. 1, 392–3; also the exhibition guides *Guia art romànic* ed. Eduard Carbonell i Esteller (Barcelona, 1997), 147 and Alessio Geretti, *Martino: un santo e la sua civiltà nel racconto dell'arte* (Milan, 2006), entry 11, 100.

¹⁰² For more on this workshop see Rosa Alcoy i Pedrós and Pere Beseran i Ramon, 'Els primers tallers trescentistes a Lleida', in: *L'art gòtic a Catalunya, vol. 1: Pintura: 'De l'inici a l'italianism'*, ed. Antoni Pladevall (Barcelona, 2005), 119–24.

¹⁰³ 'Frontal de *Gia*', 392–3.



Fig. 1. Statues of the Confraternity of S. Domènec de Tàrraga, second half of the thirteenth century, Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Cancilleria, Pergamins, Jaume I, 1970 (reproduced with permission of Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó).

altar frontal a lustrous appearance but have since cracked and fallen off the wooden base which now makes the work appear (incorrectly) as if it were never finished. The altar frontal of Gia was made in the central workshop supervised by the Bishop of Lleida. It and other frontals were sent out to the parishes in his diocese and then used by the parish clergy to instruct the laity, including in sermons.

The Gia altar frontal presents a complex iconographic programme. The saint himself stands in the centre of the altar frontal (since it was dedicated to him and most probably his relic was housed within the altar). St Martin, as bishop, is flanked by four scenes relating to his life. The right half of the frontal portrays St Martin's life and death as spiritual leader of his monks and bishop of Tours. (The saint holds a crozier in his right hand further signalling the nature of these portrayals). On the top right he is shown celebrating mass with two attendants; bottom right he is on his deathbed dispelling a vision of the Devil and attended by a tonsured monk and another man wearing a cloak.



Fig. 2. *Mare de Déu (Madonna lactans)* Rigatell, altar frontal of the hermitage and sanctuary (originally thought to come from Betesa), second half of the thirteenth century, Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (reproduced with permission from Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya).

The left half of the composition focuses on the saint's charity to his fellow human beings whom he, as the central figure, blesses with his left hand. On the top left is St Martin's famous conversion from his worldly life as a soldier, effected through two corporeal acts of mercy/charity (his clothing of the poor and visiting/healing of the sick). At the top left 'Jesus' (as the abbreviated caption reads above the figure) is depicted as part of the story of Martin tearing his cloak in order to clothe a naked beggar that features prominently in Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St Martin*. The bottom left is the focus of my discussion here. Here Martin is depicted with four other figures, two standing and two lying in bed. Three of the figures reach out to him so it is likely that they are the three people he raised from the dead. The fourth may well represent the mother at whose request he resurrected her dead child (one of the three others). To the right of this group is the *Mare de Déu de la llet*.

The presence of the Virgin *lactans* here has puzzled scholars. One art historian has been content to comment on the strangeness of inclusion of the Virgin in the group on the bottom left adding that the cult of the *lactans* must have been very popular indeed, or that maybe her inclusion reflected the importance of her statue at Compostella.¹⁰⁴ Another alludes to the reference to St Mary appearing in

¹⁰⁴ 'Frontal de Gia', 393.



Fig. 3. S. Martí (St. Martin), Gia in Alta Ribagorça, altar frontal of the parish church, second half of the thirteenth century, Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, (reproduced with permission from Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya).

a vision and conversing with the saint in the *Life of St Martin*, along with St Thecla and St Agnes, as it circulated in the Golden Legend (including the Catalan version).¹⁰⁵ This was a probable impetus for the Virgin's inclusion in the composition but not the defining reason I suspect (especially since the other saintly women are missing). Instead it seems that the inclusion of the *Mare de Déu de la Llet* here was not gratuitous or incidental, it served to convey both Eucharistic piety and to accent the importance of charity (*caritas*) or corporeal mercy. The Gia frontal's themes of mercy towards others were related to the intense charitable programme of the bishop of Lleida who was in charge of the workshop where it was made. He was in the process of endowing (and accepting donations to support) his building of a *pia almoïna*, an institution/charitable foundation to house and feed the poor.¹⁰⁶ Thus this work of art conveys a purposeful iconographic image tying motherly breastfeeding to good works that was used to instruct the laity in their devotions.

The association of the Virgin *lactans* with charity is manifest in the left side's composition. In the painting the adult Christ (representing the poor) and the Virgin (offering her breast to her child) are depicted diagonally. This displays their liturgical link. The intercessory role of the *Madonna* by means of her tie to her son is alluded to by her placement on one side of St. Martin with the devil on the other (coming from the story of St. Martin's deathbed vision of the devil).¹⁰⁷ The inclusion of the *lactans* in this complex group also provides a visual gloss on the nature of St. Martin's miracles. That is the Gia altar frontal *Madonna lactans* served to accentuate the saint's particular kindnesses to his fellow human beings when he was living in the world. For the thirteenth-century artist and parish audience in order to stress the saint's own life of loving service or active *caritas*, it made sense that the Blessed Virgin breastfeeding her son be included in the scene.

¹⁰⁵ *Guia art romànic*, 147. See Jacobus de Voragine, *Vides de sants rosselloneses*, ed. Charlotte S. Maneikis Kniazzeah and E.J. Neugaard, 3 vols (Barcelona, 1977), vol. 3, 295.

¹⁰⁶ On this structure in Lleida and its artistic program see Joan Sureda's entry no. 72 in the exhibition guide *Thesaurus/estudis: l'art als bisbats de Catalunya 1000–1800* (Barcelona, 1985), 108–9.

¹⁰⁷ Joan Sureda and Josefina Lluís i Lluís, *La Pintura romànica en Catalunya* (Madrid, 1981), 341–2.

The Marian imagery of the Gia altar frontal should have been experienced by the clergy and laity of the parish as a positive impression of female charity and good motherhood. Affectionate, natural images of childrearing that were inculcated in thirteenth-century parents often referred to the Virgin Mary and Christ child as 'cultural ideals'.¹⁰⁸ From c.1150 on, with Peter Lombard's *Four books of sentences* forming a key part of clerical training, lay people were increasingly instructed to look upon the marriage of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph as shaping their understanding of the nature of Christian marriage.¹⁰⁹ This idea was fully codified by Lull's older Catalan contemporary, the papal canonist Ramon de Penyafort (c.1180–1275) in his *Summa de matrimonio* c.1240.¹¹⁰ In thirteenth-century Catalonia the humanity of Christ was regularly preached to the laity and the six joys of the Virgin (including holding the Christ child in her arms — a veiled reference to breastfeeding?) were also a popular theme in devotional literature such as the *Doctrina pueril*.¹¹¹ To quote the 1320s Franciscan text 'The meditations on the life of Christ': 'How readily she [Mary] nursed Him, feeling a great an unknown sweetness in nursing this Child such as could never be felt by other women!'¹¹² Thus before leaving lay life, as a husband Lull would have heard his father confessor hold up the marriage of St Joseph and the Blessed Virgin as an ideal for him to emulate in his own union and holy Mary breastfed her son. Through this religious instruction the laity might even have been led to perceive that the ideal mother was one who nursed her child since the Blessed Virgin Mary's breastfeeding of the infant Jesus was such an important part of her heavenly motherhood.

Breastfeeding as a symbol of good upbringing was also increasingly employed in Christian art. By 1300 in the Mediterranean, beginning in northern Italy, a region from which many itinerant sculptors and fresco painters came to Catalonia,¹¹³ one of the most popular personifications of the virtue of charity (*caritas*) depicted her as a beautiful young woman, with flames issuing from her head or heart, or holding a heart, nursing a child or two children.¹¹⁴ The Church (*Ecclesia*), mother to all the faithful, was also sometimes depicted as a nursing woman.¹¹⁵ Grammar (*grammatica*) was illustrated as a nursing woman, with a small whip in one hand, since, as with *caritas* and *ecclesia*, individuals were thought of (metaphorically) as imbibing their knowledge, virtue and Christianity at the breasts of these allegorical figures.¹¹⁶ The depiction of feminine virtues, care for and moral education of children as nursing women along with certain depictions of the *Madonna lactans* conveyed an overall message that maternal nursing was a constructive, moral, female act.

¹⁰⁸ MacLehose, 'A tender age', Introduction. Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the middle ages* (New York, 1990), 57.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, 3rd edn, 3 vols (Grottoferata, 1971–81), vol. 3, 416. Cited in *Love, marriage and the family in the middle ages: a reader*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (Peterborough, Ontario, 2001), 174 (Book 4, distinction 28, 3:1).

¹¹⁰ Ramon de Penyafort was one of the most important canonists of the thirteenth century. He served as master general of the Dominican order, royal confessor to Jaume I of Aragon, author of the *Decretals* of Pope Gregory IX and official voice of the Vatican on marriage. See Ramon de Penyafort: *Summa on marriage*, trans. and with an introduction by Pierre Payer (Toronto, 2005), 1–3, for references to the marriage of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph see title II, articles 3, 15.

¹¹¹ Lull, *Doctrina pueril*, 114.

¹¹² Quoted in Megan Holmes, 'Disrobing the virgin: the *Madonna lactans*', in: *Picturing women in renaissance and baroque Italy*, ed. Geraldine Johnson and Sarah Matthews Grieco (Cambridge, 1997), 171. Of course in intra-ecclesiastical discourse male ecclesiastics regularly appropriated the language of maternal care and breastfeeding to themselves and their own purposes. For example, in speaking of the spiritual care he wished his followers to extend to each other St Francis joined many thirteenth-century holy men in employing the metaphor 'for if a mother loves and nourishes her son in the flesh, how much more zealously should one love and nourish one's spiritual brother?'. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as mother: studies in the spirituality of the high middle ages* (Berkeley, 1982), 110–59 and *Holy feast and holy fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley, 1987), 282–94.

¹¹³ Castiñeiras González, 'Catalan Romanesque painting revisited: The altar frontal workshops' argues convincingly that Catalan painters were well acquainted with Christian art from throughout the Mediterranean, Italian and Byzantine in particular.

¹¹⁴ Such as in the two mid fourteenth-century sculptures the marble sculpture in Milan, tomb of Peter Martyr, Church of Saint Eustorgio (flames from heart), and Florence, Tabernacle of Orsanmichele, Church of Orsanmichele (flames from head, one child, heart in her hand). See also Robert Freyhan, 'The evolution of the *caritas* figure in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11 (1948), 68–86. (I thank Michelle Duran-McClure for this reference.)

¹¹⁵ As in a sculpture of *Ecclesia* personified as a woman nursing two infants executed between 1302 and 1310, Pisa, pulpit, cathedral of Pisa.

¹¹⁶ See Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the grammar of the nursing body* (Notre Dame, 2003).

Saintly queens as lactating mothers

Ideals of good mothers as breastfeeding mothers can also be found in Iberian literature. Vernacular literature and royally commissioned history stressed the image of the good, beautiful and noble (human) mother, who suckled her own children. This *topos* originates in both hagiography and *chanson de geste*. Blessed Ida of Boulogne, mother of the heroes of the first crusade Godfrey de Bouillon, Baldwin, king of Jerusalem and Eustace III, count of Boulogne, became the quintessential saintly noble woman whose insistence upon feeding her infant sons at her breast resulted in their exalted moral character and chivalrous deeds. She was both the subject of hagiography and a character in the legend of the swan knight, a *chanson* which became linked to her son Godfrey de Bouillon. Ida's story may have entered Iberian literature as early as c.1100 because her close spiritual friendship with Bishop Osmund of Astorga (capital of Asturias).¹¹⁷

Indeed the image of the good queen mother nursing her illustrious son passed into Iberian chronicles.¹¹⁸ The *topos* of the queen as nursing mother appears in the royal chronicles in late thirteenth-century Castile. Queen Berenguela (1180–1246) is portrayed in a continuation of the Castilian national history, the *Primera cronica*, begun during the reign of Alfonso el Sabio (1221–84) and completed under Sancho IV by 1289 as feeding her royal son Fernando from her own 'breasts full of virtues'.¹¹⁹ Fernando's virtues as a king are attributed to this maternal care. Although by 1200 at the latest royal wet nurses were standard practice in Castile, Miriam Shadis has wondered if the break in the otherwise regular fecundity of Queen Leonor of Castile (1169–1214), wife of Alfonso VIII, after the birth of her sons Fernando (in 1189) and Enrique (around 1204) can be attributed to her having breastfed her sons but not her daughters. The two boys were her only sons to survive and no gifts to women described as their wet nurses are recorded whereas there are many such grants made to the nurses of the boys' sisters: the Infantas Berenguela, Blanca (Blanche de Castile) and Urraca.¹²⁰ If Leonor was one of a handful of women who was actually able to react to the moralising rhetoric concerning maternal breastfeeding by nursing her own sons, if not her daughters, she must be considered unusual.¹²¹

Conclusions and directions for future research

While the occasional Iberian queen might have been able to employ spiritual and medical beliefs and directives concerning the physical and moral benefits of mother's milk to very occasionally nurse her sons, maternal breast feeding seems increasingly not to have been the norm for women from the wealthy urban social ranks and upwards. Conflicting advice from physicians and canonists was enough to encourage wealthy lay people to employ wet nurses to increase their family sizes although the Virgin *lactans* was a potent image of good motherhood. The regular practice of wet nursing created a widespread demand for a limited supply of women with milk to nourish the children of others. Poor artisans

¹¹⁷ See Renée Nip, 'Godelieve of Gistel and Ida of Boulogne', in: *Sanctity and motherhood: essays on holy mothers in the middle ages* ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (New York, 1995), 211 and also Sally Vaughn, *St Anselm and the handmaidens of God. A study of Anselm's correspondence with women* (Turnhout, 2002).

¹¹⁸ By the second half of the thirteenth century, at the latest, the moral purity of a queen had become linked to her fulfilment of her primary role, providing an heir. In France the nature of the body of the queen, as wife of the king and mother to his heirs, was the subject of artistic representation. Kathleen Schowalter has argued based upon the illuminations in the Fitzwilliam Psalter which belonged to Marguerite de Provence that the purity of the queen's mind and the state of her soul, were suspect in the case of her inability to produce heirs. See Kathleen Schowalter, 'Seeing sin and salvation in a medieval queen's prayerbook', a presentation delivered at Villanova University on 23 March 2005 and 'Capetian women and their books: art, ideology, and dynastic continuity in medieval France' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2005).

¹¹⁹ *Primera crónica general de España que mando componer Alfonso el Sabio* ed. Ramon Menendez Pidal, 2 vols (Madrid, 1955), vol. 2, 754: tetas llenas de virtudes. I thank Miriam Shadis for this reference.

¹²⁰ Miriam Shadis, 'Women and court service in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Castile, León and Portugal', a presentation delivered at the session sponsored by the American Association for Research Historians of Medieval Spain, American Historical Association, Philadelphia, 6 January 2006.

¹²¹ As Ramon Muntaner's *Cronica* corroborates, see *Quatre grans cròniques*, 907 and John Carmi Parsons, "'Que nos in infancia lactauit": the impact of childhood care-givers on Plantagenet family relationships in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries', in: *Women, marriage, and family in medieval Christendom: essays in memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo, 1998), 289–24.

and peasants were pressured not to feed the children they bore but instead those of their betters. That these Christian women, many lawfully married — thus perhaps considered of good moral character, served as wet nurses is perhaps not surprising, but the rapacious demand also regularly meant that enslaved women, all of Muslim origin, did this work.

What I have begun to document then in this short essay is a contradictory set of imperatives within the ideological valourisation of breastfeeding in the medieval realms of Aragon. It was the effects of these contradictions that shaped the lives of the Christian mothers and enslaved wet nurses. Hundreds of as yet unexplored registers survive from the fourteenth-century before the Black Death in the Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales in Perpignan. These archives hold out the promise of a valuable opportunity to excavate the ways in which medical and social advice and theological discourses were lived out by the women whose bodies they policed, castigated, endorsed, and inducted into their own arguments. It is this further archival excavation upon which I am currently embarked.

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Rebecca Lynn Winer is an Associate Professor of History at Villanova University. Her research interest is in the social history of the Christian, Jewish and enslaved Muslim women of medieval Perpignan. She strives to place their history within the contexts of their families, communities and the wider gender system at play.