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- Images from Bridewell courtesy of Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Beckenham, Kent, England, UK.
- These, and further examples, are discussed in *Shakespeare and London* (OUP, 2018), Ch 5.

Black lives in early modern London

Othello: Her father loved me; oft invited me;

Still question'd me the story of my life,

From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,

That I have passed.

I ran it through, even from my boyish days,

To the very moment that he bade me tell it;

Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,

Of moving accidents by flood and field

Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,

Of being taken by the insolent foe

And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence

And portance in my travels' history:

Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,

Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven (*Othello*, 1.3.129-42)



The following slides show prosecutions of black people in early modern London, taken from the records of Bridewell Hospital.

Note: the following transcriptions and dates have been slightly modernised. Square brackets are used to indicate contractions. The term 'Mr' usually means 'Master', although *OED* dates 'Mister' back to as early as 1523.



Rose Browne, widow, and Elizabeth Kirkeman: '... Rose had divers s[er]vinge men blackamores and other p[er]sons ...' (15 January 1578)

Rose Browne widow and Elizabeth Kirkeman } sent in by m^r deputyes Hitchen for that Rose Browne is a bande
and a whore to the said Elizabeth and others Elizabeth sayeth
that the same Rose had divers s[er]vinge men blackamores and others
whom resorte to her house while this Elizabeth was dwell there and
such as would not deale wth the same Rose she prived them to deale
wth this Elizabeth / whereupon then this Elizabeth did gett the great
disreard wth disreard Elizabeth sayeth that the same Rose never

hath upon her it is affirmed by m^r deputyes Hitchen
and the constable that Rose is a very comen bande
and of evill fame and soe presented by the
wardemote enquest.

Transcription:

Rose Brown widow and Elizabeth Kirkman} sent in by Mr Deputy Hitchens for that Rose Brown is a bawde and a whore to the said Elizabeth and others Elizabeth sayeth that the same Rose had divers s[er]ving man blackamores and other p[er]sons resorte to her house while this Elizabeth dwelt ther and such as would not deale wth the same Rose she p[ro]cured them to deale with this Elizabeth / whereupon ther this Elizabeth did gett the great deseze [ie. disease] w^{ch} diseze Elizabeth sayeth that the same Rose nowe hathe upon her it is affirmed by Mr Deputy Hitchens and the Constable that Rose is a very comen bawde and of evill fame and soe presented by the wardemott enquest [ie. wardmote inquest].

‘Peter Peringoe a blacke amore here confesseth ...’ (15 May 1577)

Southwark 15 May 1577

Peter Peringoe
Peringoe
Marye
William

Peringoe a blacke amore here confesseth that in Joke he had
thrust of the body of one Marye William here present
to his face in one Savoyers house in Clarke Alley in
Byshopsgate on mondays last she denyeth it. She is
punished for that aswell by testimony of Richard Dobson
bede of the ward it is proved they were taken a bed together
as his confesseth confession appereth that it is true And
they saye she came to his bed.

Transcription:

Peter Peringoe a blacke amore here confeseth that indede he had thuse [the use] of the body of one Margerye Williams here p[re]sent to his face in one Sawyers house in Clerke Alley in Bishopsgate on Mondaye last she denyeth it. She is ponished* for that as well by testimony of Richard Dobson bedle of the warde it is proved they were taken a bedd together as his ~~confeseth~~ confession appereth that it is true / And they say she came to his bedde.

* Bridewell punished offenders with severe whipping.

Robert Everett and Barbary Moore (10 February 1599)

Robert Everett & Barbary Moore also Brethren
put into this house by George Hart Esq
Constable of St Andrews
The said Barbary being examined in her own sayd Everett hath not had time
and small knowledge of her bodye for saith that he hath had time and
small knowledge of her bodye three several tymes at her house of one Alice
Morrisse ffishers dwelling in Chiche Lane the said Everett being distressed in
that it is true and that he hath the said and small knowledge of her bodye
three or four tymes whereupon it was ordered that they shall be
punished and that the said Everett shall putt in sume to be appointed on
Saturday the ffourteenth of April. And was done accordingly.

Transcription:

Robert Everett and Barbary Moore al[ia]s Browne} sent into this house by George Isack the Constable of St Andrewes /

The said Barbary being exa[min]ed whether the sayd Everett hath not had thuse and carnall knowledge of her bodye she saieth that he hath had thuse and carnall knowledge of her bodye three several tymes at the house of one Alice Norrise fishwyfe dwelling in Chick Lane the said Everett being also exa[min]ed confesseth that it is trew and that he has had the use and carnall knowledge of her bodye three or foure tymes whereupon it was ordered that they shalbe both ponished and that the said Everett shall put in suretyes to appear on Saturday the fourtenth of Aprill w^{ch} was done accordingly /

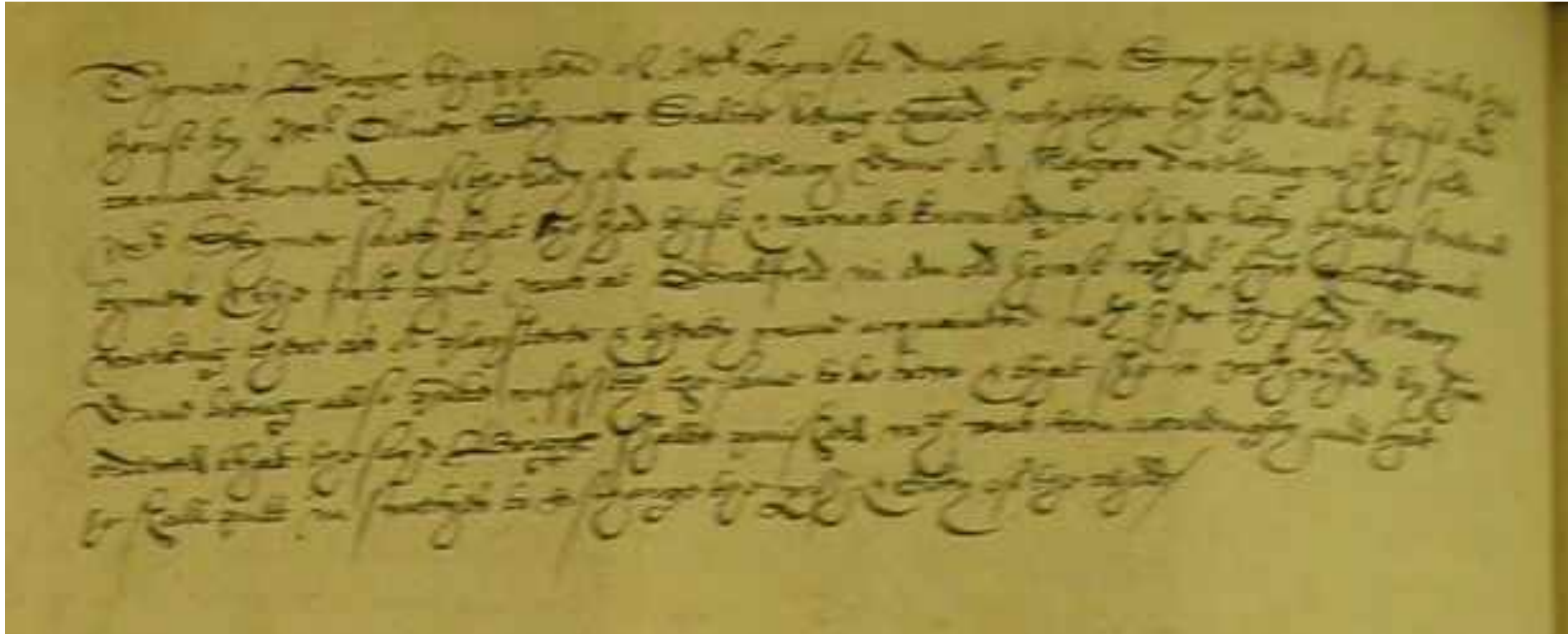
Robert Everett and Barbary Moore (13 February 1599)

This daye ~~the~~ Alice Morice Aisgryse dwelling in Church Lane brought
into this house by warrant for harboring Robert Everett and Barbary
Moore also Broome and suffered them to lye both together in one bed
having but one some and did sitte down in the same all night having a
candle lighted all night whylest they sayd Everett had the use of the
body of the sayd Barbary as both for fornication and such other whoredoms
they sayd Alice Morice was punished.

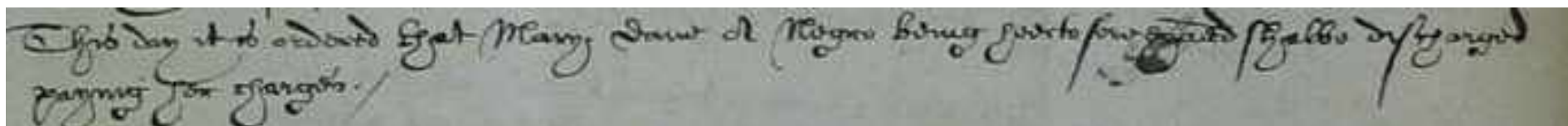
Transcription:

This day Alice Norise fishwyfe dwelling in Chick Lane brought into this house by warrant for harbouring Robert Everett and Barbary Moore al[ia]s Browne and suffered them to lye both together in one bedd having but one rome [ie. room] and did sit upp in the rome all night having A candell lighted all night whilst the sayd Everett had thuse of the body of the said Barbary / as by their former exa[min]acon appeareth whereupon the sayd Alice Norrise was punished

Mary Dane or Darne: '... one Mary Dane A Negro dwelling with the said Mr Skynner ...'
(14 July 1599)



'... it is ordered that Mary Darne a Negro being heretofore examined ...' (18 July 1599)

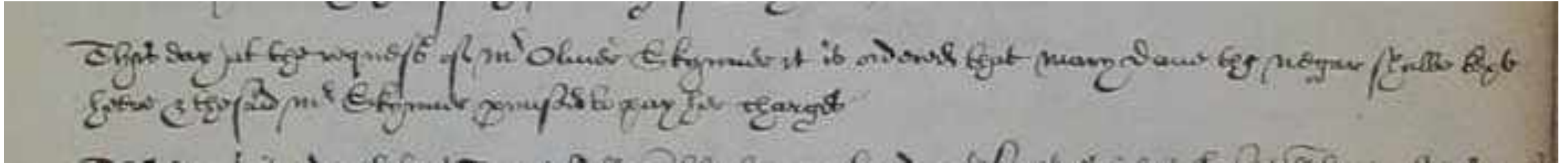


Transcriptions:

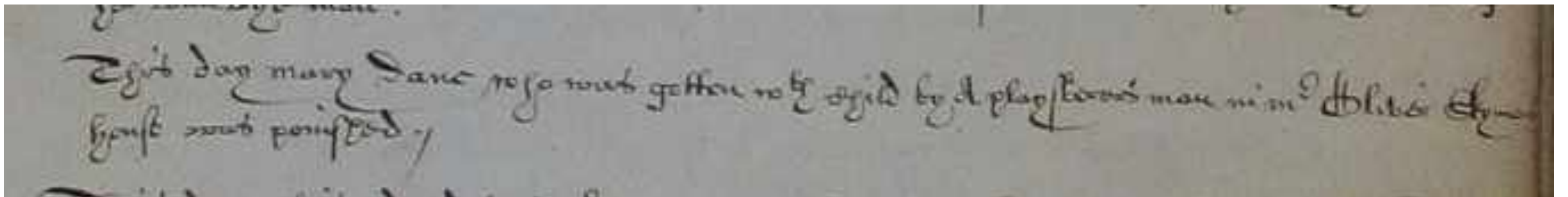
- Thomas Briggs the apprentice of M[aster] Hewster dwelling in Smithfield sent into this house by M[aster] Oliver Skynner Salter being exa[min]ed whether he had not thuse [the use] and carnal knowledge of the body of one Mary Darne A Negro dwelling with the said Mr Skynner saieth that he had thuse & carnall knowledge of her body three several tymes & the first tyme was at Stratford* in an old house when this ex[amin]at was working there as a playsterer & thereby came acquainted wth her the sayd Mary Darne being also p[rese]nte confesseth the same to be trew & that she is wth child by him ordered that the sayd Briggs shalbe ponished w^{ch} was don accordingly and that he shall putt in suretyes [a sum of money] to discharge the p[ari]she & citty of the child /
- This day it is ordered that Mary Dane a Negro being heretofore examine shall be discharged paying her charges [ie. for food].

*'Stratford' = Stratford, London.

Mary Dane or Darne: ' ... Mary Dane the Negar shall be kept here ... ' (20 February 1600)

A snippet of a handwritten manuscript in an old script, likely from a 17th-century English record. The text is written in dark ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper. It appears to be a continuation of a record, mentioning a person's name and some details about their status or location. The handwriting is cursive and somewhat difficult to decipher due to the age and style.

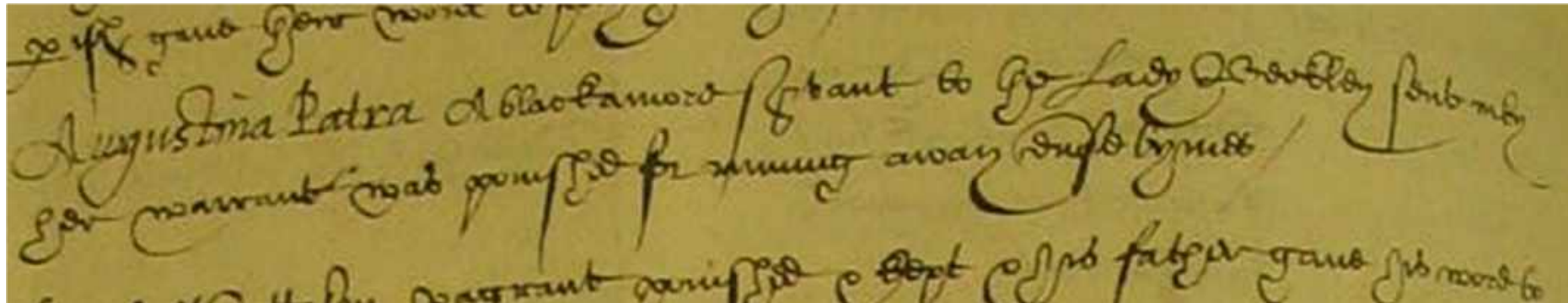
' ... Mary Dane who was gotten wth child ... ponished' (23 February 1600)

Another snippet of a handwritten manuscript, similar to the one above. It contains a record about a woman named Mary Dane, mentioning her pregnancy and the outcome. The text is written in the same cursive script on aged paper. The snippet shows the beginning of a sentence, with the name 'Mary Dane' clearly visible.

Transcriptions:

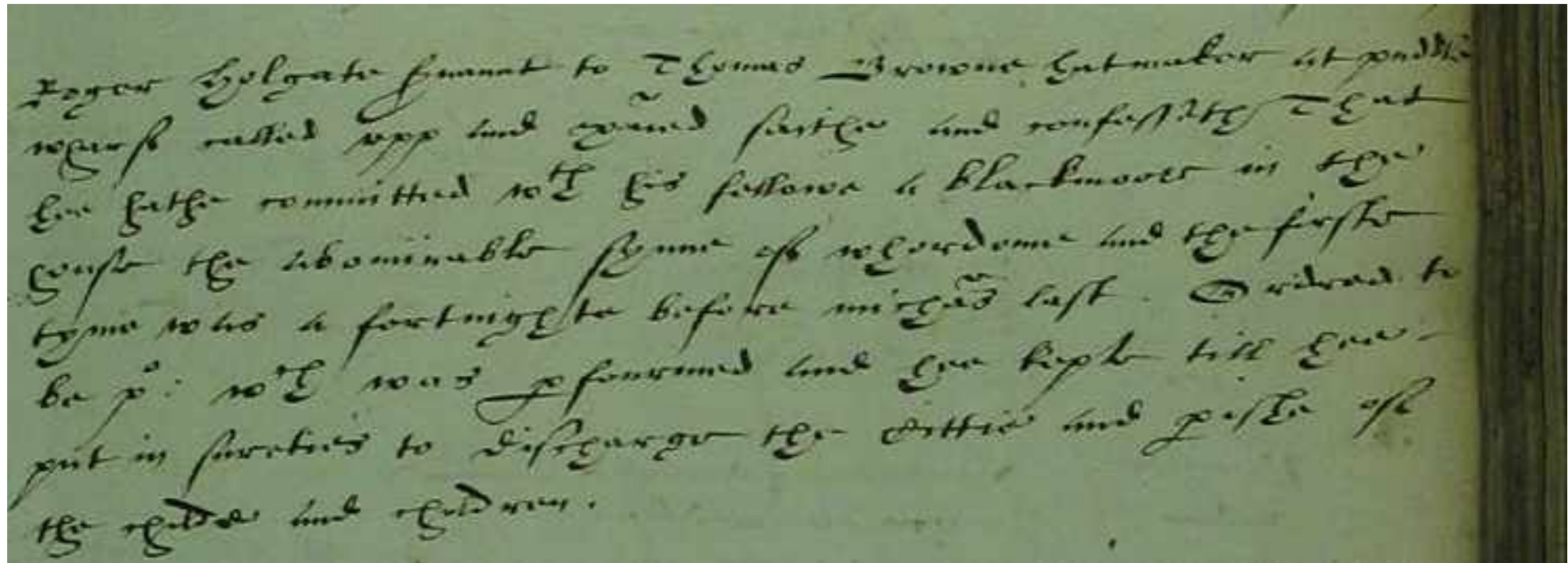
- This day at the request of Mr Oliver Skynner it is ordered that Mary Dane the Negar shalbe kept here & the said Mr Skynner p[ro]mised to pay her charges.
- This day Mary Dane who was gotten with child by a playsterers [ie. plasterers] man in Mr Oliver Skynners house was ponished.

‘Augustina Patra A blackamore servant to the Lady Berkley sent in by her warrant was ponished for running away divers tymes...’ (21 January 1601)



Augustina Patra A blackamore servant to the Lady Berkley sent in by
her warrant was ponished for running away divers tymes

'Roger Holgate servaunt ... hee hathe committed wth his fellowe a
blackmoore in the house ... the abominable synne of whoredome'
(5 January 1602/3)

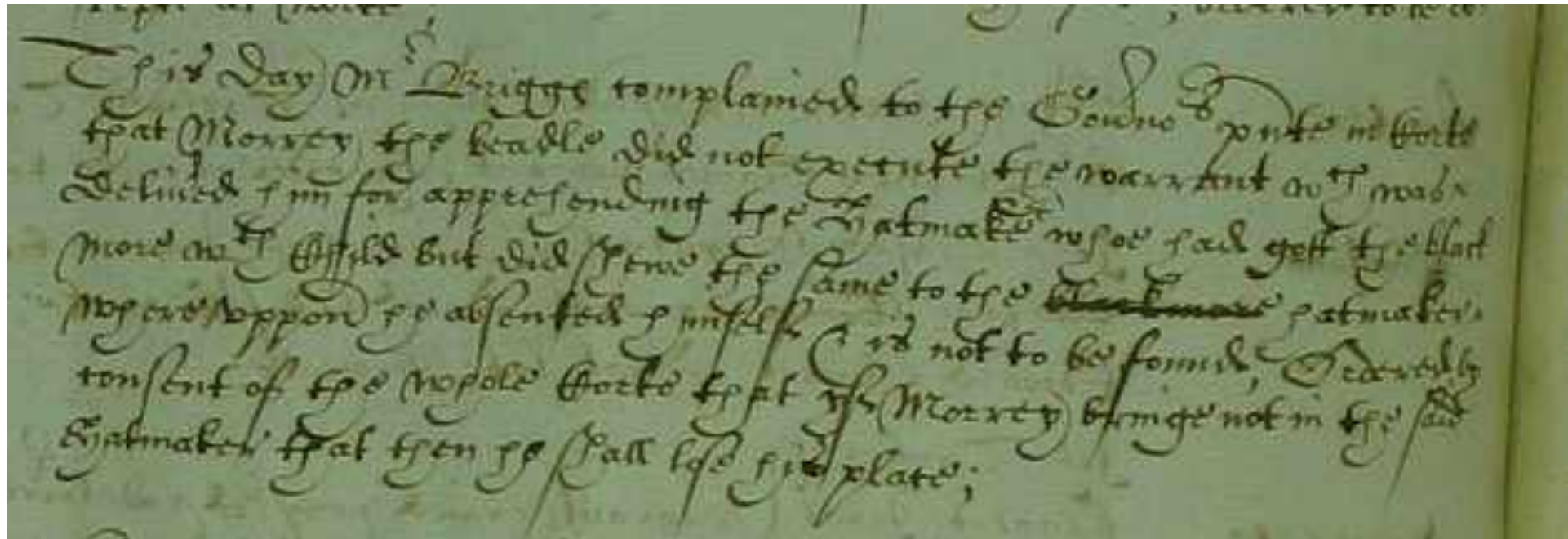
A photograph of a handwritten manuscript snippet on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in a cursive script from the early 17th century. It is a transcription of the text shown in the first block, with some variations in spelling and punctuation. The text is written in dark ink and is somewhat faded and blurry. The paper has a mottled texture and some staining. The text is written in a cursive script from the early 17th century. It is a transcription of the text shown in the first block, with some variations in spelling and punctuation. The text is written in dark ink and is somewhat faded and blurry. The paper has a mottled texture and some staining. The text is written in a cursive script from the early 17th century. It is a transcription of the text shown in the first block, with some variations in spelling and punctuation. The text is written in dark ink and is somewhat faded and blurry. The paper has a mottled texture and some staining.

Roger Holgate servaunt to Thomas Barrowe Gentelman at London
was called upp and examined further and confessed that
he hath committed wth his fellowe a blackmoore in the
house the abominable synne of whoredome and the first
time was a fortnight before m^{ch} last. And was to
be p^o: wth was p^o: and hee kept till hee
put in shewes to discharge the crime and p^o: of
the crime and shewes.

Transcription:

Roger Holgate s[er]vaunt to Thomas Browne hatmaker at Puddle Wharf called upp and ex[amin]ed saithe and confesseth that he hath committed with his fellow a blackmooer in the house the abominable synne of whoredome and the firste tyme was a fortnight before Mich[aelm]as last. Ordered to be p^o[nished] w^{ch} was p[er]formed and hee kept till hee put in sureties to discharge the Cittie and p[ar]ishe of the childe and children

'... the hatmake^r whoe had gott the black more wth child ...'
(9 January 1604/5)

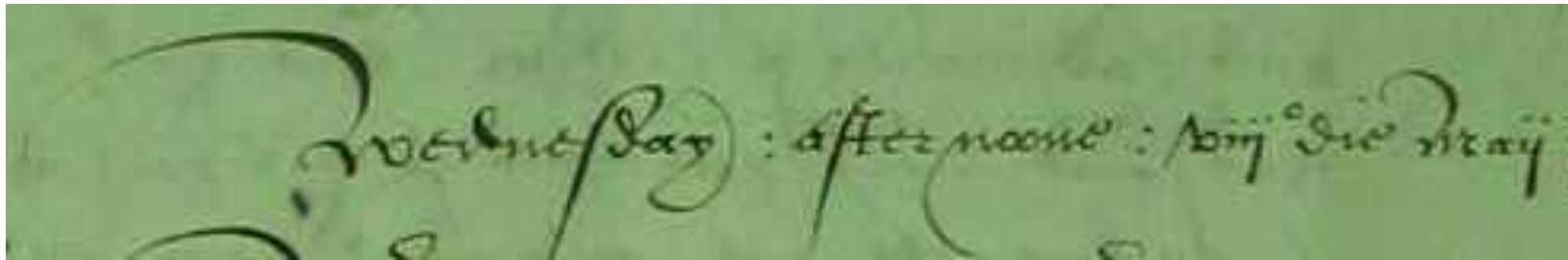


This Day Mr. Drigge complained to the Court of the City of London
that Morrey the headle did not execute the warrant out of the Court
Delivered him for apprehending the Hatmaker whose said child he had
more and the said child but did send the same to the Hatmaker's
whereupon he absented himself and did not to be found, and
consent of the Mayor and the Court that the said Morrey bring not in the said
Hatmaker that then he shall lose his plate;

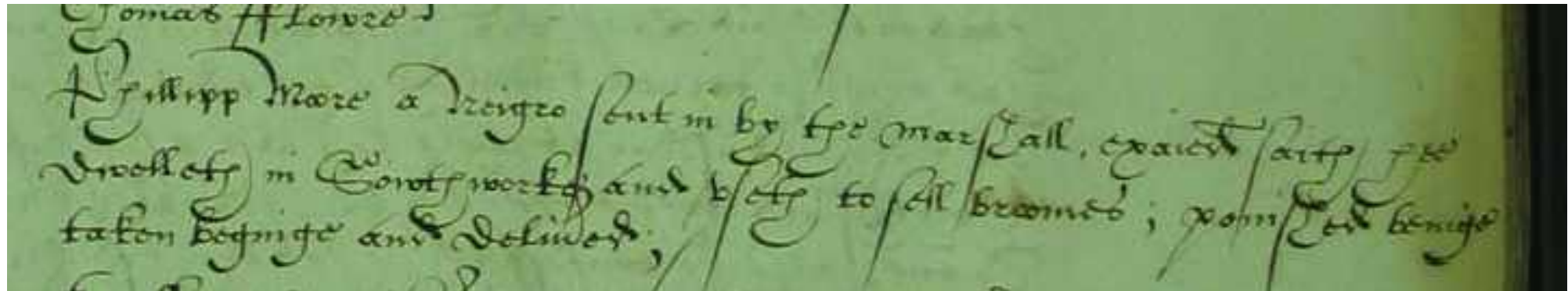
Transcription:

This day Mr Briggs complained to the Gov[ernor]s p[re]sent in court that Morrey the Beadle did not execute the warrant was delivered him for apprehending the hatmaker whoe had gott the black more wth child but did show the same to the ~~blackmore~~ hatmaker whereupon he absented himself & is not to be found, Ordered by consent of the whole Corte that yf Morrey bring not in the said hatmaker that then he shall lose his place

‘... Philip Moore a Neigro sent in by the marshall ... Hee dwelleth in Southwarke and useth to sell brooms’ (8 May 1605)



Wednesday: after noone: vij^e die May

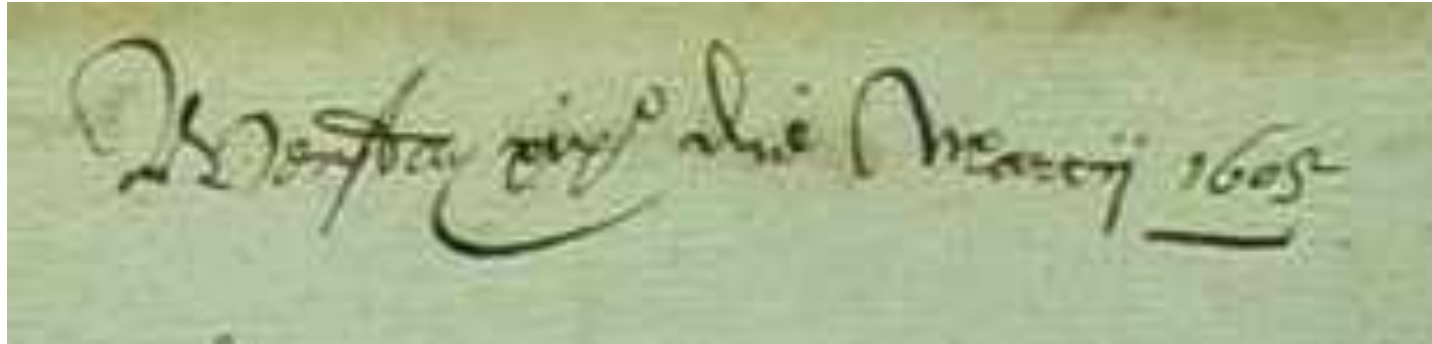


Thomas Hovver
Philip Moore a Neigro sent in by the marshall, exaied said he
dwelleth in Southwarke and useth to sell broomes; promised to be
taken by night and delivered;

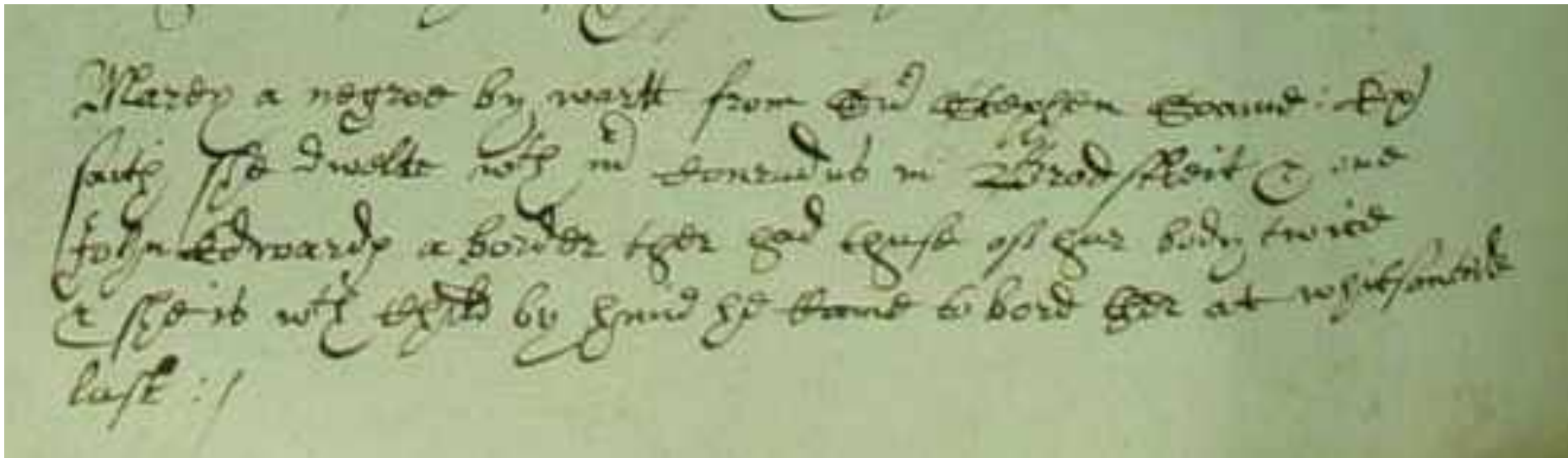
Transcription:

Philip Moore a Neigro sent in by the Marshall exa[min]ed saith hee dwelleth in Southwarke and useth to sell broomes; ponished being taken begging and delivered

‘... Marey a negroe by warrantt from Sir Stephen Soames ...’ (19 March 1605)



Marey 1605

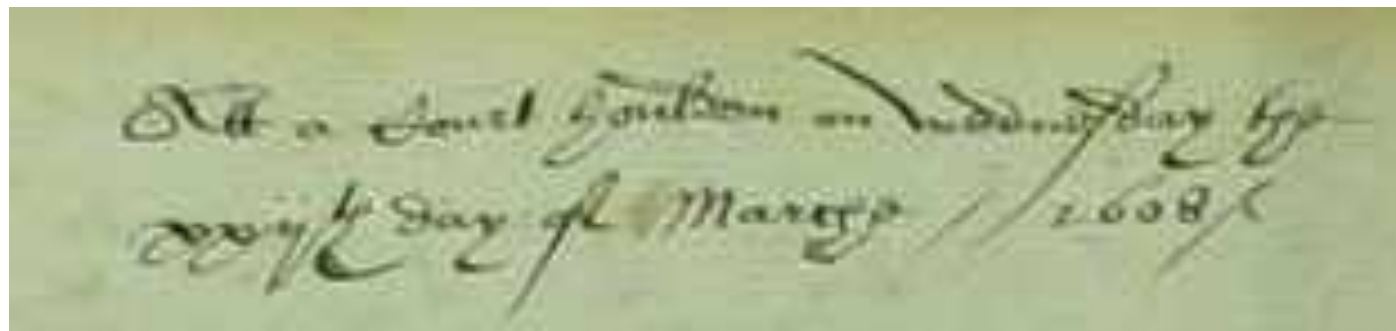


Marey a negroe by warrant from Sir Stephen Soames: by
said Sir Soames with me concluded in Broad Street & me
John Edwards a Justice of the Peace for the County of Middlesex
& he is with us by him of the County of Middlesex at
last: /

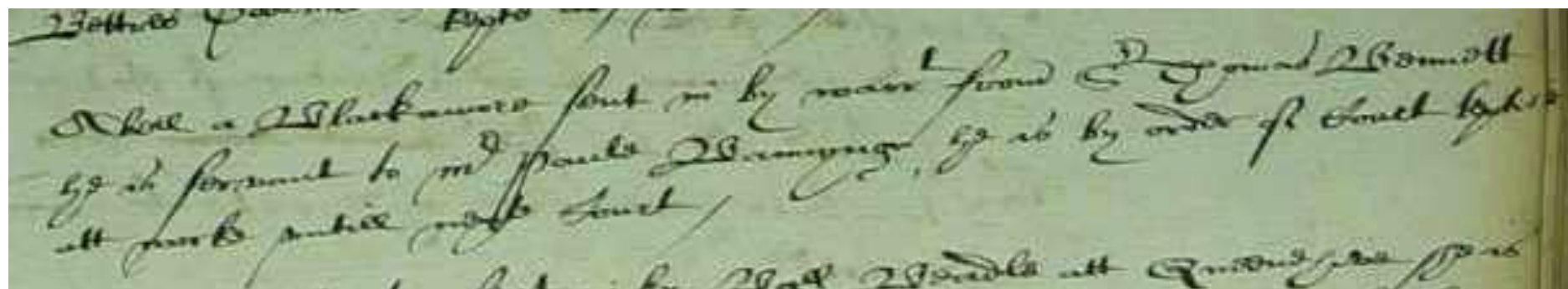
Transcription:

Marey a negroe by warr[an]t from Sir Stephen Soame[s] ex[amined]
saith she dwelt wth Mr Conradus in Bred Street & one John Edwardes a
border [ie. boarder] ther had thuse of her body twice & she is wth child
by him he came to bord ther at Whitsontide last

'Abell a Blackamore ... he is servant to master Paule Bannynge ... (22 March 1606)



A short sentence in Wednesday by
right day of March 1608



Abell a Blackamore sent in by master from Edward Bonnell
by the servant to master Paule Bannynge, by the order of the court
at the public house

Transcription:

Abell a blackamore sent in by warr[an]t from Sir Thomas Bennett he is servant to Mr Paule Bannyng he is by order of court kept at work until next Court

‘... Rachel Moore a Blackamore brought in ...’ (21 October 1609)

A close-up of a handwritten document in cursive script. The text reads: "At a Court & session on Saturday the eighth day of October 1609". The ink is dark on a light-colored, slightly aged paper.

A close-up of a handwritten document in cursive script. The text reads: "Rachel Moore a Blackamore brought in from Mr Deputy Wyatt is by order of court delivered to Ball Beadle". The ink is dark on a light-colored, slightly aged paper.

Rachel Moore a Blackamore brought in from Mr Deputy Wyatt is by order of court d[elivere]d to Ball Beadle.

‘... John a Blackamore brought in ...’ (28 March 1610)

At a Court holden on Wednesday
the xxijth day of March 1610

in p^{re}sen^{ce}
John a Blackamore brought in from Constable Bonow in Fleetstreet
by Justice Maister is by order of Court at
house of Gaolers a poor man formerly with a diller in his hospital being
discharged is by order of Court & carried out by Dutty to the Gaol
Hospital for cure
A m^{rs} Harbottle brought in a child brought in by Doctor

Transcription:

John a Blackamore brought in from Constable Beines [ie. Banes] in Fleet Streate by Jackson Warder is by order of Court d[elivere]d

What was the official attitude towards black people?

- 1601 – Negroes and Blackamores. – Whereas the Queen's Majesty is discontented at the great number of 'negars and blackamoores' which are crept into the realm since the troubles between her Highness and the King of Spain, and are fostered here to the annoyance of her own people ... In order to discharge them out of this country, her Majesty hath appointed Caspar Van Zenden, merchant of Lubeck, for their transportation ... (*Tudor Royal Proclamations*).

A letter to one of Elizabeth I's most important ministers in 1602

Dr Julius Caesar to Sir Robert Cecil (12 July 1602):

‘I have persuaded the merchants trading to Barbary, not without some difficulty, to yield the charges of the Moors lately redeemed out of servitude by her Majesty's ships, so far as may concern their lodging and victuals, till some shipping may be ready to carry them into Barbary.’

A different perspective from Spanish Dominican friar and Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas (1542)

Of the colour of the Indians.



Of the marueplous thynges that god bleeth in the composition of man, is colour: whiche doubtlesse can not bee conydered withowte great admiration in beholding one to be whyte and an other blacke, bringe coloures vntrelye contrary. Sum lyke wyle to be yelow whiche is betwene blacke and whyte: and other of other colour as it were of dyuers liures. And as these colour are to be marueyled at, euen so is it to be considered howe they dyffer one from an other as it were by degrees, forasmuche as sum men are whyte after dyuers sortes of whytensse: yelow after dyuers maners of yelow: and blacke after dyuers sortes of blackensse: and howe from whyte they go to yelow by discoloryng to browne and redde: and to blacke by a the colour, and marrey sumwhat lyghter then blacke: and tawnye lyke vnto the west Indians which are all together in general eyther purple, or tawnye lyke vnto sodde cuppes, or of the colour of chestnutes or olyues: which colour is to them natural and not by theyr goynge naked as many haue thought: albeite theyr nakednesse haue sumwhat helped therunto. Therfore in lyke maner and with suche diuersitie as men are com: monly whyte in Europe and blacke in Affrike, euen with like varietie are they tawnye in these Indies, with dyuers degrees diuersly inclynge more or lesse to blacke or whyte. No lesse maruayle is it to conyder that men are whyte in Siuile and

How colour
dyffer by de-
grees.

The colour
of the west
Indians.

Dyues sortes
of whyte and
blacke.

From:
*A Short Account of the
Destruction of the
Indies* (printed 1552).

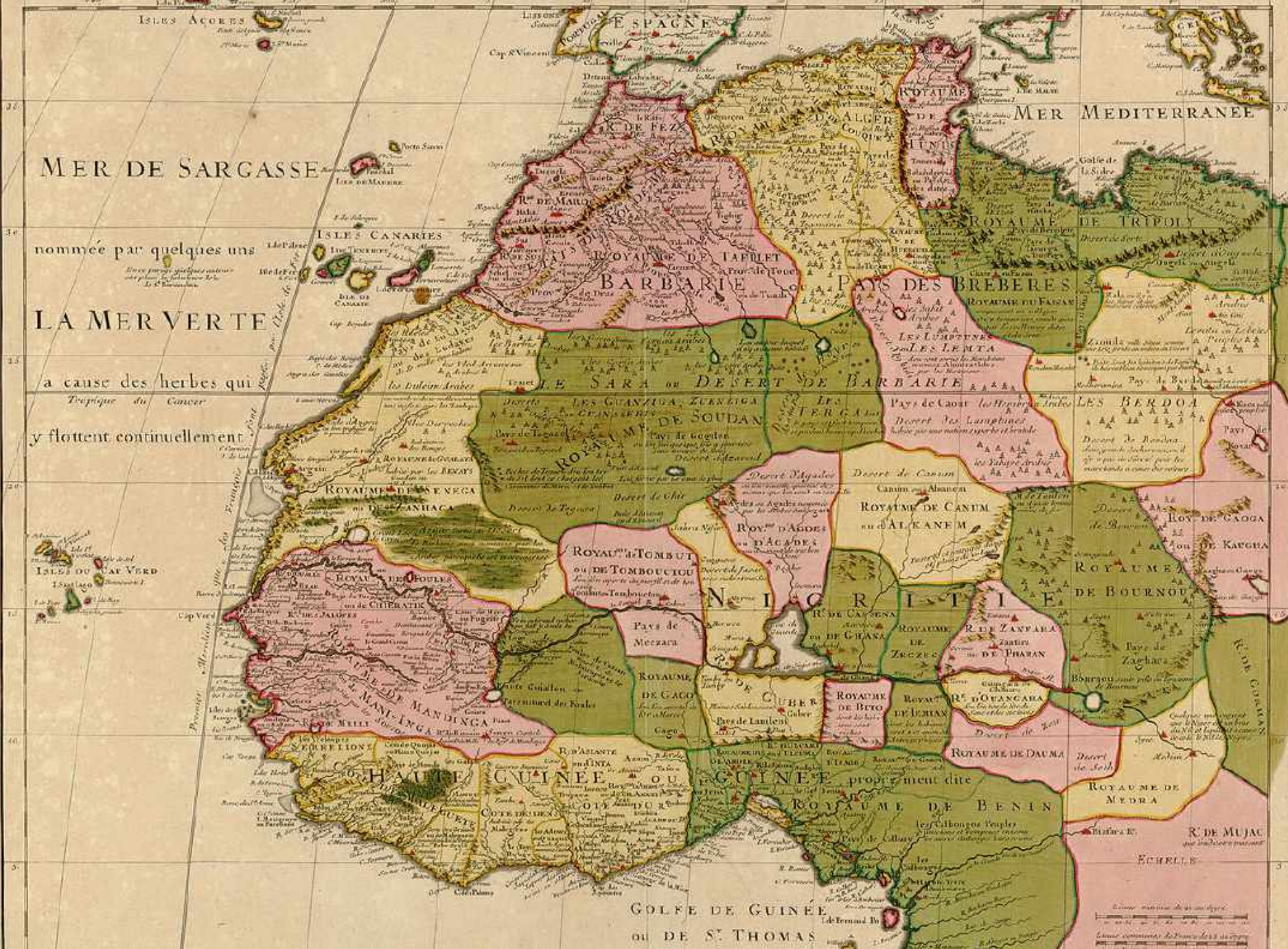
Note: Las Casas' case for
the equality of
indigenous peoples led
to the New Laws of 1542
and the Valladolid
Debate of 1550-1.

Tasks: A, B & C

A: Shakespeare, in *The Tempest*, has Prospero say,

I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt;

Using the following map, locate the main area designated 'Barbary', and find 'the green sea'. Why was it so called? Where is Africa referred to elsewhere in the play?



Where was
'Barbary'?

Task A

Task B: Make notes on what this sonnet says about colour and beauty.

Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil
& Stella*, VII

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
In colour black why wrapt she beams so bright?
Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,
Frame daintiest lustre, mix'd of shades and light?
Or did she else that sober hue devise,
In object best to knit and strength our sight;
Lest, if no veil these brave gleams did disguise,
They, sunlike, should more dazzle than delight?
Or would she her miraculous power show,
That, whereas black seems beauty's contrary,
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?
Both so, and thus, she, minding Love should be
Plac'd ever there, gave him this mourning weed
To honour all their deaths who for her bleed.

Task C: How does this sonnet by Shakespeare (No. 127) compare with Sidney's poem on the topic of colour?

Shakespeare, Sonnet
127

In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame:
For since each hand hath put on nature's power,
Fairing the foul with art's false borrow'd face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace.
Therefore my mistress' brows are raven black,
Her eyes so suited; and they mourners seem
At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Slandering creation with a false esteem:
Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says, beauty should look so.

Further resources on black lives in early modern England

- Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives: Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).
- Imtiaz Habib, 'The Resonables of Boroughside, Southwark: an Elizabethan Black Family Near the Rose Theatre', *Shakespeare*, 11 (2): 135–15.
- Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld, 2017).
- Roslyn Knutson, 'A Caliban in St. Mildred Poultry' in Tetsuo Kishi, Roger Pringle, and Stanley Wells (eds.) *Shakespeare and Cultural Traditions* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 110-26.
- Matthew Steggle, 'Othello, the Moor of London: Shakespeare's Black Britons' in Robert C. Evans, (ed.) *Othello : a critical reader*. Arden Early Modern Drama Guides (London, Bloomsbury, 2015), 103-124.