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Queen Charlotte Sophia

Queen Charlotte was the wife of the English King George III (1738-1820) and grandmother to Queen Victoria. She was a direct descendant of a black branch of the Portuguese Royal House, Margarita de Castro y Sousa. Queen Charlotte's African ancestry was solved as a result of an earlier investigation into the black magi (the biblical 'wise men' from the East) featured in 15th century Flemish paintings. Two art historians had suggested that the black magi people featured were actual people of the time (since the artist, without seeing them, would not have been aware of the subtleties in coloring and facial bone structure of quadroons or octoroons, which these figures invariably represented). Enough evidence was accumulated to propose that the models for the black magi were, most probably, members of Portuguese de Sousa family.

Six different lines can be traced from English Queen Charlotte back to Margarita de Castro y Sousa, in a gene pool which because of royal inbreeding was already minuscule, thus explaining the Queen's unmistakable African appearance.

The Negroid characteristics of the Queen's portraits certainly had political significance since artists of that period were expected to play down, soften, or even remove altogether the "undesirable" characteristics in their subjects' faces. Sir Allen Ramsey was the artist responsible for the majority of the paintings of Queen Charlotte; his



representations of her were the most undoubtedly African of all her portraits. Ramsey was an anti-slavery intellectual of his day. He also married the niece of Lord Mansfield, the English judge whose 1772 decision was the first in a series of rulings that finally ended slavery in the British Empire.

It should be noted as well, that by the time Sir Ramsey was commissioned to his portrait of the Queen, he was already, by marriage, uncle to Dido Elizabeth Lindsey, the black grand niece of Lord Mansfield.

From a brief look at the social awareness and political activism at that level of English Society, it would not be surprising in the Queen's negroid physiognomy was of significance to the Abolitionist movement.

Potentially, the most literary of these allusions to her African appearance, however, can be found in the poem penned to her on the occasion of her wedding to George III and the Coronation celebration

that immediately followed:

*Descended from the warlike Vandal race,
She still preserves that title in her face.
Tho' shone their triumphs o'er Numidia's plain,
And Alusian fields their name retain;
They but subdued the southern world with arms,
She conquers still with her triumphant charms,
O! Born for rule, -to whose victorious brow,
The greatest monarch of the north must bow!*