

BETWEEN SERVICE TO THE KING AND THE BLACK LEGEND: ÁNGEL DE COSTAFORT (FL. 1362–1366), DOCTOR TO CHARLES II OF NAVARRÉ

IZMEĐU SLUŽBE KRALJU I CRNE LEGENDE: ÁNGEL DE COSTAFORT (1362. – 1366.), LIJEČNIK KARLA II. NAVARSKOG

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SUMMARY

At the trial of Jacques de Rue, the chamberlain of King Charles II of Navarre, after he was arrested in France (March 1378), we learn that the doctor Ángel de Costafort was implicated in several of the king of Navarre's plans to poison people. The credibility of the testimonies given in this trial is questionable due to the use, or not, of torture, a fact about which historians disagree. Besides Costafort's personal biography, constructed from the scant documentation conserved in the Royal and General Archive of Navarre (Pamplona, Spain), he is linked on the basis of his signature and personal seal to the practice of alchemy.

Keywords: Ángel de Costafort, Charles II of Navarre, fourteenth century, medicine, poisons, alchemy

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BIOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS

The physician (*phísico*) Ángel de Costafort, implicated in some of the instances of poisoning that were attributed to King Charles II of Navarre, has not gone unnoticed by historians (Honoré-Duvergé, 1936, pp. 369-373; Castro, 1967, pp. 67-71; Serrano Larráyo, 2004, p. 34; Narbona Cárceles, 2008, pp. 33-47; Pindard, 2013, 549-574; Ramirez de Palacios, 2015, pp. 189, 363-365, 481; García Arancón, 2017, p. 180). Based solely on the little information about him in the documents conserved in Navarre, his life and work would probably not have aroused so much interest. The first mention of him – “Maestre Ángel, físico” – appears in late February 1362, when the king reimbursed him with four pounds and ten shillings (*sueldos*) carlines for the expenses he had incurred during 15 days in his service.¹ We know nothing about his duties, but the king must have liked the results because on 16 April, “aprobada la ciencia, lealdat et suficiencia” (his knowledge, loyalty and competence having been confirmed), he granted him an annual allowance of 40 pounds, plus the corresponding daily perquisites for his upkeep, and a mount, for the “bonos et agradables serviçios ata el día de hoy a nos por eill fechos, et esperando que en el serviçio nuestro mejor continuará d’aquí adelant” (good and pleasant services to us performed by him up to now, and hoping that he will remain in our service in the future). We now find out that as well as practising medicine, he was a master of arts – “maestre Dánel de Costafort, físico et maestro en artes”.² One must assume that Costafort was university-trained although he had not yet obtained his degree in medicine, perhaps due to financial difficulties, or perhaps because of others that the king of Navarre’s support enabled him to overcome. This is reflected in November 1362 when the king paid him 73 pounds, 19 shillings and 11 deniers for his expenses while travelling to Salamanca and back for the purpose of graduating in arts and medicine at the university.³ The documentation is not precise with regard to his arts degree. If he had it before going to Salamanca, the subsequent reference to his graduation in this discipline is unnecessary (Honoré-Duvergé, 1936, p. 371). The fact is that after he returned from Salamanca Costafort began to be referred to as a doctor or master of medicine: “maestre Ángelo de Costoforo, maestro

¹ Archivo Real y General de Navarra (= AGN), Comptos Documentos (= C.D.), cajón (= caj.) 14, n^o 90, 8. At 6 shillings per day. Added to the 4 pounds and 10 shillings were a further 20 shillings, so the total received was 110 shillings (AGN, Comptos Registros (= C.R.), 1st Series (= 1^a S.), n^o 99, folio (= fol.) 153r).

² AGN, C.D., caj. 17, n^o 90, 2. On 6 October he was again paid 27 pounds “por los serviçios que fechos le ha ata agora” (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 105, fol. 161r).

³ AGN, CD, caj. 15, n^o 76, 3.

en medicina” (Master Ángel de Costoforo, master of medicine) or “maestre Dángel de Costofor, físico, maestro en artes et doctor en medezina” (Master Dángel de Costofor, physician, master of arts and doctor of medicine).⁴

The brief amount of time he spent in Castile before returning to Navarre leads us to think that Costafort did not study all the medical subjects in Salamanca before receiving his doctorate. With regard to the obtainment of university degrees, I think there are two possibilities. Firstly, he had already done the necessary courses, or many of them, at another university before he arrived in Navarre. After presenting the documents certifying his studies in Salamanca, he either did only those that he still needed or went straight on to do the examinations in order to graduate as a doctor.

Secondly, he used his connections with the king of Navarre in order to take the examination without the need to present documents certifying his studies. His experience as a physician in the service of the king of Navarre was his best reference.⁵ It is, however, interesting that Charles II should have sent one of his doctors to graduate at a renowned university regardless of the good reputation that accompanied him. This is an obvious example of the process of medicalisation in medieval society that spread all over Western Europe, whereby the doctors who enjoyed the greatest prestige had previously studied at university. In Navarre, despite the kings’ gradual interest in having university-trained doctors, the paltry number of this type of healer, as well as the absence of universities, meant that Jewish doctors (physicians and surgeons) became important in health care until they were expelled in the late fifteenth century.⁶

As requested by Costafort, in January 1363, the king excused the spice merchant from Estella, Miguel Pérez, from paying his share, five florins, of the “ayuda de los deçen florin” (ten florin tax [*ayuda*]),⁷ a clear example of the king’s appreciation of him. In this petition, we can sense a certain degree of friendship and, why not, a professional relationship between them. We know in some detail that Costafort, together with the king’s surgeon Bran-

⁴ 25 January 1363 (AGN, C.D., caj. 15 n^o 9, 2) and 28 November 1363 (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 121, fol. 200v).

⁵ Not infrequently, the intervention of certain authorities – monarchs and popes – paved the way for their protégés to obtain the university qualification (Amasuno Sárraga, 2002, p. 170).

⁶ On the elites’ interest in gaining access to university-trained physicians in the Hispanic territories, outstanding for the Crown of Castile is the study by García Ballester (2001, pp. 200-204); and for the Crown of Aragon, those by McVaugh, (2002, pp. 78-87), and Ferragud (2019, pp. 139-141). On the situation in the kingdom of Navarre, see Serrano Larráyo, 2004, pp. 32-42.

⁷ AGN, C.D., caj. 15 n^o 9, 2.

caleón and the royal apothecary Aubertín, left Olite for Pamplona to treat Guillem de Braquemont “qui iazía enfermo” (who was sick). He stayed there from Friday 21 April to the following Tuesday.⁸ His good work meant that on 1 June, he was appointed the king’s personal physician, with an annual salary of 200 florins.⁹ The paucity of the documents about his other medical activities makes it impossible to say much more. At the end of the month, he received eight pounds and 18 shillings “por fazer ciertas cosas de su offiçio poral seynnor rey (...) et por otras cosas necessarias a su offiçio” (for doing certain things associated with his profession for our lord the king (...) and other things necessary in his profession).¹⁰ We also know that on that same day, and then in the middle of October, the abbot of Falces was paid 27 florins for a mule and 77 pounds, 13 shillings and 10 deniers for several furs, respectively, that were taken from him and presented to the royal physician as a gift.¹¹ On 27 October the king ordered the treasurer of the kingdom to pay him the 200 florins assigned annually to him as a pension, something that, for reasons unknown, the latter refused to do.¹²

Between 1364 and 1366, Ángel de Costafort continued to receive the emoluments for his medical work, although the sources are rather vague. On 14 June 1364, he received 20 florins “pora ciertas medezinas” (for certain medicines), a sum that must be added to the 13 pounds paid to him on 15 April 1365 that were still outstanding.¹³ On 25 July, he was again paid 13 pounds for spices and medicines that he had bought for the king and “gentes de su casa” (members of his household).¹⁴ In those years, the payments of allowances and pensions were continuous, and the physician’s services were very much appreciated: his pension rose to 300 florins that year.¹⁵ After 17 March 1366, he ceased to appear on the payroll of the king’s Royal Household, where he was paid eight shillings a day. However, on 17 April, he was granted 50 pounds (32 pounds and 10 shillings) for accompanying the king to the *Ultrapuertos* (the other side of the Pyrenees).¹⁶ This is when Costafort disappears from the ac-

⁸ AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 107, fol. 83v.

⁹ AGN, C.D., caj. 17, n^o 15, 2.

¹⁰ AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 107, fol. 81v.

¹¹ AGN, C.D., caj. 17, n^o 28, 12; AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 107, fol. 92r.

¹² AGN, C.D., caj. 17, n^o 57, 6.

¹³ AGN, C.D., caj. 18, n^o 130, 19.

¹⁴ AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 113, fol. 75r.

¹⁵ AGN, C.D., caj. 20, n^o 126, 29.

¹⁶ AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 118, fol. 140r. Charles II arrives in San Juan de Pie de Puerto (Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, now in France) on 5 July 1366 and on the 20th, he is already back in Roncesvalles (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 120, fols. 156r and 164r).

counting sources,¹⁷ with one exception: on 10 September 1368, Angelet, “fijo de maestre Dángel, físico del seynnor rey que fue” (the son of master Dángel, who used to be the king’s physician), received 10 *cahices* of wheat that the king ordered to be given to him as a special gift¹⁸.

THE BLACK LEGEND?: THE OPINIONS OF HISTORIANS

With the information we have seen so far, Ángel de Costafort would have never been thought of as anything other than one of the servants of Charles II discharging his duties as a court doctor, not just associated with the physical treatment of the king, his family and the members of his Royal Household.¹⁹ However, the testimony of Jacques de Rue, the king of Navarre’s chamberlain, after he was arrested in France (March 1378) while accompanying Prince Charles (the future Charles III), offers a few more details about him. I am especially interested in the account given by the chamberlain during his trial for two previous poisonings, among others, both of them on the initiative of Charles II of Navarre, one of them a failed attempt against King Charles V of France, and the other one successful.²⁰ Denis-François Secousse presents the following version of the statement about the first of them:

Dist avecques, que environ a VIII ans, ledit roy de Navarre print et retint avecques lui un Phisicien quie demeuroit à l’Estelle en Navarre, bel homme et joine, et très grant clerç et soutil, appellé maistre Angel, né du pays de Chippre, et lui fist moult de biens, et lui parla entre les autres choses de empoisonner le roy de France, en disant que c’estoit l’homme du monde que il haioit plus, et lui dist ques se il le povoit faire, il lui en seroit bien tenuz et lui recompenseroit bien; et tant fist que ledit Phisicien lui octroya de le faire, et devoit estre fait par boire ou par mengier, et devoit ledit Phisicien venir en France pour ce exccuter, et pensoit ledit roy de Navarre que le Roy de France preist plaisir en lui pour ce qu’il parloit bel latín, et estoit moult argumentatif, et

¹⁷ AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 120, fol. 17r. In 1366, he receives 200 florins as his annual allowance, “finido por la fiesta de Sant Miguel” (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., 118, fol. 133r).

¹⁸ AGN, C.R., 1^aS., n^o 125, fol. 115r.

¹⁹ The activities of the physicians and surgeons with connections to the monarchy ranged from the simplest to others involving greater responsibility, such as performing diplomatic functions, delivering confidential messages, sitting as judges in certain lawsuits or certain practices of a fiscal nature (Ferragud, 2005, pp. 481-488; Serrano Larráyo, 2004, p. 53).

²⁰ The toxicological properties of some poisons had been known since ancient times, and various authors dealt with the different ways in which poisoning could occur and how to act in such an event. Notwithstanding that, the use of medical science for the purpose of helping to figure out alleged poisonings was complicated (Ferragud, 2016, p. 126).

que pour ce eust souvent entrée devers lui, parquoy eust oportunité de faire son fait; et ledit Roy de Navarre qui avoit grant desir a ce que la besoigne s'avançast, le pressa moult du faire; et quant ledit Phisicien se vit ainsi pressie si qu'il convenoit qu'il le feist ou se parteist de sa compaignie, il s'en ala et s'en parti, et bien VII ans ou environ qu'il s'en parti; et tenoit l'en Navarre, qu'il estoit naiez en la mer; et ce sçait ledit Jaquet, parce que ledit Roy de Navarre meismes le lui dit (Secousse, 1755, pp. 378-379).

The second case refers to the poisoning of the French mercenary Seguin de Badefol at the king's table, in Falces on 12 January 1366, caused by quinces and crystallized pears²¹ (Honoré-Duvergé, 1936, p. 372; Pindard, 2013, p. 558). He had been in the service of Charles II in France since the end of August 1364, and he took advantage of his passage through Navarre, en route to Castile in support of Henry of Trastámara, to demand payment for his services (Germain, 2012, pp. 13-14). Such events must be placed in the context of the king of Navarre's aspirations to consolidate his family's possessions in France, basing himself on his legitimate rights to the French throne, which led him to become directly involved in the Hundred Years War (Ciganda Elizondo, 2006, pp. 13-15).

Another figure appears on the scene in 1378: Pierre du Tertre, secretary and adviser to King Charles II, who was also arrested by the King of France's men and tried. Du Tertre does not acknowledge the charges of possible poisoning of the French king, but nor does he rule them out: with regard to the death of Badefol, he even adds that it was rumoured that it had been one Guillemin le Petit. He more categorically denies the accusations of attempts, by the king of Navarre to poison his wife, their son, and the cardinal of Boulogne (Pindard, 2013, pp. 559-560). These victims are examples of poisoning (or rumours of it) as a political weapon, the practice of which, if it was perpetrated, had to remain a secret due to the reprisals it might entail for those involved, if they survived, and their families and close friends (Ramires, 2009). The resultant betrayal of poisoning entailed premeditation as an indispensable requisite. Poison and betrayal in fact shared a place in the ranking of despicable crimes and murders (Komornicka, 2018, pp. 103, 105).

Costafort was born in Cyprus and lived in Estella. Pindard considers that in the people's imagination poisoners were closely associated with the Near

²¹ The use of sweets as a medium for poisoning seems to have been a fairly habitual practice (Ferragud, 2018, p. 379).

East, hence the attribution to his origins²² (Pindard, 2013, p. 568). The suspicion that physicians could be possible poisoners is not surprising, justified by the proximity and the trust placed in them by their patrons, kings and noblemen especially. From this position, doctors could easily cause intoxication without arousing suspicion. The *Ordinacions de la Casa i Cort de Pere el Ceremoniós* (The Ordinances of the House and Court of Peter the Ceremonious), issued by Peter IV the Ceremonious, king of the Crown of Aragon, clearly show his obsession with being protected, and the physician was at the table to avoid mishaps with poisoned food (Gimeno, Gonzalbo & Trenchs, 2009, p. 98). Here we have a dual consideration of court physicians: as possible poisoners in the service of their lord, on the one hand, and as guarantors of the latter's health, on the other. In the same way, his physical description (young and handsome) and his mastery of French and Latin were elements that were part of the ideological concept of the "courtesy" typical of men associated with a court (noble or royal). Pindard, whom I follow, sees a grain of truth in the account by the king of Navarre's chamberlain of the attempt to poison his lord. The disappearance of Ángel de Costafort, who, as Jacques de Rue believed, died at sea shortly after Charles II had suggested poisoning to him, could be construed as him escaping (or abandoning the court).

To what extent did Costafort's loyalty to the king lead him to consider following his orders? Service at court, besides entailing a number of privileges, could also bring problems. Indeed, proximity to the king and his family led to a fair number of physicians being caught up in political machinations and intrigues not created by them, although in some cases, they willingly accepted the situation and the consequences (Rawcliffe, 1989, p. 254). In my opinion, this does not seem to have been the case. Who knows, perhaps this disappearance was the work of the king of Navarre, not wanting to leave alive any witnesses to his plan. The fact is – it has been said previously – that his son received a modest pension in 1368.

The timeline of the planned poisoning produced by the defendant does not tally with Costafort's stay in Navarre, when he states that it had taken place seven years earlier, i.e., in 1371. Pindard rules out the possibility of error in the documentary transcription of the trial by Denis-François Secousse (D'Orgemont, 2003, p. 148). Pindard alludes to a possible memory lapse by

²² The presence of Ángel de Costafort in Navarre could well be related in some way to the accession to the throne of Cyprus, in 1360, of Peter of Lusignan, Count of Tripoli, married since 1353 to Eleanor of Aragon, the cousin of King Peter the Ceremonious. Commercial relations between Cyprus and Catalan merchants were constant throughout the second half of the 14th century (Ferrer i Mallol, 2004, pp. 311-312).

Jacques de Rue, although he is rather sceptical about this since the latter became the chamberlain in 1366, and it is rather unlikely that he would have forgotten that Ángel de Costafort disappeared that same year. This author puts forward another hypothesis, “that of an involuntary error by the scribe due to the exhaustion caused by the long expositions or, more interestingly, a deliberate one: placing an attempted poisoning of the king of France in 1371, when the Treaty of Vernon was signed between Charles V and Charles II, and not in 1366, at a time when discussions about the application of the treaty were very tense” (2013, p. 568). Historians are divided in their opinions about the veracity of the account: some, like Pindard, afford him some credibility because they consider that the testimony was not obtained under torture, while others consider that there was coercion²³ (Pindard, 2013, pp. 555-556; Narbona Cárceles, 2008, p. 42).

With regard to the poisoning of Seguin de Badefol, Charles II’s Royal Household accounts corroborate the presence in Falces, on 12 January 1366, of Ángel de Costafort, the royal surgeon Brancaleón de Cozers, and his apothecary Aubertín (Albert) de Plasence.²⁴ The first two were paid eight shillings for daily perquisites and the latter five shillings. Of the servants, one Petit is mentioned, probably Guillemín le Petit. All the figures who, along with the king, could in one way or another have been implicated in the murder have been found. However, although the records corroborate the presence of the French mercenary at the king’s table,²⁵ there is no mention at all of the money spent on quince and pears or crystallized fruit at that time. Nor would the absence of this information, for the purpose of concealing the facts, be surprising. Quinces and crystallized pears were used as a means of disguising the poison because they were winter fruit, thus in season at that time. Nevertheless, if Costafort was *au fait* with the king’s plans, then his apothecary Au-

²³ The king of France seems to be particularly interested in using the king of Navarre’s attempted poisoning of him as a political weapon. To all this, one must add that publicizing the torture, according to Frank Collard, served to demonstrate the instigator’s ignominy (Collard, 2008, pp. 243-244).

²⁴ Brancaleón is recorded in the service of the king of Navarre between 1355 and 1369, while Aubertín was between 1362 and 1368 (Serrano Larráyo, in preparation).

²⁵ “Lundi XII jour de jenar, le roy a Falces et y sunt Seguin de Badafol et plus autres” (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n^o 120, fol. 9v).

bertín must also have been, since it would be he who crystallized the pears, if they were not bought.²⁶

One of the things about Costafort that has intrigued some historians is his handwritten signature: “Rosa Nigra”.²⁷ It is a reference to a rose, which is also reflected in his personal seal.²⁸

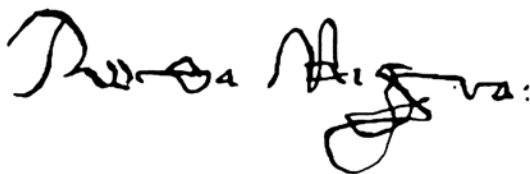
A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive, Gothic-style script and reads "Rosa Nigra:".

Figure 1. Handwritten signature of Ángel de Costafort, 1364

AGN, C.D. caj. 18, n.º. 30, 19



Figure 2. Seal of Ángel de Costafort, 1364

AGN, C.D. caj. 18, n.º. 96, 12

²⁶ Expenditure has been confirmed, on 17 April 1366, of 15 pounds and 12 shillings “por ciertas especias por el seynor [rey]” made by the said king’s chamber valet Guillemin [le Petit] (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n.º 118, fol. 158r). It is no surprise that both the apothecary Aubertín and the royal surgeon Brancaléon were familiar with the practice of crystallization and knew how to disguise poisons among sweets. In January 1364, the former received 54 shillings “por fazer ciertas confituras”, and the latter 48 pounds, 8 shillings and 8 obol deniers “por fazer et confir ciertas espeçias poral seynnor rey pora quando fue a Tudela por tratar la paz de los reyes” (for making and crystallizing certain spices for our lord the king, for when he went to Tudela to sign the peace treaty between kings) (AGN, C.R., 1^a S., n.º 111, fol. 73r). The most notorious poison was arsenic. It was used in various ways during the Middle Ages because of its curative properties, especially as a corrosive for treating wounds. The ease with which it was obtained by apothecaries and alchemists, and with which it could be administered to harmful effect, as it was odourless and tasteless, made arsenic a poison that was very frequently used (Ferragud, 2016, p. 127).

²⁷ AGN, C.D. caj. 18, n.º 30, 19.

²⁸ AGN, C.D. caj. 17, n.º 88, 25.

Every attempt to interpret his handwritten signature involves identifying what a black rose is. Neither I nor those who have helped me have found any reference whatsoever to it in any of the known medieval medical recipe books. Nor, since Costafort was a figure associated with poisons, mistakenly or not, have we found any in treatises on poisons. “Rosa Nigra” seems, at first sight, to be a translation from Greek and then Latin, of *melanthium* (Gr. *melas* and *anthos*). The sources also cite its African name, *git* or *gitter*, which has a dark or black seed. However, discovering the connection between the plant and the pseudonym used by Costafort is another matter entirely. It could be that the signature simply alludes to his original name in Greek or that it is an allusion to a particular symbolic element. I have been unable to find *rosa nigra* as an ingredient in any theriacal compound prior to the sixteenth century²⁹ (we must not forget that theriac, in its many different formulas, had been considered an effective antidote since ancient times)³⁰ (Collard, 1992, p. 105), something that could well be interpreted in Costafort’s imaginary as the ability to prepare not only poisons but also their antidotes. In 1629 the French scholar Claude Saumaise related, after Theophrastus, the *rosa nigra* to the violet, something that does not seem right from the botanical point of view because the Latin name for *melan ion* is *viola odorata*.³¹

Herba est *oenanthe*,³² cuius Plinius duobus locis meminit, e Theophrasto et Dioscoride, quasi diversae sint, ut semper solet... ita scribit e Theophrasto: “Sequitur *oenanthe*, *melanion*, ex silvetribus *heli-ochrysos*”. Theophrastus: ἐπὶ δε τοῦτοις οἰνάνθη καὶ μελάνιον, ita vulgo est, quum scribendum est disiunctim, καὶ μελάν ἴον, et *rosa nigra*. Plinius cum ignoraret μελάνιον *melanthium* rescripsit, nam ita eius libri habent: *sequitur oenanthe, melanthion, etc.* Et in indice huius loci: *de oe-*

²⁹ The Swiss naturalist and doctor Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) kept a letter that someone had sent him, in which several medicinal remedies were included, based on *karabe* and *rosa nigra*, *mastiche*, rose syrup and *centimorbica* (Delisle, 2008, p. 222).

³⁰ As an antidote par excellence, theriac is at the heart of considerations about the distinction between medicine and poison. Thus, according to the ingredients’ names, it represents the extreme case of compound medicine, while its multiple indications confer on it the role of a panacea and also of medicine for desperate cases (Jacquart, 2020, p. 329).

³¹ *Ion* is often preferably translated as violet, also as rose, and ultimately as “flower”.

³² Literally “wine flower”: in Greek οἰνάνθη.

nanthe et melanthio ineptissime; μελάνθον Latini gith vocant; μελάν ἴον est rosa nigra, cuius multis locis meminit Theophrastus.³³

Nowadays, we know of a plant called the “black rose”, whose scientific name is *Aeonium arboreum atropurpureum*, but I do not know if Saumaise (and Ángel de Costafort too) was referring to this plant. In the language of botany, however, *niger* in Latin and *melas* in Greek do not exactly refer to black in the modern sense but dark (deep).³⁴ To say that a plant is black is synonymous with it looking healthy and growing strongly. In ancient texts this meaning seems obvious. Could there be, in the signature, an implied relationship or association between this adjective and the second part of the name, “fort”? In that period, among very learned people, this type of association was not unusual.³⁵ What if Costafort was suggesting some etymological connection between his surname and the *costum* or *costus* (Gr. *kóstos*)? (Stirling, 1997, vol. II, p. 145 (word *costum*, *costus*)). The flowers of this plant are certainly striking but not black or dark. That said, an alias of this figure could be “Melanio”, which means “black flower”. It does not, however, seem reasonable to establish any relationship, based on philological questions,³⁶ between this alias and Mel-

³³ “It is the herb called *oenanthe coronaria* (wild vine flower), recalled by Pliny in two places, taken from Theophrastus and Pedanius Dioscorides, respectively, even though they do not refer to the same thing, as often happens ... this is how he described it according to Theophrastus: “Then there is the oenanthe, the black violet, among the helichrysoms (golden flowers)”. But Theophrastus said: “among these are the oenanthe and the black violet”, and so it is, since one must write it in two parts, “melan ion”, that is, “black rose”. Pliny, ignoring “melanion” transcribed “melanthion” (*nigella*), as in his book it reads: “then there is oenanthe, melanthion, etc. Even in the index of this passage: *de oenanthe y melanthio*, wrongly; ‘melanthion’ as the Latins call the *nigella*; on the other hand, ‘melan ion’ is the black rose, which Theophrastus cites in many passages” (Saumaise, 1629, vol. 1, p. 180). The citation the text refers to, alluding to Pliny’s mistake, is: *sequitur oenanthe ac melanium et ex silvestribus heliocrisys, einde alterum enus anemones quae limonia vocantur (...)* (Pliny, 1499, lib. 21, p. 65). The erroneous reading of this is reflected: *Eodem et oeanthe* (vine flower) *pertinet; est autem vitis labruscae uva. colligitur cum floret, id est cum optime olet, siccatur in umbra substrato linteo atque ita in cados conditur. praecipua ex Parapotamia, secunda ab Antiochia atque Laodicea Syriae, tertia ex montibus Medicis; haec utilior medicinae. quidam omnibus his praeferunt eam quae in Cypro insula nascitur. nam quae in Africa fit ad medicos tantum pertinet vocaturque massaris. omnis autem ex alba labrusca praestantior quam e nigra* (Pliny, 1499, lib 12, pp. 132-133). The allusion to the island of Cyprus, Ángel de Costafort’s homeland, in the said citation is, to say the least, interesting.

³⁴ In the work by Theophrastus, an example of the use of the epithet “black” as a “deep” colour is applied to the red of the poppy (*Papaver rhoeas* L.) (Theophrastus, 1988, p. 464 (note 55)). The names of some botanical species, such as the European hop-hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*) or the black poplar (p. 185).

³⁵ My thanks for these explanations to Arsenio Ferraces Rodríguez.

³⁶ Μελανίον, cannot be broken down into two words, adjective, noun, like μέλαν ἴον, black violet. It is a single word composed of an adjective and an onomastic suffix, but the fact cannot be overlooked that they are paronyms leading to the ‘false etymology’ so frequent in medieval medical texts. My thanks for their comments to Ernest Emili Marcos Hierro and Ana Isabel Martín Ferreira on this question.

anion (Μελανίων), or Meilanion (Μειλανίων), also known as Hippomenes in Greek mythology, who was a disciple of the centaur Chiron, Asclepius' doctor and tutor, among many others. He beat Atalanta in a race using three golden apples that, according to Ovid, Aphrodite gave him from her sacred apple tree in Tamassos, Cyprus (Ovidio, 2002, p. 644; Quintana Fernández, 1995, p. 303).

It is important, despite the difficulty, to find the meaning that Costafort was seeking to transmit through the graphic content of his seal. I have found no reference whatsoever to black roses in medieval heraldry. The roses recorded are white or red (the most famous are the white of York and the red of Lancaster). The seal itself is typical of the late medieval period: tilted shield below helmet with mantling and crest. In this case, the main emblem on the shield is a rose that has been used as a crest. The legend appears: *DANGEL : COSTOFO (flowers) ARUM (flowers) ASOR *. ASOR might be ROSA written back to front, a sort of hidden message or trick; the use of these canting arms – connections between images and names on coats of arms – was a habitual practice (Menéndez Pidal de Navascués, Ramos Aguirre & Ochoa de Olza, 1995, p. 75 (n° 2/772)).

In this attempt to get any further with the possible meaning of the black rose, we should remember that from an alchemical point of view, the rose symbolises the philosopher's stone, the white one being mercury and the red one sulphur. Moreover, the term *rose* expresses the result obtained after the various alchemical manipulations. The pseudo-Arnaldian texts called *Rosarius philosophorum* allude to the white rose for transmutation to silver and the red one for transmutation to gold (Calvet, 2011, pp. 263-357; Calvet, 2006, pp. 162-206). In other words, it is a word with a metaphorical value that evokes a complex investigation, but nothing is mentioned in these texts about the black rose. One possibility would be to treat it similarly to the flowers that appear on alchemical vessels in medieval manuscripts, flowers of silver, especially in the *Aurora Consurgens*: (Figure 3)

Another meaning could be related to the stage of nigredo (blackening), the first part of the alchemical process in the transmutation of matter. This stage, associated with the waning moon, was related to the cult of the goddess that personified the moon in Greek mythology (Selene), possibly being (without any documentary evidence to back it up) an allegory of arsenic, known as the lesser moon in spagyrics. In the same way, the symbolism of the rose on Costafort's seal could be understood as a sign of the possession of knowledge

of distillation, especially in the preparation of rose water, used as a medicine and due to its alchemical distillation.



Figure 3. Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Rh. 172, fol. 27v. URL: <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/fr/zbz/Ms-Rh-0172/27v-56/o/>

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The physician Ángel de Costafort is closely associated with King Charles II of Navarre. Whether or not he took part in the events that his contemporaries attributed to him, used in French chronicles and works of literature as a means of discrediting and invalidating the king of Navarre's aspirations in France (Honoré-Duvergé, 1951, pp. 345-350; Surget, 2010, pp. 240-263; Lecuppre, 2016) is up to the reader to interpret. However, it cannot be denied that this figure was one of the stereotypes we find in the later Middle Ages related to the practice of poisoning: servants from the east, as in his case, or Jews (Collard, 2008, pp. 40, 44).

Despite the paucity of references to his medical activities and the absence of references to his knowledge of alchemy, his signature and wax seal could well be evidence of his interest in the latter discipline. It was a practice to which some physicians devoted their attention, especially those associated with royal or noble courts, principally due to the high cost of their work and

the fact that their lords were able to pay for it. This interest went beyond occult practices or the preparation of poisons. Alchemy was a procedure that did not seek only to discover the philosopher's stone with which to turn lead or any other base metal into gold or silver; from the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century interest in it grew as a method of making up medicines from chemical products (Contreras Mas, 2000, pp. 89, 92-93). This connection between alchemy and medicine and pharmacy was conducive to the use of new products, such as the distillates that we now call "alcohol", and new uses and different preparations with products that had already been in use for centuries in medicine, such as compounds of lead, copper, arsenic and salts, for example (Ferragud & Bertomeu Sánchez, 2015, p. 423).

Several possibilities have been suggested with respect to his mysterious signature, but no solution. I feel certain that there is a botanical allusion behind the signature on which one must insist in future research.

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SAŽETAK

Na suđenju Jacquesu de Rueil, komorniku kralja Karla II. Navarskog, nakon uhićenja u Francuskoj (ožujak 1378.), doznajemo da je liječnik Ángel de Costafort umiješan u nekoliko planova kralja Navare da otruje ljude. Vjerodostojnost danih svjedočanstava u ovom suđenju upitna je zbog provođenja ili neprovođenja mučenja, što je činjenica oko koje se povjesničari ne slažu. Osim osobne biografije, koja je sačinjena od oskudne dokumentacije sačuvane u Kraljevskom i Općem arhivu Navare (Pamplona, Španjolska), Costafort je i na temelju svoga potpisa i osobnog pečata povezan s bavljenjem alkemijom.

Ključne riječi: Ángel de Costafort, Karlo II. Navarski, 14. stoljeće, medicina, otrovi, alkemija

