



## Queen Charlotte Sophia

**Consort of George III and Queen Victoria's grandmother**

Queen Charlotte, wife of the English King George III (1738-1820), was directly descended from Margarita de Castro y Sousa, a black branch of the Portuguese Royal House. The riddle of Queen Charlotte's African ancestry was solved as a result of an earlier investigation into the black magi featured in 15th century Flemish paintings. Two art historians had suggested that the black magi must have been portraits of actual contemporary people (since the artist, without seeing them, would not have been aware of the subtleties in colouring 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, in all probability, members of the 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 obliterate "undesirable" features in a subject's face. Sir Allan Ramsay was the artist responsible for the majority of the paintings of the Queen and his representations of her were the most decidedly 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 too that by the time Sir Ramsay was commissioned to do his first portrait of the Queen, he was already, by marriage, uncle to Dido Elizabeth Lindsay.

Thus, from just a cursory look at the social awareness and political activism at that level of English society, it would be surprising if the Queen's Negroid physiognomy was of no significance to the Abolitionist movement.

Perhaps 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!*