

Every year at the end of May, thousands of Roma people from all over Europe descend upon the French town of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the unofficial capital of Camargue in the Provence region on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in order to honor the appearance of *Sara-la-Kali*, or Sara the Black, their patron saint. In addition to the thrilling religious ritual that occurs during the 4-day festival, the town is also filled with the scents, colours & tastes that represent ancient Roma culture in all its splendor.

The Roma were considered by church governance to be a “people without religion” for hundreds of years, but by the end of the middle ages European Roma had accepted Christianity when they chose as their patron saint “Sara the Black” a figure that doesn’t appear at all in the pantheon of the Gods.

The first historical reference to Sara the Black is found in an ancient hand-written text discovered in 1521 in a library in the French town of Arles and identified Sarah as the servant of three Marys and that fact led the Roma to identify with her and adopt her as their patron saint. In 1448 skeletal remains that relate to the Marys and Sara the Black were discovered in the city now known as Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the Roma turned the picturesque town into a pilgrimage place and every year they flood to the area by the thousands to relive the appearance of Sara the Black on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and put on one of the most exciting and colourful religious festivals in the world where they present the ancient Roma culture in all its splendor.