THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RANSOM IN THE EARLY MODERN MEDITERRANEAN*

In 1608, Christian corsairs captured a ten-year-old Algerian girl named Fatima and sold her into slavery in Livorno, Italy. Her father paid her ransom and nearly succeeded in returning her to Algiers. But the ship that was intended to carry her to freedom stopped in Corsica, where she was forced to convert to Christianity and baptized as Madalena. She never returned home, despite more than a decade of diplomatic effort involving the Spanish king and nobles, Jewish subjects of Spanish Oran, Algerian pashas and janissaries and the Ottoman sultan. Fatima’s travails were far from unique. In the early modern Mediterranean, a wide range of individuals, networks and institutions dealt with the trafficking of people — capturing, enslaving, smuggling and ransoming — across and beyond the borders of Spain’s Mediterranean territories, Morocco, and Ottoman Algiers and Tunis. According to a recent estimate, at least three million people — Muslims and Christians — lost their liberty at sea or on land and were enslaved between 1450 and 1850.1 Out of this number, few

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managed to obtain release through compensation, swapping of captives or flight. As Fatima’s narrative makes clear, this was not for lack of trying. Her story reveals a complex and integrated political economy that deeply preoccupied commercial, political and religious actors. Rulers and captives, ransom dealers and institutions together became the chief actors in a Mediterranean political economy of ransom stimulated by violence, privateering and piracy.

The contours of the early modern ransom system took shape during the sixteenth century when the Mercedarian and Trinitarian orders, Iberian ransom institutions established at the turn of the thirteenth century, came under royal patronage. Royal monopolization and bureaucratization of these orders neither eliminated independent ransomers (Iberian Christians and North African Muslims and Jews), nor did it occur independently of pressures from Maghribi political actors who

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Present, no. 172 (Aug. 2001). The calculation excludes Christians enslaved in Istanbul or other regions of the Ottoman Empire, a population which would have raised these figures. Alessandro Stella estimated that between 1450 and 1750, around 1,100,000 African, Ottoman and Moroccan slaves passed through Portugal and Spain. When adding the slaves born on Iberian soil, the Balearics, and the Canary Islands, the number jumps to two million. See Alessandro Stella, *Histoires d’esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique*, (Paris, 2000), 78–9. In Italy, around half a million were enslaved between the beginning of the sixteenth century and the end of the eighteenth, see Raffaella Sarti, ‘Bolognesi schiavi dei ‘Turchi’ e schiavi ‘turchi’ a Bologna tra Cinque e Settecento: alterità etnico-religiosa e riduzione in schiavitù’, *Quaderni Storici*, 2 (2001), 450. In Malta alone, between 35,000 and 40,000 Muslims (half of whom were from the Maghrib) were enslaved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Michel Fontenay, ‘Il mercato maltese degli schiavi al tempo dei Cavalieri di San Giovanni’, *Quaderni Storici*, 2 (2001), 397.


sought to control this lucrative activity. These attempts to shape ransoming practices and agendas of Mediterranean polities, religious orders of redemption and small-scale ransom actors, shed light on the history of piracy, captivity and ransom. More importantly, the political economy of ransom entailed the regulation of exchange and mobility across the Mediterranean. Hence, its history is crucial for the making and unmaking of the Mediterranean during that period.

This article analyses this ransom system and its transformations between 1575 and 1650. It reconstructs the entangled histories of Fatima and other Christian and Muslim victims of maritime piracy as well as the equally complex negotiations over their exchange. The focus will be on the interaction between reciprocity, political regulation and economic exchange that mediated the ransom of captives. By analysing the processes that linked these lives, I stress political and social aspects of ransom in the seventeenth-century western Mediterranean, an activity recently analysed in mostly economic terms. Spanish, Algerian and Moroccan political actors, ecclesiastic ransom institutions and ransom go-betweens transformed the political economy of ransom as they collaborated and competed with one another over ransom procedures, the construction of captives’ value and the regulation of human traffic across the sea. This world of ransom linked the captivities of Fatima and other Christian and Muslim captives, whose cases have been, so far, studied in isolation. The stories of captives intersected either in


negotiations over ransom or because some were imprisoned as revenge for others’ capture. The attempts to ransom Fatima demonstrate how political process, social strife and religion continued to shape the Mediterranean ransom system during the first half of the seventeenth century.

But, did ‘The Mediterranean’ exist during the seventeenth century? Most historians of the early modern period believe that the sea ‘died’ around the turn of that century — as reflected in the near absence of study on the seventeenth-century Mediterranean.7 Studies of captivity in the Mediterranean, a theme that has recently attracted much scholarly attention, follow that trend. Rather than accounting for the ways in which Mediterranean ransom actors interacted with one another, they focus either on royal–ecclesiastical ransom institutions or, more recently, on small-scale ransom networks.

The decision to study these modes of ransom in isolation carries interpretative and empirical consequences. An institutional perspective that focuses exclusively on the Spanish Trinitarian and the Mercedarian orders of redemption imagines the Middle Sea as a ‘forgotten frontier’ sharply dividing Christendom and the Muslim world.8 This perspective favours the nation and religion as its units of analysis, failing to account for the ways in which Spanish ransom agendas were continuously influenced by pressures from both Maghribi political actors and individual ransom intermediaries. As a result, the dynamic created by the attempts of Muslim and Christian institutional and individual actors to control the traffic of people across the Mediterranean


disappears, and the sea which, according to Braudel, ‘shared a common destiny’ during the sixteenth century, dissolves into national units in the seventeenth century.9

When scholars focus on ransom intermediaries at the expense of institutions, the Mediterranean re-emerges as a space defined by commercial exchange. About a decade ago, in a series of groundbreaking articles, Wolfgang Kaiser redefined the redemption of captives as part of an ‘economy of ransom’ that regulated religious violence and rationalized commerce with Muslims as a means for the redemption of captives.10 In addition to shedding new light on the related questions of transaction costs, credit mechanisms and insurance, this perspective rightly avoids the reading of captivity and ransom in terms of a transhistorical clash between Islam and Christendom. However, in the context of the western Mediterranean, this corrective emphasis risks divorcing two kinds of actors — ransom institutions and individual ransomers — which, in fact, constantly interacted with one another. In some cases, the result obscures the continuous importance of religion, political dynamics and social obligation in shaping the market.11

From a broader perspective, the scholarly divide on the subjects of religious institutions and commercial actors informs the larger debate in Mediterranean historiography about the ‘northern invasion’ and its meaning. According to Braudel, at the turn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch, English and French invaded

11 While the term ‘the economy of ransom’ does not necessarily reduce the field to economics, some of the scholars who focused on that economy were not always sensitive enough to the role of politics, religion and society in its shaping; see Miguel Angel de Bunes Ibarra, La imagen de los musulmanes y del norte de África en la España de los siglos XVI y XVII: los caracteres de una hostilidad (Madrid, 1989), 142 and Attila Ambrus, Eric Chaney and Igor Salitskiy, ‘Pirates of the Mediterranean: An Empirical Investigation of Bargaining with Transaction Costs, <http://scholar.harvard.edu/chaney/publications/pirates-mediterranean-empirical-investigation-bargaining-transaction-costs-0> [accessed 29 Jan. 2016]. This perspective resonates with the recent stimulating reconceptualization of the Mediterranean offered by Horden and Purcell, which provokes a similar problem, see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History (Oxford, 2000). For a critique of some features of Horden and Purcell’s model, see Gadi Algazi, ‘Diversity Rules: Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell’s The Corrupting Sea’, Mediterranean Historical Review, xx, 2 (2005).
the sea, transforming it from a space dominated by religious enmity into an economic sphere, in which nation states competed one against the other. If the argument sounds familiar, it is because it is the story of modernization and the ‘death’ of the Mediterranean. This article builds on a recent critique of that model, incorporating both individual and institutional actors of different polities and confessions, as well as transactions irreducible to market exchange, in an effort to understand the human trafficking across the sea. To this effect, it highlights three overlapping sets of relationships: first, between ecclesiastic redemptive institutions and ransoming merchants; second, between ransom actors on the one hand, and Spanish, Algerian and Moroccan authorities on the other; and lastly, among distinct political actors in Spain, Algiers and Morocco. The analysis demonstrates that while economic considerations and a calculating spirit might have motivated some of these merchant-ransomers, it did not mean that the entire system could be reduced to market exchange. The attempts of the Spanish, Moroccan and Algerian political actors to regulate the exchange of captives, and ransom exchanges motivated by fraternal, professional or religious-based reciprocity were as vital in shaping the aforementioned sets of relationships. Instead of a sea allegedly dominated by northern invaders and monolithic nation states at the turn of the seventeenth century, this integrative approach establishes the enduring importance of religious conversion, political strife and social obligation among local actors.

I

REDEEMING FRIARS AND RANSOMING MERCHANTS

The Mediterranean system of ransom was transformed during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Throughout most of that century, the Spaniards had tried to realize the Crusaders’ fantasy of the conquest, colonization and Christianization of North Africa as a continuation of the conquest of Granada in 1492. As the

century advanced, however, the project lost steam; in 1577, Philip II abandoned his initial North African colonial policy. In 1581, the Habsburg and Ottoman empires signed a peace agreement, an event that marked the loss to northern Europe and the Atlantic world of economic supremacy over the sea and transformed the nature of Mediterranean warfare.\(^{14}\) Following the agreement, corsairs replaced large imperial fleets, and captive-taking became common practice independent of spectacular maritime clashes.\(^{15}\) The shift to piracy, or maritime guerilla tactics, did not reduce the number of captives, but changed the patterns of their circulation, making it more evenly dispersed across time and space.\(^{16}\) In earlier periods, dramatic maritime battles such as that of Lepanto (1571) saw thousands of captives lose their liberty, while some regained it, often within the course of a few short hours.\(^{17}\) Many captives would change hands again in the ceasefire and peace treaties that followed such large-scale and violent encounters. After 1581, seldom more than a few hundred soldiers lost or regained their liberty within such brief intervals. Instead, corsairs often captured a small number of civilians: a few fishermen or peasants, dozens of travellers, or some sailors on ships.\(^{18}\) In

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\(^{16}\) Braudel, *Mediterranean and Mediterranean World*, 865 and 882.

\(^{17}\) In Lepanto, the Holy League captured over three thousand Muslims, while fifteen thousand Christian slaves were rescued; when the Ottomans re-conquered Tunis from the Spaniards (1574) they captured thousands of imperial soldiers, and in Alcazarquivir, or the Battle of the Three Kings (1578), fourteen thousand Portuguese — almost the entire Portuguese nobility — were taken captive by Ahmed Al-Mansur, new Sultan of Morocco. On Lepanto, see Manuel Rivero Rodriguez, *La batalla de Lepanto: cruzada, guerra santa e identidad confesional* (Madrid, 2008), 366; on Alcazarquivir, see Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, *Ahmad al-Mansur, The Beginnings of Modern Morocco* (Oxford, 2009), 7; Lucette Valensi, *Fables de la mémoire: la glorieuse bataille des trois rois* (Paris, 1992), 141; on Tunis and la Goleta, see Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, xiv. It is worth putting these numbers in context: estimates of the number of Christians held captive at Algiers, the city that boasted the largest numbers in captivity, varied greatly between five thousand and thirty thousand, see Davis, ‘Counting European Slaves on the Barbary Coast’. The numbers of prisoners taken in these famous battles, then, were significant.

other words, piracy transformed patterns of circulation of captives across the imperial map, producing a much longer-lasting and more stable population of captives than did large-scale naval battles before 1581.

As a result of this demographic shift, the Spanish Crown tightened its regulation of the Trinitarian order and the order of Our Lady of Mercy.\(^{19}\) First, Philip II increased funds he dispensed for ransom and bureaucratized ransom procedures. The process dates back to 1492 at the end of the Reconquista, a moment that redrew the geography of captivity and ransom. After that point, the freeing of the majority of captives (Muslims or Christians) required crossing the Mediterranean, making the enterprise more complicated and expensive. To defray the growing expense, from the mid sixteenth century, the new royal governing councils filled the orders’ moneyboxes. Financing ransom entailed dictating a ransom agenda. Whereas captives’ kin were interested in freeing their loved ones, and friars invested in redeeming ecclesiastics, women and children (all of whom were believed to confer prestige on the orders), the Crown and its councils sought either to save soldiers who could be reassigned to military service or subjects who fell under the jurisdiction of the council in question.\(^{20}\) Additionally, from 1574 the royal council inspected the orders’ finances, regulating the procedures that governed their rescue operations. From that time onwards, the Mercedarian or Trinitarian General had to request the council of Castile to authorize a rescue expedition and issue a passport valid in the Spanish jurisdiction, stating that friars were permitted to travel to North Africa and requesting that Spanish officials provide the friars with

\(^{19}\) While it is likely that the order of the Holy Trinity was founded in response to the crusaders’ defeat in the battle of Hattin outside Jerusalem in 1187, its orientation was soon directed south to the Muslim–Christian frontier and in 1202 its founder, Juan de Mata, established a second house in Marseille, see Yvonne Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden, 2002), 87. On the establishment, spread, patronage and tensions between the orders, see Andrés Díaz Borrás, *El miedo al Mediterráneo: la caridad popular valenciana y la redención de cautivos bajo poder musulmán 1323–1539* (Anuario de estudios medievales, Anejo, xliv, Barcelona, 2001), 39–41; James William Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain, the Order of Merced on the Christian–Islamic Frontier* (Philadelphia, 1986), 15–26.

any assistance they required. Finally, the king also imposed strict book-keeping regulations, demanding that a scribe (nominated by the monarchy) accompany the expeditions and record negotiations with the Maghribi authorities, the identity of the rescued captives, the price paid for them, and the sources of funds.

The transformation of ransom into an imperially sponsored enterprise formed part of larger religious and political reforms related to the Catholic Counter-Reformation and Philip II's project of empire-building. By reshaping the spirituality of the religious life of the friars and regulating the redemption of captives, the monarch was aiming to achieve three goals. First, he strengthened his control of the orders, thus centralizing and bureaucratizing royal power; second, he increased the number of ransom expeditions and, thus, of rescued Spanish subjects; and finally, he furthered the construction of his own image as a devout Catholic saving Christian souls in danger of conversion to Islam under the duress of captivity in the Maghrib.

But the institutionalization of ransom was a process that involved both Spanish and North African actors. In order to send rescue missions to the Maghrib, it was not enough to secure funds and obtain the necessary permits from the Spanish Crown. More pressing was the co-ordination of the operation with the Moroccan and Ottoman authorities.

22 For an example of these documents, see Guillermo Gozalbes Busto, *Los Moriscos en Marruecos* (Granada, 1992), 283.
23 More than other European rulers, Philip II personally orchestrated the execution of the Tridentine decrees in his vast territories, a process which entailed consolidating his political power and control over the church. R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (New Approaches to European History, xii, Cambridge, 1998), 42, 46–53. This was not unique to Spain. The Counter-Reformation enhanced a process, which began nearly a century earlier, through which national Crowns took over ecclesiastical jurisdiction previously in papal hands. An important point in the process was in 1523 when Pope Adrian conceded the Emperor the *Patronato Real*, see J. Lynch, 'Philip II and the Papacy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xi (1961), 24. More successful than other rulers in this regard, Philip II came to hold immense rights over the church, nominating bishops, prelates and heads of religious orders and benefitting from ecclesiastical revenues. Po-Chia Hsia, *World of Catholic Renewal*, 47–8. The regulation and funding of ecclesiastical ransom, then, was part of a larger moral, disciplinary and institutional reform of the orders, itself part of the implementation of the Tridentine decrees. For a thorough analysis of the religious reform of the order of Our Lady of Mercy, see Bruce Taylor, *Structures of Reform: The Mercedarian Order in the Spanish Golden Age* (Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions, xii, Leiden, 2000).
officials of the Spanish garrisons in the Maghrib (or a friar sent for that purpose from Spain) had to travel to the city where the orders had planned to ransom captives and purchase a passport from its governor. This document was designed to protect the orders en route to the Maghrib and for the duration of their stay. The safe pass also stipulated the number of slaves that the orders committed to buy from the governor and his men, thus partially imposing a Maghribi ransom agenda on the orders.24 The orders often found themselves forced to purchase captives they were not interested in just to be allowed to buy the ones they wanted. For example, slave-traders backed by the local authorities insisted that the orders first spend their monies on buying captives who negotiated their ransom independently, and whose price exceeded that of the captives’ ransom collectively negotiated by the friars. Maghribis also favoured selling the old, the sick and Protestant captives: groups that the religious orders had little interest in, and for whose ransom they would later endure criticism from those back home opposed to the project of redeeming captives.25 Consequently, the friars preferred buying captives directly from Maghribi rulers to negotiating independently with local slave-owners.26

The Trinitarian and Mercedarian orders shared the ransom market with independent ransom agents. These Alfaqueques, as


26 Gabriel Gómez de Losada, A la catolica y cesarea magestad de la serenissima Señora Doña Maria-Ana de Austria... respondese a un memorial que se dio á su magestad, sobre el recate de los cortados, niños, y mugeres que padecen en la tirana, y cruel esclavitud de Argel... (place unknown, c.1667–1675).
they were called in Spain (from the Arabic al-fakkâk, which in Al-Andalus meant ‘redeemer’), were active as early as the twelfth century, did not work for the Church, and provided both Muslim and Christian captives with credit for ransom. Some worked for a particular municipality, others were independent merchants ransoming captives across the Muslim–Christian and Castilian–Aragonese frontiers. Ecclesiastic ransom institutions and individual ransom agents constituted two options for captives and their kin throughout the medieval period. Alfaqueques and merchants knew the territory better than anyone else, acted immediately and did not wait to collect large sums of money for the ransom of several captives, as did the Trinitarians and Mercedarians. The captives’ next-of-kin knew that turning to Alfaqueques or merchants increased their chances of being quickly reunited with their loved ones. Yet ransom via Alfaqueques was an expensive enterprise and did not suit everyone. Those who could not afford their services had to rely on the slower ransom procedures of the Trinitarians and Mercedarians.

The southward shift of the Christian–Muslim frontier affected independent ransomers in two ways. First, the transformation of the Trinitarians and Mercedarians into royal agents nearly eliminated the office of a municipal ransomer. Second, the end of the Reconquista divided independent ransomers into two classes: Christian merchants from Iberia, and Algerian, Moroccan and Spanish Jewish and Muslim merchants. Iberian

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28 Ferrer i Mallol, ‘La redempció de captius a la corona catalano-aragonesa’, 262.

29 There were exceptions to this rule. Cities that suffered from piracy on a regular basis, for example Calpe located in Spanish Levant between Valencia and Alicante or the Balearic islands, continued to employ alfaqueques or local independent ransomers, see Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS), *Guerra Antigua*, Leg. 1541, 9.19.1644. On the Balearic Islands, see Natividad Planas, ‘La Frontière franchissable: normes et pratiques dans les échanges entre le royaume de Majorque et les terres d’Islam au XVIIe siècle’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, xlviii, 2 (2001).
merchants continuously trading with and within North Africa had never disappeared. In fact, we now know that direct and indirect Spanish commerce with the Maghrib continued to grow throughout the early modern period. The religious rhetoric of the official Spanish discourses prohibited trade with the infidel, but in practice, trade with North Africa became routine in seventeenth-century Spain, functioning under a system of ‘permanent exception’. If a Christian merchant wanted a licence to trade with the Maghrib, all he had to do was declare that he would use his profits to ransom Christians rather than invest them in goods to be redistributed back in Spain. The Crown issued these special licences repeatedly, turning them in fact into a form of taxation. The involvement of these merchants in the ransom market placed them in competition with the orders, with the latter occasionally complaining to the Crown that the merchants were abusing the trading licences at the expense of captives.

Redeeming friars and ransoming merchants sought different goals and framed their activity distinctively. When ecclesiastics purchased captives, they were not only conducting business. They were also, mostly, redeeming Christian souls. In this sense, their activity was based on communal solidarity and reciprocal logic. As Christians, they rescued fellow Christians, members of their confessional community. Reciprocity was not only confession-based but also organized politically. The orders were divided by provinces (Castile, Andalusia, Aragon, Portugal),

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30 Roberto Blanes Andrés, Valencia y el Magreb: las relaciones comerciales marítimas (1600–1703) (Barcelona, 2010); Eloy Martín Corrales, Comercio de Cataluña con el Mediterráneo musulmán (siglos XVI–XVIII): el comercio con los ‘enemigos de la fe’ (Barcelona, 2001).

31 Wolfgang Kaiser, ‘La excepción permanente: actores, visibilidad y asimetrías en los intercambios comerciales entre los países europeos y el Magreb (siglos XVI–XVII)’, in José Antonio Martínez Torres (ed.), Circulación de personas e intercambios comerciales en el Mediterráneo y en el Atlántico (siglos XVI, XVII, XVIII) (Monografías, xxxii, Madrid, 2008). For a helpful analysis of the negotiations between the Majorcan administration and the Spanish Crown about the right to trade with Muslims, see Planas, ‘La Frontière franchissable’.

32 For example, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Consejo de Aragón, Leg. 743, 9.9.1659.

33 Reciprocity is understood here following Polanyi, as ‘movements between correlative points of symmetric groupings’, Polanyi, ‘The Economy as Instituted Process’, 250–3.
and friars rescued Christians of their province alone. Their efforts resulted in the salvation of the redeemed and an increase in the orders’ religious prestige. Social, even religious prestige was also often manifested in the rescuing labour of Christian merchants, when they ransomed Christians, and in the ransom operations of Jewish and Muslim merchants, when they ransomed those of their own religion. But economic exchange and profit formed the dominant motive for their labours. For Christian merchants, ransom was a way of whitewashing the illegal exchange of commodities deemed materials of war (whose sale to Muslims was prohibited) or was simply a means to grease the wheels of commerce with the infidel. For North African Jews and Muslims, it facilitated commercial contacts with Spain and granted them entry into an empire that had expelled them a century before. In contrast to Christian merchants who required a permit from the Spanish authorities to trade with Morocco or Algiers, Algerians and Moroccans needed a licence to enter Spain. Over the course of the seventeenth century, only few obtained such safe passes. The friars, thus, had several reasons to collaborate with Maghribi ransomers on a regular basis, including the latter’s linguistic command of Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Berber and their local connections within the region. Moreover, the fact that North Africans had limited access to Spain with comparatively less power than Iberian merchants meant that they could not subvert the image that the orders had carefully crafted of their ransom mission as the exclusive path through which captives could be redeemed.

34 This characterized organized redemption institutions elsewhere in the Christian world. In the case of Italy, each city-state had its own ransom institution, see Davis, Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters, 149–69.
35 Miller, ‘Reflections on Reciprocity’.
38 In some cases, these intermediaries openly competed against the orders. For the case of Judas Malaqui, a Jewish merchant from Tétouan and a supplier of the Spanish fort of the Peñón de Vélez in Morocco, see AGS, Guerra Antigua, Leg. 271, fo. 304, 1589.
II

ALGERIAN ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE RANSOM MARKET

Jews and Muslims served the friars as interpreters, innkeepers, creditors and sellers of captives.\(^{39}\) But more important was the key role that Maghribis played in the cross-regional economy of ransom. Occasionally, they bought captives in one city, travelled with them hundreds of miles to another, and sold them there to the friars. This was extremely convenient for the friars who did not frequent North African cities more than once every three years. Thanks to this ‘delivery service’, in the price of a redemption expedition to one city, the friars could ransom captives from other cities located hundreds of miles away.

Maghribi authorities were less than enthusiastic about this trans-regional trade, which they believed transpired at their expense, and tried to prevent it. The combined interest of the Moroccan governors and Algerian pashas was to have a controlled ransom market in Algiers, regularly frequented by the orders of Redemption. Economic, political and social interests were at stake. Working with the orders allowed the pasha to impose his own ransom agenda on the buyers (the friars), namely, forcing them to buy his captives first, and then those of his clients. The pasha could then validate his claims for political authority, increase his income and strengthen his network of clients. Therefore, pashas did what they could to attract to Algiers Mercedarians and Trinitarians while

attempting to prevent local merchants (Moroccans and Algerians) from collaborating with the friars.

To lure the friars, the pashas had promised protection, which they were not always able to provide. For example, on 9 May 1604, Soliman, the Pasha of Algiers, was informed that the Mercedarians were to depart from Valencia for Algiers and that their ransom budget stood at 33,000 escudos. This was exciting news. Five years had passed since an ecclesiastical ransom operation had been executed in Algiers, and 33,000 escudos was a handsome sum that impoverished Algiers desperately needed at the time. Soliman wasted no time and couriered a message to the Mercedarians via the viceroy of Majorca warning the friars of pirates who might capture them: ‘And because here it is understood that the order of Redemption or settee from Valencia is about to arrive, should it stop in Majorca, your signoria [the Majorcan viceroy] should warn it to be careful of English corsairs’. To ensure the safe arrival of the friars, the pasha quickly warned them of English corsairs, even though the English were his allies at the time and the friars were agents of an enemy polity.

Even in the absence of friars, the commerce in captives never froze. Local merchants continuously negotiated ransom deals with masters and captives, transferring the latter from Algiers to Tétouan and, once there, selling them to Trinitarian and Mercedarian redemption expeditions. An intelligence report

40 Settee or saetia in Spanish was a vessel carrying two or three masts with lateen or triangular sails.


42 That the pasha should warn the Spanish of English pirates was surprising. A few months after the pasha sent his letter, James I, king of England, signed a peace treaty with the Spaniards, an act which made English ships legitimate prey from an Algerian perspective. Before the signing of the agreement, however, the English, as the Spaniards’ enemy, were allies of the Algerians. See John B. Wolf, The Barbary Coast: Algiers under the Turks, 1500 to 1830 (New York, 1979), 183–4.
compiled by a Spanish captive-cum-spy in 1607 suggests that the pasha’s attempts to prevent go-betweens from installing themselves between the Algerians and the Spaniards were unsuccessful. On 12 December 1607, the Spanish spy noted, ‘an English ship arriving from Tétouan entered [the port and] it brought Turkish and Moorish and a few Jewish merchants. These [merchants] come to take captives for the [Mercedarian] expedition at Tétouan’.\footnote{AGS, Estado, Leg. 210, 12.14.1607.} Negotiations took some time, but he reported that three and a half months later, ‘the ship . . . left with some Christian [captives] that the merchants have bought in order to hand them in to the . . . ecclesiastical ransom expedition in Tétouan’\footnote{Ibid., 3.25.1608.}. Despite the pasha’s prohibition, ransom intermediaries continued to buy captives in Algiers and sell them to Trinitarians and Mercedarians in Tétouan. A later entry in the captive’s chronicle (2 September 1608) provides further evidence of the pervasiveness of the practice and the Algerian failure to uproot it:

The galliot of . . . Marjamami . . . left for Tétouan . . . Under the threat of death, the Divan ordered him [Marjamami] not to take to Tétouan under any circumstances Christian [captives], neither the ones bought by the merchants nor [captives] owned by Algerians. \textit{Because [the merchants] are the reason that the Spanish Trinitarians and Mercedarians do not arrive in this city [Algiers] and that the pasha is losing his fees.}\footnote{Ibid., 9.2.1608; emphasis added.}

Collaboration between local merchants and the friars, then, was a routine matter. The ship reported by the informant scheduled to depart for Tétouan was owned by an important Algerian corsair (Marjamami), a member of the Taifa (the corsairs’ corporation).\footnote{On the Taifa, see Ciro Manca, \textit{Il modello di sviluppo economico delle città marittime barbaresche dopo Lepanto} (Naples, 1982), 41–57.} Not only merchants, but Algerian corsairs also participated in the indirect redistribution of captives across the Maghrib. This was despite the fact that as Taifa members, these corsairs were represented by the Divan [governing council] and were expected to follow its rulings. Moreover, the Divan pointed an accusatory finger at the ‘go-betweens’, explicitly linking their trade with Tétouan to the loss of revenues that the Algerian authorities had suffered. The fact that this was not the first time the Spanish undercover agent described Algerian attempts to regulate the market suggests that the pasha and the Divan permitted the involvement of other actors in the
market. Evidence prior to 1609, then, indicates that independent ransom intermediaries regularly bought captives in Algiers and sold them to the friars in Tétouan. Similar trade procedures probably took place in the opposite direction. The same reasons that made Jews and Muslims desirable allies for the orders, transformed them into competitors with the pasha. The reoccurrence of this practice suggests that either the Divan failed to regulate or came to accept limited involvement of actors other than the friars in the market.

How did this dynamic look from Spain? The orders did not ask for royal permission to employ intermediaries before the second decade of the seventeenth century. Does this mean that the king was unaware of the collaboration? It is possible, but unlikely. The king knew of the importance of Jewish intermediaries in the Maghrib, especially for the Spanish garrisons scattered there. His Councils of War and State communicated on a regular basis with Jewish residents of Muslim towns and with leading members of the Jewish families of Oran (the largest Spanish garrison in North Africa), and were aware of the working relations the latter established with the Mercedarian friars.\(^47\) The king, then, tacitly approved this alliance despite the fact that many of the intermediaries were non-Spanish Jews and Muslims who were, theoretically, not permitted to set foot on Spanish soil. That he did not try to prevent or limit it suggests that the volume of ransom of captives that go-betweens controlled was limited, and the king was satisfied with the practice. Indeed, the working relations were informal, yet the Spanish Crown relied on those whom it had expelled years earlier in order to free Spanish captives from the Maghrib.

The discord between the politics of ransom of the Spanish king (informally supporting the employment of Jews and Muslims to ransom his own subjects) and that of the Algerian pashas (who tried to control these ransom intermediaries) obscures competing models of Mediterranean interaction and exchange. Tacitly collaborating with intermediaries, rather than negotiating directly with the Algerians, seemed to be an efficient communicative and commercial model for the Spanish Crown at

that time. That the Spaniards preferred what seems like a market — minimum political regulation and a multiplicity of providers — does not equate the Spanish monarch to a proto-capitalist. On the contrary, working with Maghribi intermediaries seems to have been a more expensive solution.\(^\text{48}\) It is more likely that the Spanish king sought to avoid risking the lives of Trinitarians and Mercedarians and to maintain long-term beneficial working relations with Maghribi Jews and Muslims. This was the opposite of the model the Algerians tried to establish.

As part of their attempts to control the trade in captives (together with the Moroccans and Tunisians), the Algerian authorities preferred face-to-face interaction and direct exchange. Within the context of that political economy, this meant that the pasha was interested in maintaining unmediated relations with the Spanish Crown in order to sell captives directly to its authorized ransom agents, the Mercedarians and the Trinitarians. While that did not necessarily entail peaceful relations or a frictionless interaction, it meant that the lion’s share of ransom was to be realized by the friars and not by independent merchants. To achieve that goal, pashas were willing to guarantee protection to the Trinitarians and Mercedarians and prevent independent Maghribi ransom agents from operating in Algiers. Maghribi rulers were motivated by financial concerns, but working with the orders also allowed them to lubricate their social networks by forcing Trinitarians and Mercedarians to buy the captives of their clients. It is likely that the volume of captives exchanged via locals was small and therefore Algerian pashas came to accept the participation of intermediaries in the ransom market. As much as Maghribi and Spanish Mediterranean agendas differed, none of the parties felt an acute need to take radical measures to impose their own preferred models. Intermediaries on the one hand, and the Trinitarians and Mercedarians, on the other, were not thought to be mutually exclusive options, but rather complementary ones. However, this status quo began to change at the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century.

\(^{48}\) Copy of a letter from Ysidro del Castillo y Aguilera to Cid Ali Hache Catalán, Real Academia de la Historia (hereafter RAH), Colección de Don Luis Salazar y Castro, Leg. 38, Carpeta 5, 18.11.1648.
III

FATIMA'S CONVERSION AND THE ARREST OF THE TRINITARIANS

We will now return to Fatima's trial of captivity and to the attempts to exchange her in return for Christian captives, and how these negotiations reflected and affected the power balance that both rulers and ransomers carefully maintained. A convenient point of departure is the ransom expedition the Trinitarian order sent to Algiers in 1609, led by Bernardo de Monroy, Juan del Águila, and Juan de Palacios. Del Águila and de Palacios were experienced at redeeming captives in Algiers. Del Águila had spent seven years in Algiers (1595–1602), and de Palacios had been sent there twice to ransom captives. The three men left the Valencian port of Denia in early March and arrived in Algiers on 1 April. Overall, the expedition progressed smoothly. Soon after their arrival, the friars began selling the goods they had brought with them and used the profits to buy captives. By mid May, they had ransomed 130 captives and were ready to return to Spain. As was the custom, the three Trinitarians had obtained passports from the governor of Algiers prior to their arrival in the city. Yet, despite having the required documents and having followed the procedures, on 13 May, minutes before the Trinitarians and the captives they had ransomed embarked on the ships that would have taken them to Spain, they were detained on the orders of the Algerian Divan.49 The reason for these arrests bore no direct relation to the Trinitarians or to the captives. The Christians were paying for an injustice suffered by Mamet Axá, a powerful Algerian ‘Turk’, a janissary, and the father of the ten-year-old Fatima whose trial of captivity opens this article. Weeks earlier, Axá had commissioned a Corsican merchant (who traded with Algiers on a regular basis) to ransom his daughter, who was held captive in Livorno.50 Fatima left the port of Livorno, but a short

49 The passports protected the Trinitarians on their way to Algiers. They ran into corsairs a few days after they left the port of Denia, but the corsairs allowed them to go free once the Trinitarians presented their safe-passes, see Porres Alonso, Libertad a los cautivos, 341. For a detailed reconstruction of the affair and the captivity the Trinitarians had suffered, see Bonifacio Porres Alonso, Testigos de Cristo en Argel: Juan del Águila, and Juan de Palacios y Bernardo de Monroy, Trinitarios (Córdoba and Salamanca, 1994). See also Friedman, Spanish Captives in North Africa, 136–8.

50 Francisco de la Vega y Toraya, Chroónica de la provincia de Castilla, León y Navarra del Orden de la Santísima Trinidad (Madrid, 1729), 66. The Corsican merchant, Manfredino de Manfredi had a brother who converted to Islam and lived in Algiers, see Vega y Toraya, Chroónica de la provincia de Castilla, León y Navarra. Ransom was part
time later her ship stopped at Calvi, a port town in north-west Corsica (then under the dominion of the Republic of Genoa, itself a Spanish satellite from 1528).\footnote{On the relations between Genoa and the Spanish Empire, see Thomas Allison Kirk, \textit{Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic, 1559–1684} (Baltimore, 2005); Manuel Herrero Sánchez, ‘La república de Genova y la monarquía hispánica (siglos XVI–XVII)’, \textit{Hispania}, lxv, 219 (2005); Céline Dauverd, \textit{Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Genoese Merchants and the Spanish Crown} (Cambridge, 2015).} Once there, Fatima was forced to convert to Christianity and was baptized as Madalena (spelled Maddalena in Italian) by the bishop of Saona.\footnote{AGS, \textit{Estado}, Leg. 1882, fo. 273. On other instances of religious violence directed against Muslim slaves, see Daniel Hershenson, ‘Plaintes et menaces réciproques: captivité et violence religieuses dans la Méditerranée du XVIIe siècle’, in \textit{Les Musulmans dans l’histoire de l’Europe}, 2 vols. (Paris 2011–13), ii, \textit{Passages et contacts en Méditerranée}, ed. Jocelyne Dahkla and Wolfgang Kaiser (Paris, 2013); Bernard Vincent, \textit{El rio morisco}, (Valencia, 2006), 75–87.} Seeing that the bishop would not let him take Madalena to Algiers, the Corsican go-between left Calvi for Algiers to deliver the unfortunate news. Furious, Axa went to the Algerian Divan and demanded redress. In response, the Trinitarians were detained. When Philip III had learned that Fatima-Madalena was indeed baptized and now as a Christian could not be returned to Algiers, he ordered a halt to all ecclesiastic ransom operations in Algiers until the Trinitarians and the captives they had redeemed were freed.\footnote{AGS, \textit{Guerra Antigua}, Leg. 767, 3.9.1612.} Axá and the Divan never retreated from the conditions set in 1609— the return of Axá’s daughter in exchange for the Trinitarians and the captives they had ransomed.

In the following years, several failed attempts to bring the affair to an end were negotiated amongst the Pasha of Algiers, grandees of the Spanish empire, Jewish and Muslim intermediaries, the Trinitarians, other captives and their kin and even the Ottoman Sultan. First, on behalf of the Spanish monarch, Jews from Spanish Oran had contacted the Sultan imploring him to interfere. The Sultan ordered the release of Monroy, but by 1612 the Algerians obeyed orders from Istanbul selectively, and
the attempt had failed. In 1617, the newly commissioned Pasha of Algiers brought a similar order from the Sultan, but it too was disobeyed. The governor of Oran unsuccessfully devised two other plans. In 1613, he plotted to smuggle Monroy out of Algiers to Oran and in 1621, he sent an envoy who negotiated Monroy’s ransom in exchange for ten thousand ducats to be paid by one of the leading Jewish families of Oran. Both attempts failed.

Equally intriguing were the attempts to exchange the Christians for Muslim prisoners. The problem with swapping Christian captives in return for Fatima was that from a Christian perspective, her conversion made her inalienable. Immediately following the arrest of the Trinitarians, the Spanish king asked the Genoese to send an emissary to Calvi, arrange for Muslim slaves to question Madalena about her conversion, and send a report to Algiers. The testimonies compiled in Arabic indicated that Madalena converted of her own free will and wished to keep living amongst Christians. Axá spurned the testimony, demanding to meet his daughter in person in Tabarka, a Genoese island located near Tunis a few hundred miles east of Algiers, and see for himself whether or not she was a Christian or a Muslim. ‘If she was a Christian he would leave her, and if a Moor, he would take her with him’. The Christians refused. Even if, in the early stages of the affair, the prospect of returning Madalena to Axá carried some sense, as time passed, this solution became less and less feasible. By 1618 Madalena, now nineteen, was already married in Corsica, which made the possibility of her return to Algiers even less likely.

55 AGS, Estado, Leg. 263, 10.13.1617.
56 AGS, Guerra Antigua, Leg. 785, 4.19.1613; AGS, Estado, Leg. 190, 7.17.1621 and 10.16.1621.
57 Vega y Toraya, Chro´nica de la provincia de Castilla, Leo´n y Navarra, 87, 91.
59 AGS, Estado, Leg. 1882, fo. 245, 8.1.1617.
60 The viceroy of Valencia indicated her marital status in a letter to the Council of the State on 29 October 1618, AGS, Estado, Leg. 1882, fo. 266, 10.29.1618.
To overcome the impasse, the Spaniards sought to negotiate an exchange for other Muslims. An opportunity seemed to present itself when Mahamete, bey of Alexandria, one of his wives, some of his servants and other Muslims were taken captive by a Spanish squadron. The bey had offered twenty thousand ducats for his own release, but his age, ill health and previous state of captivity among the Spaniards convinced three out of six counsellors from the Council of State to release him as a gesture of generosity. However, Monroy and others lobbying for his rescue immediately intervened hoping to strike a deal. Simultaneously, the Marquis of Villena, whose bastard son Diego de Pacheco was taken captive and sold in Algiers in 1609, was also pulling strings in Madrid’s political corridors with the same goal in mind. The problem was not so much the tensions between different Spanish parties but rather that Algiers refused to release the Trinitarians for anyone but Fatima. Diego de Pacheco was taken to Istanbul in 1610, converted or was forced to convert in 1614, and died in 1619. The old bey died in a Sicilian prison cell in 1616. Juan de Águila, Juan de Palacios and Bernardo Monroy died in Algiers in 1613, 1616 and 1622 respectively. Sadly, the archive provides no further evidence of Fatima-Madalena’s fate.

Beyond the fact that they all failed, the efforts to ransom these victims demonstrate that for every ransom deal that was executed, several others were negotiated or imagined, but never realized. While for the captives involved and their kinsmen, these failures were disastrous, they also functioned as representations of the state of power relations in and between Spanish and Maghribi political hubs. The negotiating parties sought to impose on their counterparts the value they attributed to the captive in question, inflating or deflating it. In other words, regardless of the success of the negotiations, the parties involved—Maghribi Jews and

61 AGS, Estado, Leg. 495, 6.5.1614; ‘Copia de consulta original de oficio, del Consejo de Estado, a 19 de noviembre de 1613’, CODOIN, xlv, 547–52.
62 On the bey’s offer, see AGS, Estado, Leg. 1168, 7.25.1614; on the votes of the counsellors, see ‘Copia de consulta original de oficio, del Consejo de Estado’, CODOIN, xlv, 549–52.
63 AGS, Estado, Leg. 295, 7.19.1614.
64 For a testimony on the capture of Diego de Pacheco, see AGS, Estado, Leg. 1949, fo. 133 and 136, 3.24.1613. On the marquis’ attempts to exchange him for the Bey, see AGS, Estado, Leg. 1168, fo. 171, 12.14.1613 and fo. 206, 10.5.1614.
65 AGS, Estado, Leg. 1949, fo. 133, 3.24.1613; AGS, Estado, Leg. 1167, fo. 45, 5.11.1614; AGS, Estado, Leg. 1892, fo. 37, 7.23.1619.
Muslims, the church and a host of political actors — were given an opportunity to demonstrate, assess and augment their political power. Thus, these failures should be re-evaluated as they reveal mechanisms of exchange, the construction of value and the prestige of slave-traders and redeemers.

IV

CONVERSION AND INALIENABILITY

Behind closed doors, the Spaniards entertained the possibility that Madalena may have been forced to convert to Christianity. At some stage, they had addressed the Pope, hoping perhaps to obtain a dispensation, but even he could not do much as the girl was Christian. A captain in the Spanish Atlantic fleet held captive in Algiers complained about what he perceived as the Algerians’ unfair conduct in a letter he sent the Council of the State in August 1617: ‘Even if the girl was Christianized by force, as they claim, they could consider . . . that among [the Muslims] it is customary to turn young children into Moor by force. But their arrogance knows no par and they cannot keep their word.’ The Spanish official acknowledged the mutual nature of Mediterranean religious violence. The problem, as he saw it, was not in forcing the conversion of a ten-year-old girl but, rather, in the Algerian refusal to acknowledge that both parties often practised forced conversions and that Madalena’s conversion — whether forced or voluntary — was a fait accompli.

The conversion of enslaved captives removed them from networks of economic exchange to reciprocity-based ones. By converting or being converted, Diego Pacheco and Fatima-Madalena entered a new religious value regime from which their kin could not redeem them despite their political

66 AGS, Estado, Leg. 1950, 7.17.1621.
68 A rapidly growing body of literature on conversion in the early modern Mediterranean has shifted scholarly focus from questions of motivation and sincerity to ones about narratives and performance. For three recent insightful studies, see E. Natalie Rothman, Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul (Ithaca, 2011); Tijana Krstić, Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire (Stanford, 2011); Ryan Szpiech, Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic (Philadelphia, 2013).
power. They were now members of a confessional community protected or trapped (depending on one’s perspective) by those of their own religion. In his attempts to obtain Mahamete and exchange him for his son, the Marquis de Villena argued that Pacheco was converted by force, implying that he still deserved to be redeemed. The framing of his son’s conversion as being forced reveals an attempt to introduce mitigating circumstances, and highlights how conversion made it harder for the marquis to legitimately claim Mahamete. Similarly, the pressure exerted by Axá led to the arrest of the Trinitarians and the redeemed captives, but failed to retrieve his daughter.

Captives’ value, scholars have duly noted, was determined by parameters such as age, status, gender, profession and the estimated ability and will of the captive’s kin and community to ransom him or her. This account, however, ignores the fact that objects of exchange (captives) were also vulnerable to the manipulations of others, and capable of manipulating their own value in ways that made them inalienable. Conversion was one such manipulation. The political economy of ransom was based on violent mechanisms for the insertion of people into exchange networks but it allowed for complementary procedures such as conversion for the removal of victims from the system. These mechanisms were inflexible to the degree that redeeming a Christian who ‘turned Turk’ or a baptized Muslim was nearly impossible. The system’s inflexibility, or rather efficiency, was predicated upon the membership of the commodities in question in distinct confessional communities. Captives who were familiar with the system could have threatened to convert in order to pressurize the friars to ransom them, even in cases where the latter had already exhausted their ransom funds. Such manipulations bring to

71 In September 1661, four Catalan boys held captive in Algiers appeared in the lodgings of Mercedarian friars who were on a ransom mission, threatening that if the Mercedarians ‘would not ransom them, the [Catalan boys] would immediately convert [to Islam] in their presence’. Since the redemptionists had already spent all the money they brought for ransom, one of them remained in Algiers as a hostage, allowing the Catalans to return home with the rest of the rescued. See Relación (cont. on p. 85)
light the differing logics of operation that drove merchants and friars. The friars were not motivated by economic logic even if they operated in a market. What interested them was the salvation of Christian souls in danger versus the termination of the trial of captivity.

In Fatima’s case inalienability entailed full de-commoditization. It is important to stress that like other captives, she was never only a commodity to all the parties involved in the negotiation over her exchange. As far as her father was concerned she was a beloved daughter to be rescued, and once converted, nobody in her new Christian community was willing to sell her any more. Her case, though, appears exceptional in that after her conversion, she lived as a free person who by 1618 was married to a Christian. More commonly, inalienability was socially and religiously oriented: namely, the convert’s home community was not interested in his or her ransom, nor was the convert’s new religious community willing to sell him or her back. On the other hand, even if conversion could eventually lead to manumission, slave-owners whose slaves converted could, and did, sell them to other members of the confession. In other words, alienability meant that the convert could not be sold back to his or her former confessional community, but could still be sold among members of his or her new community. The uniqueness of slaves as a commodity, at once objects and subjects, indicates the limitations of these commercial networks and those of economic terminology as a tool for explaining Mediterranean bondage.

(n. 71 cont.)

verdadera embiada de la ciudad de Argel dando cuenta de los alborotos, y ruidos, que aquellos barbaros tienen entre sí, Biblioteca Nacional de Espana (hereafter BNE), VE 57-17.


73 Algazi, ‘Diversity Rules’.

74 It should be stressed that not only did Muslims rarely force their slaves to convert but also when the latter sought conversion, masters often objected to it, see Laurent d’Arvieux, Mémoires du chevalier d’Arvieux: voyage à Tunis, ed. Jacques de Maussion de Favières (Paris, 1994), 44–5; Laugier de Tassy, Histoire du royaume d’Alger . . . un diplomate français à Alger en 1724 (Paris, 1992), 62. Spanish soldiers posted in North Africa, who defected to Algiers with the intention to convert to Islam, almost always discovered that the pasha preferred to enslave them rather than have them as new Muslim subjects, see AGS, Estado, Leg. 210, 2.10.1608.
Algiers was as responsible as Spain for the failure to resolve the Fatima affair. We see that when we look at the power struggles between the pasha and the aga, the captain of the janissaries, who presided over the meetings of the Divan. Since 1587, the Ottoman Sultan nominated Algerian pashas for renewable triennial mandates. Nominees perceived this North African ‘exile’ as an opportunity to make a fortune before they returned as wealthy men to Istanbul. In contrast, the office of the aga was elected and in the seventeenth century each aga held the office for two lunar months. These two figures negotiated and decided upon Algiers’ political issues at the Divan, in meetings that also brought together senior officers of the janissaries, representatives of the corsairs’ taifa, the mufti, cadi and secretaries. The shape and dynamics of the disagreement between the pasha and the aga on how to terminate the affair reveals both a reciprocal logic similar to the one encountered on the Christian side and political tensions external to Fatima’s conversion. On the surface, it seems as if the source of debate was the salaries of the janissaries, which the pasha was responsible for paying, often having difficulty in finding the funds. The archival record, however, reveals repeated discussions that tied the payment of the soldiers’ salaries to the demand for Fatima’s release. On

76 Wolf, *Barbary Coast*, 82.
79 Unfortunately, we have no minutes of the Divan meetings and in general Ottoman Algerian archives store very few documents for that period, see Fatima Loualich, ‘In the Regency of Algiers: The Human Side of the Algerine Corso’, in Fusaro, Heywood and Omri (eds.), *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, esp. 93–6. The source of the information employed here is the report of an anonymous captive and secret agent from Denia (in the Crown of Valencia), sent to the viceroy of Majorca. The details the anonymous Valencian provided about the
14 September 1613, for example, in response to the janissaries’ complaint about a delay in receiving their wages, the pasha replied that he could not pay until the janissaries allowed free commerce in captives and had freed the detained Trinitarians. Similar tensions erupted again in three separate meetings during the first quarter of 1614. The last meeting, in March, ended in disaster. A French renegade pleaded that the Trinitarians should remain in prison until Fatima was returned to her family. Turmoil ensued: the janissaries shouted vehemently, knives were unsheathed, and some soldiers threatened to slash the pasha’s throat.

The disagreement reflects the differing ransom agendas of the pasha and the janissaries. In this instance, the pasha is seeking to restore the status quo and have the friars return to Algiers. The janissaries operated like a guild protecting one of its members — Axá — in their refusal to allow the pasha to release the Trinitarians. Their behaviour was based on reciprocal logic of the kind that drove the friars to redeem Christians or prevented the swapping of Fatima-Madalena for the Trinitarians, only in this instance, reciprocity was predicated upon a professional fraternity and not a confessional group. These tensions also demonstrate the complexity of the political game. On the one hand, different parties in Spain and in Algiers were split about the measures to be taken towards retrieving the status quo. On the other, the affair created ad hoc coalitions that crossed religious and political boundaries. The Spaniards, their Jewish subjects in Oran, the Ottoman Sultan and the Algerian pasha were acting to release Monroy and restart state-regulated commerce of captives. However, the aga and the janissaries, Christians from different communities of origin who converted to Islam, objected to a compromise.

meetings suggest that he was either present in person or had a valuable informer, see AGS, Estado, Leg. 255, 9.14.1613.

When asked for the money, the pasha responded that, ‘he had already dealt and cut [an agreement] with the [Trinitarian] fathers allowing them to leave; and in order to finalize it, he wants [the janissaries] to give him their word that they will not hinder [the deal] but would rather let the fathers and the Christian [captives they had ransomed] go free’. Ibid., 2.7.1614; see also ibid., 1.5.1614 and 3.3.1614.

Ibid., 2.7.1614.
The arrest of the Trinitarians led Philip III to formalize the collaboration between the friars and Jewish and Muslim ransomers, transforming the latter into imperially sanctioned ransom agents. How and why did that happen? In 1609, when Philip III heard of the arrest, he ordered a halt to all ransom operations in Algiers until the Trinitarians and the redeemed captives were freed. Since Algerians continued capturing Spaniards, redeemers began searching for ways to circumvent the prohibition. As we have seen, go-betweens had been buying captives in Algiers and selling them elsewhere for years. The orders could keep on working with intermediaries, but now they had to rely solely on them, and that required a royal assent. On 3 March 1612, the Mercedarians petitioned the monarch to allow them to commission a captain in Ceuta (a Spanish possession at the time) or in Gibraltar to sail to Algiers with North African Muslim or Jewish merchants, ransom Spaniards, and hand them over to the friars in Ceuta. Similar petitions were

82 AGS, Guerra Antigua, Leg. 767, 3.9.1612.
83 Ceuta was a Portuguese garrison, which became Spanish at the Spanish–Portuguese union in 1580.
84 The licence the Trinitarians received two years later allowed ‘[that] a captain from Gibraltar, Ceuta or Tangiers could go with his ship to Algiers, taking with him a few Jewish or Muslim merchants who have contacts among the Muslim merchants of Algiers, to execute the said ransom’, apud Porres Alonso, Libertad a los cautivos, 345. Indeed many of the captives they ransomed in this expedition were brought to Tétouan from Algiers. See Trinitarios calzados. Libro de la redención de cautivos de Tétouan, Fez y Marruecos. Resultado de las comisiones de fray Jerónimo Fernández y fray Antonio de Madrid. Año 1614, AHN, Códices, lib. 124. For the 1617 Mercedarian expedition to Algiers and its reliance on local merchants, see José Antonio Gari y Siumell, La orden redentora de la Merced: . . . ó sea, historia de las redenciones de cautivos cristianos realizadas por los hijos de la orden de la Merced (Barcelona, 1873), 280–6. In 1618, the Spaniards tried using the services of a Valencia-based French trader to buy Spanish soldiers held captive in Algiers. The Algerians, however, refused to sell him captives without the presence of Trinitarian friars. Eventually, and despite his own veto on sending redeemers to the city, Philip III ordered the Trinitarians to travel to Algiers and join the French merchant. The reason for this exception was that the captives were soldiers whose return to military service was a royal necessity. On the ransom expedition see AHN, Códices, lib. 125, fo. 7r and 22–27v (first foliation) and fo. 56v (second foliation). On the commercial activities of the French merchant, Antoine Masued (or Masuer or Massuer) see Alvaro Castillo Pintado, Tráfico marítimo y comercio de importación en Valencia a comienzos del siglo XVII (Madrid, 1967), 85 and 99; and Rafael Benítez, ‘La tramitación del pago de rescates a través del reino de Valencia: el último plazo de rescate de Cervantes’, in Kaiser (ed.), Le Commerce des captifs, 201, 203 and 215.
resubmitted and permits reissued continuously. In fact, the Mercedarians returned to Algiers only after 1627 and, with one exception (1618), the Trinitarians only after 1650. During this period, Spain outsourced ransom, relying mostly on Maghribis to rescue its subjects.

The issuing of these royal licences had somewhat contradictory effects on the Crown, the orders and Maghribi go-betweens. In commissioning non-Habsburg subjects to execute the work of the friars, the Crown achieved two objectives simultaneously; it obviated the inherent risk of sending the orders to Algiers, and yet ransomed its own subjects. Moreover, in compelling the orders to apply for a licence for a procedure that deviated from the Crown’s instructions, the king reaffirmed and strengthened his control over the orders. In this sense, the affair illuminates the complexity of processes of political centralization in early modern imperial Spain. So far, scholars have read the Crown’s appropriation of the redemptive labour of the orders as part of state-formation, centralization and bureaucratization. The Crown’s policy following the imprisonment of the Trinitarians in 1609 proves that such processes were often predicated upon the externalization of power and decentralization. Students of political history have criticized the image of early modern Spain as an absolutist monarchy from nearly every angle, stressing how weak the political metropole was in relation to its peripheries. Yet this case shows how decentralization was extended beyond imperial boundaries involving former subjects previously expelled and who were now considered residents of enemy polities. Not only was the political economy of ransom shaped by political processes, but in turn, it weighed on state-making

85 Ransom via intermediaries was organized along several routes and involved Maghribi and Spanish Jews and Muslims and, occasionally, Christian merchants. Algiers–Tétouan emerged as the main axis that channelled this trafficking, but there was at least one attempt to use Oran as the point to which locals delivered rescued Spaniards, see AGS, Guerra Antigua, Leg. 786, 2.28.1613 and AGS, Guerra Antigua, Leg. 786, 6.25.1613.

86 Martínez Torres, Prisioneros de los infieles, 24 and 77.

processes. By repeatedly guaranteeing such permits, the Catholic king gradually came to rely on non-Spaniards, who were not even Christians, for rescuing his subjects’ bodies and saving their souls. Therefore, the increase of royal involvement in ransom, a policy geared to rescue as many Spanish subjects as possible, saving Christian souls in danger, and constructing a Catholic image of the monarchy, not only entailed the decentralization of political power, but also subverted royal ideologies. This occurred because increased efforts to redeem Christians from the Islamic world led to the establishment of new bonds and working relations with Jews and Muslims precisely at the time when Philip III had ordered the expulsion of the Moriscos (1609–1614), the descendants of the Muslim population of Spain perceived as a ‘fifth column’. The idea of expulsion had been circulating in Spanish political corridors for decades. Historians have suggested that its execution in 1609, with the signing of a truce with the Protestant ‘Dutch rebels’, was meant to compensate for Spain’s loss of international prestige in being forced to make concessions to the Dutch republic. By expelling the Moriscos, the Crown sought to recuperate the honour it had allegedly lost in signing the ceasefire agreement. In such an economy of religious prestige, the advantages gained by the cleansing of the Crown’s territory of the Moriscos could legitimize the formation of new contractual relations between Spain and North African Muslims and Jews.

Once go-betweens were formally charged with ransoming Spaniards, they came to control a greater portion of ransom deals. In the process, however, the king pressed on them his own ransom agenda. Despite the fact that the royal decree increased the volume of captives trafficked by Muslim–Jewish networks, the initial vibrancy and potency of the networks allowed the king to suspend redemptive expeditions to Algiers. The redeeming friars expressed their discomfort at the go-betweens’ growing influence. Referring to Moroccan Jewish merchants, one Mercedarian wrote in 1618, ‘It does not seem

89 For a discussion of the debates about the expulsion and the ways in which the expulsion strengthened Spain’s image as the defender of Catholicism, see Antonio Feros, El Duque de Lerma: realeza y privanza en la España de Felipe III (Madrid, 2002), 353–72.
advisable, nor will it ever be, that the redemptions be executed by intermediaries, especially not by Jews’. Nevertheless, he and his fellow Mercedarians knew that they were incapable of ransoming captives independently of these go-betweens. Until 1627, Tétouan remained the preferred solution, and Jews and Muslims continued to facilitate the return of and re-socialization into the Catholic community of the Spanish Crown of Spaniards held captive in Algiers.

VII
TIGHTENING REGULATION

The Mercedarians were not the only ones dissatisfied with the growing power of the intermediaries. Commissioning Maghribis partially resolved a Spanish problem, but the authorities in Tétouan and in Algiers were unhappy as a result. If, prior to the halt on direct ransoms from Algiers, they felt that the gain of local merchants from ransom came at the expense of their profit and power from selling captives to the friars, now they harboured no doubts. From the Moroccan perspective, the Algerians and the go-betweens were taking over their share of the ransom.

When in December 1614 a Mercedarian expedition arrived in Ceuta, the friar leading it immediately nominated a French captain to sail to Algiers, a Muslim merchant from Tétouan to finance the journey and employ his contacts there and a Jew from Ceuta to be the guarantor of the transaction. Only then, the Mercedarians met the governor of Tétouan and explained that they intended to spend the bulk of their ransom funds on captives from Algiers—‘the best of that redemption was to be used [for ransom] in Algiers and this was the most important and most necessary’. Upset, the governor refused to help the friars unless they first spent their money on captives owned by Tétouanites. His people, he explained, were dissatisfied with the ransomers’ plan, and he feared a rebellion. Three years later, the scene repeated itself, only now the governor strictly

92 For a description of the uproar that erupted in 1614 once the plans of the Mercedarians became public and the consequent danger to their lives, see Mss. 12078, fo. 160, BNE.
forbade the Mercedarians from contacting local merchants before buying his captives. Eventually, local Jews mediated an agreement according to which the friars spent some of their funds on captives of the governor and some on the captives they commissioned from Algiers.

Following the arrest of the Trinitarians, the Algerians became more active in attempting to exclude local go-betweens from the ransom market. For example, in September 1614, a Muslim merchant left Algiers with a frigate and thirty-three Christian captives he had intended to sell in Tétouan. Approximately a league away from Algiers the merchant’s ship dropped anchor and took on three more Christians, who had previously been ransomed by Monroy. The Algerians had discovered the plan, and on 20 September intercepted the frigate and strangled the merchant to death at the exact same spot where he had picked up the three captives. In addition to this case, evidence shows that the Algerians strictly forbade intermediaries from selling captives to Mercedarians in 1613 and to Trinitarians in 1618. Spanish reliance on Maghribi ransom agents, then, not only reduced the involvement of the friars, but also compelled the Algerians and Moroccans to harden their policies. Ironically, the Spanish politics of ransom united Algerian pashas and Moroccan governors in an informal coalition. The members of this alliance were unaware that they formed a coalition; they never negotiated its terms, nor did they formally agree to collaborate. If anything, after years of Algerian attempts to conquer Morocco, Algerians and Moroccans had perceived themselves as rivals. Moreover, they sold the same commodity and competed for the same buyers. And yet, despite being diametrically opposed in their goals, they shared a common interest: the control over go-betweens and direct commerce in captives with the orders of Redemption.

93 Gari y Siumell, La orden redentora, 283.
94 AGS, Estado, Leg. 255, 20.9.1614.
95 There is very little research on Ottoman–Moroccan relations during the seventeenth century. On Ottoman attempts to intervene in Moroccan politics, see Auguste Cour, L’Etablissement des dynasties des Chérifs au Maroc et leur rivalité avec les Turcs de la régence d’Alger 1509–1830 (Saint Denis, 2004); and Abderrahmane El Moulden, ‘Sharifs and Padishahs: Moroccan–Ottoman Relations from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries: Contribution to the Study of a Diplomatic Culture’, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Princeton, 1992), esp. 149–150.
Whereas before Fatima’s conversion and the imprisonment of the redeemers the rulers of the western Mediterranean perceived intermediaries and ecclesiastical ransom institutions as complementary options, now these political powers actively pursued their exchange and communication agendas, which had up to that point remained only vaguely articulated. Philip III formally commissioned intermediaries as his ransom agents, the latter gained power and prominence, and increased their control over the ransom of Spaniards from Algiers. In response, both Algerian pashas and Moroccan governors employed all available methods to prevent these go-betweens from interfering in the ransom market. The affair, then, re-signified the relations between go-betweens and the orders of Redemption. Now, redemption via the orders and ransom via intermediaries were perceived as excluding alternatives.

VIII

CONCLUSION

The last archival trace Fatima left behind was when she married a Christian in Calvi in 1616. The affair, however, continued to haunt Spaniards, Algerians and Moroccans for decades. In 1627, with the permission of Philip IV, the Mercedarians renewed their missions in Algiers, while the Trinitarians did so only in 1650. In 1648, a former Spanish captive who established strong friendship ties with his Algerian captors had sent the latter letters with an Algerian envoy based in Madrid at the time. The ex-captive informed his Algerian acquaintances of his efforts to convince the king’s ministers to send the Trinitarians to Algiers. Despite the fact that ransom in Algiers would have been cheaper for the Crown, he explained that decision-makers in Madrid, fearing a new Monroy affair, preferred to send the friars to Tétouan and Salé instead.96 The conjuration of the affair in 1648 within the context of Algerian lobbying to send more redemption expeditions to Algiers demonstrates how the political economy of ransom was shaped not only by the Spanish king or the orders of Redemption, but rather by the interactions among political actors from all sides of the sea.

96 Copy of a letter from Ysidro del Castillo y Aguilera to Cid Ali Hache Catalán, RAH, Colección de Don Luis Salazar y Castro, Leg. 38, Carpeta 5, 18.11.1648.
The conversion of Fatima and the detention of the Trinitarians are exceptional in the wealth of documentation they have left behind. Yet similar kidnappings, forced conversions, violation of ransom agreements and successful and failed attempts to commoditize those considered immune to commoditization (the Trinitarians) or to remove slaves from exchange networks were common throughout the early modern period.97 In this regard, the history of ransom clearly did not begin nor did it end in the dates limited by this article. Yet, due to the richness of the record, the affair sheds light on the dynamics that transformed and affected Mediterranean ransom agendas and procedures, dynamics that often remain obscure.

The study of the human trafficking engendered by piracy and corsairs, a phenomenon that ranged from the trivial to the spectacular, requires a shifting analytical frame that pays attention to different geo-political and social value regimes. The light such an integrative approach sheds has broader implications for Mediterranean historiography and the ‘northern invasion’ thesis according to which north Europeans marginalized local actors, making their social, religious and political mechanisms obsolete in the new seventeenth-century modernized Mediterranean. The persisting importance of North Africans and Iberians in shaping the ransom system, as well as of religious mechanisms such as conversion, social reciprocity, and political process complicates this narrative. Indeed, the involvement of local actors in piracy, captivity and redemption was significant to the degree that the paradigmatic others of Spain—Jews and Muslims—came to be in charge of the physical rescue and moral salvation of Spaniards and participated in processes of state formation. In other words, while north Europeans were reshaping the Mediterranean, North Africans and Mediterranean networks continued to shape seemingly European territorial identities and political processes. In so far as captivity and ransom formed the main interface linking Morocco, Algiers and Spain, their analysis is essential to understanding the process by which human circulation across the sea was transformed in the early modern

97 Smaller scale entanglements that created similar ad hoc ransom coalitions and oppositions were common in the early modern period, see Hershenzon, “[P]ara que me saque cabesa por cabesa . . .”
period, via interaction between cross-boundary maritime practices (such as the exchanges carried out by Maghribi Jews and Muslims), attempts at political regulation, social obligation and religious mechanisms.

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