

Algerian-Moroccan Strategies and Redemption Mechanisms (1659–1727): Cross-Mediterranean Captivity

Dr. Zineb DJANI¹, Dr. Rafika KORICHI²

¹ Heritage and Memory Laboratory for research in the Algerian Sahara and the Islamic West, University of Ghardaia, (Algeria). E-mail: zinab.j47@gmail.com

² Heritage and Memory Laboratory for research in the Algerian Sahara and the Islamic West, University of Ghardaia, (Algeria). E-mail: rafikakoko@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The issue of captivity constitutes one of the most critical topics defining relations between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. This issue gained heightened gravity due to the historical conditions that dominated the region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With the escalation of European incursions—particularly French and Spanish—against Algerian and Moroccan coasts, the intensification of naval Jihad, and the prevalence of privateering practices pursued by both Muslims and Christians, numerous individuals were captured on both sides. Consequently, the prisoner question emerged as a pivotal element in stimulating diplomatic engagement between the opposing powers. Redemption orders played a significant role in securing the release of Christian captives, especially as the ransom process provided a substantial source of revenue and served as a vital factor in stimulating local economies, particularly that of Algeria.

Keywords: Christian Captives, Muslim Captives, Naval Jihad, Privateering, Redemption Mechanisms, Algerian-Moroccan Diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of captives and prisoners of war constitutes one of the most pivotal dynamics that defined diplomatic and military relations between the powers of the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean during the second half of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. This historical juncture witnessed an intense escalation in maritime competition and armed confrontations, driven by persistent European naval expeditions—most notably by France and Spain—against Algerian and Moroccan coasts, matched by vigorous privateering and maritime Jihad operations. This enduring conflict resulted in the capture of substantial numbers of prisoners on both sides of the basin, transforming the captive dossier into a formidable lever in regional statecraft, a primary catalyst for diplomatic correspondence and special embassies, and a direct influence on the socio-economic fabric of the Maghreb, where redemption mechanisms evolved into a lucrative revenue source and an intersection of interests among sovereign states, religious orders, and merchant intermediaries.

Navigating these intricate dynamics, this study investigates how the management and strategic balance of the captive dossier between Algeria and Morocco on one side, and European powers on the other, shaped Mediterranean interactions. The central inquiry asks: *How did the presence of European captives in the Maghreb and reciprocal Algerian-Moroccan efforts to liberate Muslim captives forge*

frameworks for diplomatic engagement and define the trajectories of economic and humanitarian interactions across the Mediterranean during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries? To address this core theme, the research explores the legal, social, and living conditions of European captives in Algeria and Morocco in contrast to the plight of Muslim captives in Europe, analyzes the institutional mechanisms—encompassing peace treaties, religious redemption orders, and commercial brokerages—employed to secure captive releases, and evaluates how complementary or intersecting Algerian and Moroccan diplomatic endeavors served the broader cause of liberating Muslim prisoners.

By elucidating the historical background and multifaceted dimensions of maritime captivity in the Western Mediterranean, this study aims to deconstruct the diplomatic and humanitarian strategies adopted by Algerian and Moroccan authorities to address the captive crisis, highlighting how redemption processes stimulated economic activity and compelled European monarchs to engage in formal treaty negotiations. To achieve these research objectives, the study employs a descriptive-historical method grounded in the analytical and critical evaluation of contemporary archival documents and primary narratives, supplemented by a comparative framework to examine living conditions and redemption protocols across Algeria and Morocco, while juxtaposing Maghrebi treatment of Christian captives against the treatment endured by Muslim captives in European ports and naval galleys.

1. THE ISSUE OF EUROPEAN CAPTIVES IN ALGERIA AND MOROCCO

1. European Captives in Algeria

1.1.1. Statistical Census of Their Numbers

Algeria witnessed a massive influx of European captives, the majority of whom were Spaniards, Italians, and Frenchmen. The seventeenth century represented the "golden age" of privateering, during which their numbers increased substantially. Father Pierre Dan notes that during the first half of the seventeenth century, there were approximately 25,000 male captives and 1,000 female captives in Algeria¹.

In March 1790, the newspaper *La Gazette* published an account referencing Sīdi Ibrāhīm, a member of the Algerian Deylik Divan in 1670 CE, who stated that the total captive population reached 50,000. Regarding Algerian naval activity, between 1672 and 1682 CE, Algerian vessels managed to capture 353 English ships carrying 1,850 mariners². Thus, these statistics demonstrate that the number of Christian captives was exceptionally large. According to Fau, by 1729 CE, the number of captives stood at 10,000—a figure that had diminished partly due to many converting to Islam. Father Dan indicates that 9,500 captives embraced Islam in Algeria³, whether to obtain freedom or out of conviction in the tolerance of the Islamic faith. Consequently, the renegade class (*al-A'lāj / renegados*) played a distinguished role in Algerian history.

The methods by which Europeans were captured were manifold, including:

¹ John JB Wolf, *Al-Jazā'ir wa-Ūrubbā 1500–1830*, trans. Abū al-Qāsim Sa'd Allāh, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2005, p. 207.

² Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Al-Asrā al-Ūrūbbiyyūn fī al-Jazā'ir fī 'ahd al-Dāyāt (1671–1830)," PhD diss., Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, University of Mascara, 2015–2016, p. 144.

³ Pierre Dan, *Histoire de Barbarie et de ses corsaires des royaumes et des villes d'Alger, de Tunis, de Salé, et de Tripoli*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1646, p. 341.

–**Raids on European Coasts:** Particularly southern coasts such as Genoa, Naples, Livorno, Sardinia, Corsica, and Malta¹, as well as certain European Atlantic shores.

–**Interception of Vessels at Sea:** Particularly ships belonging to nations that lacked peace treaties with Algeria, as most captives were seized during maritime encounters.

–**Strengthening Algerian Presence in the West:** Executing periodic assaults on Oran, which declined after the Spaniards fortified the city's eastern approaches in the final third of the sixteenth century².

–**French Military Campaigns:** Campaigns launched against Algeria during the second half of the seventeenth century, notably the French expedition against Djidjelli (Jijel) in 1075 AH / 1664 CE, where Algerian forces captured 1,400 French prisoners upon France's defeat³.

1.1.2. Living Conditions and Social Classification:

The initial phase for captives involved leading them to the Dey's palace (*Djenina*), where the Dey was entitled to a share ranging between 10% and 12% of the captured spoils. Based on this privilege, he personally inspected and selected the most valuable captives⁴, choosing captains, officers, physicians, carpenters, and individuals of noble lineage. The Dey customarily selected eight captives for his service.⁵

The captives selected by the Dey were dispatched to state prisons (*bagnios*), while the remaining prisoners were distributed among the vessel owners and crew.⁶ On the following day, the captives were offered for sale at the *Badistan* (or *Bazistan*),⁷ where each prisoner was sold to the highest bidder.⁸ A captive's market value was governed by several variables, including age, place of birth, wealth, social status in their home country, and professional skill.⁹ Local residents held the right to purchase captives to employ them in private households or agricultural estates¹⁰.

Captives resided in prison complexes known as *bagnios*. During the second half of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, the total number of Christian captives declined due to diminishing privateering revenues, the conclusion of peace treaties with European nations, and the growing renegade population (*al-A' lāj*), which led to a reduction in the number of active *bagnios*.

¹ Yahyā Bū'azīz, *Al-Mūjaz fī tārikh al-Jazā'ir*, 2nd ed., Algiers: OPU, 2009, Vol. 2, p. 185.

² 'Abd al-Qādir Fakāyir, *Al-Ghazw al-Isbānī li-al-sawāhil al-Jazā'iriyyah wa-āthāruh* 910–1206H/1505–1792M, 2nd ed., Algiers: Dār Hūmah, 2015, p. 316.

³ Muḥammah 'Ā'ishah, "Al-Asrā al-Ūrūbbiyyūn fī madīnat al-Jazā'ir wa-dawruhum fī al-'alāqāt bayna al-Jazā'ir wa-duwal al-ḥawḍ al-gharbī li-al-Mutawassīṭ khilāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa-al-sābi' 'ashar," Master's thesis, Ghardaia University Center, 2010–2011, p. 16.

⁴ John B. Wolf, *Al-Jazā'ir wa-Ūrūbbā 1500–1830*, trans. Abū al-Qāsim Sa'd Allāh, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2005, p. 209.

⁵ Laugier de Tassy, *Histoire du royaume d'Alger*, Paris: Éditions Loysel, 1992, p. 163.

⁶ Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Al-Asrā al-Ūrūbbiyyūn fī al-Jazā'ir fī 'ahd al-Dāyāt (1671–1830)," PhD diss., Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, University of Mascara, 2015–2016, p. 221.

⁷ The Badistan was established prior to 981 AH / 1573 CE by Pasha Ḥasan Veneziano to sell all spoils brought back by privateers, including captives and merchandise. See: 'Ā'ishah Ghaṭṭās, *Al-Ḥiraf wa-al-ḥirafīyyūn fī madīnat al-Jazā'ir 1700–1830M*, Algiers: ANEP, 2007, p. 256.

⁸ Ḥanīfī Halāyīlī, *Awraq fī tārikh al-Jazā'ir fī al-'ahd al-'Uthmānī*, 1st ed., Algiers: Dār al-Hudā, 2008, p. 209.

⁹ John B. Wolf, *Al-Jazā'ir wa-Ūrūbbā 1500–1830*, p. 110.

¹⁰ Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Bānyāwāt al-asrā al-Masīhiyyīn fī al-Jazā'ir khilāl al-'ahd al-'Uthmānī (1519–1830M)," *Majallat Dirāsāt Tārikhiyyah*, No. 1, Algiers, December 2013, p. 133.

By the late seventeenth century, the primary facilities included the Djenina prison, the Chelbi prison, and the Great Prison (*Le Grand Bagnio*), alongside private prisons owned by affluent city residents.¹

Captives were categorized according to ownership and service:

–**The Dey's Captives:** These prisoners resided within the Dey's palace, tasked with cleaning the kitchens and quarters across the upper and lower floors, as well as serving coffee to the Dey and his ministers. Others maintained and landscaped the palace gardens. The condition of palace captives was markedly superior to that of other prisoners.²

–**The Beylik (State) Captives:** Captives who were neither chosen by the Dey nor purchased by private individuals became the property of the state (*Beylik*). They were employed in heavy labor, such as quarrying stone along provincial roads, working in rural districts (*Fahş*), or working in naval dockyards (*Dār al-Şinā'ah*) and shipbuilding workshops.³ They also maintained military barracks. Their labor was arduous—particularly galley rowing—and sea captains (*Reis*) maintained strict vigilance to prevent escapes,⁴ although employing captives as galley rowers became less frequent during this period.⁵ State captives wore an iron ring on one leg to distinguish them from others.⁶ They were also permitted to engage in secondary commercial pursuits, such as managing taverns within the *bagnio*, paying half the standard tax rate for this privilege.⁷

–**Private Captives:** Private *bagnios* served primarily as sleeping quarters for privately owned captives. During the day, captives were required to secure their own livelihood and earn a fixed daily fee to pay their masters. Consequently, captives engaged in various trades and crafts, while some resorted to theft, reselling stolen goods the following day at public auctions held inside the *bagnio*.⁸

Significantly, the state attached a hospital to each prison, demonstrating official concern for the healthcare of captives. In 1694 CE, Dey Sha'bān (r. 1689–1695 CE)⁹ issued a decree establishing hospitals and granting operational privileges to their administrators, led by Father Joseph Queralt from the Province of Castile. Furthermore, every *bagnio* housed a chapel or small church catering to various Christian denominations, allowing captives to conduct religious services and observe feast days, particularly Easter and New Year's Day. Taverns for selling wine were located on the lower levels of the Beylik prison and the Galley Prison (*Bagnio de la Galère*).¹⁰

¹ Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Bānyāwāt al-asrā al-Masīhiyyīn fī al-Jazā'ir," p. 132.

² James Leander Cathcart, *Mudhakkirāt asīr al-Dāy Kāthkār qunṣul Amrīkā fī al-Maghrib*, trans. Ismā'īl al-'Arabī, Algiers: OPU, 1982, pp. 26–27.

³ William Spencer, *Al-Jazā'ir fī 'ahd Ruyyās al-Baḥr*, trans. 'Abd al-Qādir Zabādiyyah, Algiers: SNED, 1980, p. 156.

⁴ Diego de Haëdo, *Topographie et histoire générale d'Alger*, trans. Adrien Berbrugger and Monnereau, Paris, 1870, p. 394, p. 50.

⁵ John B. Wolf, *Al-Jazā'ir wa-Ūrubbā 1500–1830*, p. 211.

⁶ Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Al-Asrā al-Ūrubbīyyūn fī al-Jazā'ir fī 'ahd al-Dāyāt (1671–1830)," p. 226.

⁷ James Leander Cathcart, *Mudhakkirāt asīr al-Dāy Kāthkār*, p. 128.

⁸ James Wilson Stevens, *Al-Asrā al-Amrīkān fī al-Jazā'ir 1795/1796*, trans. 'Alī Tāblīt, Algiers: Publications Thaïla, 2007, p. 216.

⁹ Dey Sha'bān governed the Regency of Algiers between 1689 and 1695 CE.

¹⁰ Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Bānyāwāt al-asrā al-Masīhiyyīn fī al-Jazā'ir," p. 136.

1.2. European Captives in Morocco

1.2.1. Statistical Census of Their Numbers

In most cases, the capture of Frenchmen occurred through two primary avenues: purchase and maritime interception. Numerous historical sources describe the purchase of French captives in other Maghrebi ports and their subsequent transfer to Morocco. The total number of captives was estimated at 1,200, of whom 20% were French. By 1687 CE, the number of French captives stood at 400.¹ In 1691 CE, the French captive population was recorded at 286, dropping to 110 in 1714 CE, before rising slightly to 130 in 1727 CE.²

Regarding Spanish captives, the liberation of Moroccan coastal strongholds (*presidios*) occupied by Spain during the reign of Sultan Moulay Isma'īl³ led to the capture of a substantial number of Spanish soldiers and settlers—most notably following the retaking of Larache (Al-‘Arā’ish) and La Mamora (Al-Ma‘mūrah). Additionally, naval Jihad operations yielded a high volume of captives of diverse nationalities, with Spaniards constituting the majority. For instance, between 1672 and 1676 CE, there were 1,200 captives in Morocco: 200 in Marrakesh, 500 in Fez, over 200 in Meknes, and 300 in Salé.

Spain and Portugal accounted for the largest proportion of Christian captives in Morocco; in 1687 CE, they represented 500 captives (comprising 33% of the total). By 1703 CE, there were 700 Spanish captives alone. The numbers continued to fluctuate; in 1708 CE, a census conducted by Moulay Isma'īl recorded 800 captives: 200 French, 400 Spanish, and 200 Portuguese.⁴ European historians estimate that the total number of captives during the reign of Moulay Isma'īl reached several thousand individuals of various European nationalities.⁵

1.2.2. Living Conditions and Settlement Dynamics

Captives residing in Marrakesh fared markedly better than those in other Moroccan cities, as they received continuous pastoral care from monks, inhabited suitable quarters, and enjoyed reasonable living conditions. Conversely, captives in Tetouan⁶, Salé, and Safi⁷ lacked direct episcopal

¹ Henry de Castries, *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc: Deuxième série, Dynastie Filalienne*. Archives et bibliothèques de France, Vol. 3, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1909, p. 123.

² Leïla Maziane, "Les captifs européens en terre marocaine aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, No. 65, 2002, p. 2.

³ Sultan Moulay Isma'īl was pledged allegiance on 16 Dhu al-Hijjah 1082 AH (March 17, 1672 CE) at the age of 26. He passed away on Saturday, 28 Rajab 1139 AH (March 21, 1727 CE) and was interred at the Mausoleum of Shaykh al-Majdhūb in Meknes at the age of 83, having ruled Morocco for 55 years. See: Buṭrus al-Bustānī et al., *Al-Munjid fī al-a‘lām*, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1969, p. 29.

⁴ Leïla Maziane, "Les captifs européens en terre marocaine aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," p. 7.

⁵ Al-Ṣiddīq Bin al-‘Arabī, "Ṭawā'if wa-shakhṣiyyāt Masīhiyyah bi-al-Maghrib," *Majallat Tiṭwān*, No. 1, Publications of the Center for Moroccan and Andalusian Studies, Morocco, 1956, p. 157.

⁶ Tetouan was among the early urban centers, struck by the Idrisids in 338 AH / 949 CE as a stronghold of local activity. It was attacked by the Spanish in the late 8th century AH / 14th century CE and remained deserted for nearly a century before being rebuilt by the Andalusian leader Abū al-Ḥasan al-Manzūrī in 888 AH / 1483 CE, settled by Granadan emigrés in the 10th century AH. See: ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Bin ‘abd Allāh, *Tiṭwān: ‘Āṣimat al-shamāl wa-manba‘ is hā’ih*, Morocco, 2005, p. 1.

⁷ Safi is a coastal city situated on the Atlantic Ocean between El Jadida and Essaouira.

supervision and were housed in underground dungeons known as *maṭāmīr* (silos/subterranean cells)¹. Within these subterranean spaces, captives erected altars and conducted Mass without hindrance from Moroccan authorities. In Salé, alongside smaller silos, a large subterranean prison housed the city's entire captive population.

Thus, European captives were distributed across various Moroccan cities. Upon ascending to power, Sultan Moulay Ismaʿīl centralized the administration of captives under state authority. He mobilized Christian captives to construct the Kasbah of Meknes and engage in various infrastructure projects. According to historical accounts, his prisons held twenty-five thousand captives employed in palace construction. As their numbers expanded, Moulay Ismaʿīl designated a spacious, high-walled compound where the captives constructed small dwellings. This complex was structured into distinct quarters containing thoroughfares, bakeries, places of worship, and infirmaries. Certain captives were permitted to reside outside the compound, particularly those offering specialized services to the Sultan or his entourage, as well as married captives. Captives in royal service received compensation, with the Sultan providing for their sustenance and attire².

Sultan Moulay Ismaʿīl issued strict directives to captive overseers prohibiting forced labor beyond designated working hours, corporal punishment, and the use of leg or wrist irons—restraints reserved strictly for individuals convicted of capital offenses. Furthermore, incapacitated or ailing captives were exempted from labor duties.³ Captives also enjoyed religious freedom, with Moroccans facilitating their religious rites. Marrakesh housed two Spanish friaries, while the Meknes prison contained a church and chapel. Moulay Ismaʿīl issued an imperial decree (*Zahīr*) granting clergy immunity and inviolability. The Sultan held clergy and captive religious figures in high esteem, allowing them to fulfill their spiritual duties quietly and enabling captives to observe religious festivities, practice their faith freely, and conduct traditional funerary rites⁴.

Josué de León, a captive in Meknes between 1708 and 1728 CE, documented:

*"...Captives employed in construction and blacksmithing resided near their worksites, while others lived in a central municipal quarter known as 'Al-Qanūṭ'... Skilled, upright captives proficient in Arabic were employed in royal workshops and assigned tasks requiring trust and integrity, enjoying freedom of movement within the city... The Sultan personally intervened on their behalf in disputes with Muslims... Mass was conducted daily in the friary, and ailing Spanish captives received medical care in the Franciscan friary hospital, which housed a pharmacy and a surgeon. Each nationality maintained its own medical facilities... In Meknes, a Franciscan friary comprised ten priests, two friars, and two clinics..."*⁵

¹ Badī'ah al-Kharāzī, *Tārīkh al-kanīṣah al-Naṣrāniyyah fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā*, 1st ed., Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīdah, 2000, p. 58.

² Badī'ah al-Kharāzī, *Tārīkh al-kanīṣah al-Naṣrāniyyah fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā*, p. 58.

³ Zahrā' Ikhwān, "Ṣūrat al-Maghrib fī Ūrubbā fī al-qarnayn 17 wa-18 min khilāl ba'd al-kitābāt al-Ūrūbbiyyah," *Majallat Minbar al-Jāmi'ah*, No. 3, Moulay Ismail University, Meknes, 2001, p. 69.

⁴ Zahrā' Ikhwān, "Ṣūrat al-Maghrib fī Ūrubbā fī al-qarnayn 17 wa-18," p. 70.

⁵ Chantal de La Véronne, *La vie de Moulay Ismaïl d'après Gens de León*, Paris: Geuthner, 1974, pp. 71–72.

European accounts frequently exaggerated the harshness of Moulay Ismaʿīl's rule to tarnish his reputation, describing captives as constantly bound in chains¹. Such portrayals were commonplace in European historiography regarding Muslims²; captive writers were often pressured to exaggerate hardships to appeal to popular readerships and foster the hostility promoted by ecclesiastic institutions³.

In reality, executions were rare, carried out solely in response to acts of treason or severe criminal offenses.⁴ Furthermore, approximately 1,500 captives embraced Islam in seventeenth-century Morocco, rising through the social hierarchy to hold influential positions across military and administrative sectors; one renegade served as governor (*ʿĀmil*) of Salé, and another as governor of Fez.⁵

2. MECHANISMS AND NETWORKS FOR REDEEMING EUROPEAN CAPTIVES

In most instances, the mechanisms employed for redeeming European captives in Algeria and Morocco were strikingly similar, revolving around provisions included in peace treaties or the intervention of religious redemption orders that had operated for centuries to liberate captives.

2.1. Redemption via Peace Treaties and Official Statecraft

Treaties concluded between Algeria, Morocco, and European powers—particularly France—frequently encountered friction regarding captive exchanges. European negotiators, especially the French, often refused to exchange healthy Muslim captives, offering instead disabled or elderly prisoners. Following the 1684 CE peace treaty between Algeria and France, French envoys to Morocco, such as Saint-Amans and Saint-Olon, were dispatched to secure the release of French captives, encountering substantial obstacles due to the intricate political nature of the captive question.

However, while European powers like France and England maintained permanent consuls in Algeria and Morocco to negotiate peace treaties and secure captive releases, Spain lacked diplomatic consuls and peace agreements with both states during this period.⁶ Consequently, religious organizations stepped in to substitute for consular representation, directly overseeing the liberation of European captives—most notably Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian nationals.

2.2. Redemption via Religious Missions and Orders

The number of captives in Morocco and Algeria rose significantly as a result of continuous military engagements with Spain and Portugal. Consequently, Spanish religious missions played a vital diplomatic role in maintaining connections between Algeria, Morocco, and Spain. Members of

¹ Albert Savine, *Dans les fers du Maghreb: St. Vincent de Paul et les esclaves chrétiens au Maroc (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles)*, Paris: Éditions Michaud, 1905, p. 37.

² Father Pierre Dan described these spaces as large vaulted subterranean cellars situated twelve feet below ground level where captives were imprisoned collectively under day-and-night guard supervision. See: Pierre Dan, *Histoire de Barbarie*, p. 412.

³ Idrīs Abū Idrīs, "Al-Mudhakkirāt al-Ūrūbbiyyah ka-maṣḍar li-tārīkh al-Maghrib khilāl al-qarn 17 wa-18M," *Majallat Maknāsah*, No. 9, Morocco, 1992, p. 67.

⁴ Al-Ṣiddīq Bin al-ʿArabī, "Ṭawāʿif wa-shakhṣiyyāt Masīhiyyah bi-al-Maghrib," *Majallat Tiṭwān*, No. 1, 1956, p. 158.

⁵ Al-Ṣiddīq Bin al-ʿArabī, "Ṭawāʿif wa-shakhṣiyyāt Masīhiyyah bi-al-Maghrib," pp. 69–70.

⁶ John B. Wolf, *Al-Jazāʿir wa-Ūrūbbā 1500–1830*, trans. Abū al-Qāsim Saʿd Allāh, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2005, p. 215.

these religious orders acted virtually as ambassadors for the Spanish Crown, serving during critical junctures to break diplomatic impasses and alleviate bilateral tensions.¹

Religious missions arrived in North Africa—particularly Algeria and Morocco—to minister to the spiritual and religious needs of Christian captives and provide healthcare. Crucially, they facilitated redemption negotiations to free Christian captives. To carry out these missions, the fathers were required to pay administrative fees, present customary gifts to local rulers, and pay ransom amounts. Throughout their stay in Algeria and Morocco, these religious envoys were treated with respect and provided with private accommodations.

In Algeria, the redemption fathers negotiated directly with the Dey regarding state-owned captives. For privately owned captives, they obtained an official permit from the Dey allowing them to negotiate ransom terms directly with private captive owners.² Three major Christian religious orders operated across Algeria and Morocco:

–The Trinitarians:

Affiliated with the Order of the Most Holy Trinity (*La Sainte Trinité*), this order was founded in 1198 CE by Saint John of Matha (*San Juan de Mata*) and Saint Felix of Valois (*San Juan Felipe de Valois*) with the explicit primary purpose of redeeming Christian captives.³ Members of this order were dispatched to replace the Spanish Franciscans in fulfilling this redemption mandate.⁴ In Algeria, the Trinitarians facilitated the release of numerous captives, including 286 prisoners (predominantly Spaniards and Genoese) in 1662 CE, and an additional 46 captives of various nationalities in 1725 CE. Among the prominent Trinitarian fathers dispatched on these missions were Father Jean de la Faye, Father Denis Mackar, and Father Henry Le Roi.⁵ In Morocco, the Trinitarian order organized a redemption expedition to Tetouan in 1669 CE, securing the release of 127 captives, followed by another mission in 1674 CE that freed 128 captives. They subsequently conducted another redemption mission to Meknes in 1676 CE.⁶

–The Mercedarians:

Affiliated with the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary fund-raising for Mercy (*Notre-Dame de la Merci*), this order was established around 1218 CE in Granada. The objective of these religious groups was to minister to the spiritual and religious life of Christian captives while collecting alms and charitable donations across Europe to fund ransom efforts in Algeria and Morocco. In Morocco, a Franciscan mission arriving in Meknes in June 1692 CE succeeded in liberating 123 Spanish captives,

¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Banīs, "Al-Sifārāt al-sijāliyyah bayna al-Maghrib wa-Isbāniyā khilāl al-qarn 18M," Master's thesis, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V University, Rabat, 1998, p. 46.

² Ḥafīzah Khashmūn, "Mahāmm muftadī al-asrā wa-iltizāmātuhum al-ijtimā‘iyyah fī madīnat al-Jazā’ir khilāl al-fatrah al-‘Uthmāniyyah," Master's thesis, supervised by Kamāl Filālī, Constantine University, 2006–2007, p. 65.

³ Pierre Dan, *Histoire de Barbarie et de ses corsaires des royaumes et des villes d'Alger, de Tunis, de Salé, et de Tripoli*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1646, p. 120.

⁴ Badī‘ah al-Kharāzī, *Tārīkh al-kanīṣah al-Naṣrāniyyah fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā*, 1st ed., Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīdah, 2000, p. 66.

⁵ Ḥafīzah Khashmūn, "Mahāmm muftadī al-asrā wa-iltizāmātuhum al-ijtimā‘iyyah fī madīnat al-Jazā’ir khilāl al-fatrah al-‘Uthmāniyyah," Master's thesis, Constantine University, 2006–2007, p. 75.

⁶ Ḥafīzah Khashmūn, "Mahāmm muftadī al-asrā wa-iltizāmātuhum al-ijtimā‘iyyah fī madīnat al-Jazā’ir," p. 39.

followed by the redemption of another group of Spanish prisoners in April 1693 CE.¹ In Algeria, the Mercedarian order secured the release of 18 captives (mostly French) in 1655 CE, while Father Auvry successfully redeemed one hundred captives in 1662 CE.²

It is worth noting that the activities of these religious missions in Morocco and Algeria extended well beyond captive redemption to encompass proselytization and spiritual guidance for captives and resident Christian communities. These orders successfully obtained official authorization to build chapels and establish hospitals to provide medical treatment to captives, particularly during plague epidemics.³

2.3. Spanish Diplomatic Embassies for Captive Redemption

Furthermore, diplomatic embassies were dispatched by Charles II (*Carlos II*) to negotiate the redemption of Christian captives, including:

✓ The Embassy of Fray Juan Muñoz and Alférez Miguel Pardo (February 1690 CE):

Two envoys dispatched by Sultan Moulay Isma‘īl arrived at the Spanish authorities in Ceuta carrying a letter addressed to King Charles II.⁴ As the number of Spanish captives exceeded two thousand, Moulay Isma‘īl dictated strict terms to Spain. In his initial two letters to the Spanish authorities, he demanded the exchange of 100 captives held in Ceuta or Melilla, or their substitution for one thousand Moroccan captives in Spain.

✓ The Embassy of Manuel Viera de Lugo and Don Abelmessia (September 1690 CE):

Serving as special envoys to Moulay Isma‘īl, they arrived in Meknes on September 15, 1690 CE.⁵ The Sultan received them on multiple occasions in May 1690 CE and proposed exchanging 100 Spanish captives for 500 Moroccan captives along with 5,000 Arabic manuscripts preserved in the libraries of Seville, Granada, Cordoba, and other Spanish cities.⁶ However, the special envoy was authorized solely to negotiate the release of 100 Moroccan captives, prompting Moulay Isma‘īl to dispatch his ambassador Al-Ghassānī to Madrid.

✓ The Embassy of Father Fray Diego (1111 AH / 1699 CE):

Father Fray Diego conveyed correspondence and diplomatic gifts between both parties while negotiating captive ransom terms in 1699 CE. The envoy arrived bearing gifts from Charles II to Moulay Isma‘īl—consisting of weaponry and horses—which the Sultan received favorably.⁷

2.4. Alternative Paths to Liberation

- Escape from Captivity

European captives frequently achieved freedom by escaping to European vessels anchored in Algerian and Moroccan ports, or by fleeing overland to coastal enclaves occupied by the Spanish

¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Banīs, "Al-Sifārāt al-sijāliyyah bayna al-Maghrib wa-Isbāniyā khilāl al-qarn 18M," Master's thesis, Mohammed V University, Rabat, 1998, p. 32.

² Ḥafīzah Khashmūn, "Mahāmm muftadī al-asrā wa-iltizāmātuhum al-ijtimā‘iyyah fī madīnat al-Jazā‘ir," p. 76.

³ Badī‘ah al-Kharāzī, Tārīkh al-kanīsah al-Naṣrāniyyah fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā, p. 63.

⁴ Juan Bautista Vilar and Ramón Lourido Díaz, Relaciones entre España y el Magreb (siglos XVII y XVIII), Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992, p. 26.

⁵ ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Amrānī, "Siyāsāt Mūlāy Ismā‘īl al-khārijīyyah," Majallat Da‘wat al-Ḥaqq, Nos. 4–5, Morocco, 1965, p. 295.

⁶ ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Tāzī, Al-Tārīkh al-diblūmāsī li-al-Maghrib, 1st ed., Morocco, 1988, Vol. 9, p. 110.

⁷ Luṭfī ‘Abd al-Badī, "Wathīqah Marākushiyyah bi-al-Isbāniyyah: Kitāb Mūlāy Ismā‘īl Sultān Marākush ilā Kārīlūš al-thānī Malik Isbāniyā," Majallat Ma‘had al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyyah, Vol. 3, Part 1, May 1959, p. 329.

Crown. European captives held in Algeria commonly attempted escapes toward Oran, while those held in Morocco occasionally fled toward Ceuta.

- Redemption via Merchant Intermediaries

Captives also secured their liberation through the intervention of commercial traders, particularly Jewish merchants who were entrusted with purchasing captive ransoms. These merchants acted as financial intermediaries between Algerian authorities and European families—including Italians, French, Dutch, and others—seeking to redeem their relatives in Algeria.¹

3. CAPTIVE EXCHANGE AND MAGHREBI ENDEAVORS FOR MUSLIM LIBERATION

3.1. Bilateral Exchange of Christian Captives Between Algeria and Morocco

Owing to joint cooperation in maritime Jihad between Algeria and Morocco, mechanisms existed for exchanging European captives between the two states. When the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Isma‘īl required additional laborers to construct a new city in Morocco, he sought to purchase European Christian captive workers held in Algeria in 1688 CE.² He dispatched a letter to the Dey of Algeria proposing a transaction to purchase 500 captives at 150 dollars per head for city construction, requesting their prompt dispatch to Morocco upon acceptance.

Accordingly, Algerian authorities assembled 300 French captives and sent them to Tetouan and subsequently to Meknes for inspection by Moulay Isma‘īl. However, upon their arrival, the Sultan retained the captives, refused payment, and threatened the members of the delegation with execution, declaring that he would not pay money for Christians brought into his realm.³

In another letter from the French Consul in Salé to his government dated November 8, 1688 CE (4 Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1100 AH), he noted:

"...According to passengers of a French vessel arriving in Cádiz on November 4, 1688 CE, four Algerian corsair ships anchored in Safi... captured 13 French merchant vessels carrying approximately 200 crew members. Around 60 individuals were sent to Algeria, while the King of Morocco seized 60 captives, and the remainder were sold in local markets..."

On December 25, 1688 CE (2 Šafar 1100 AH), Algeria dispatched an embassy to Meknes to negotiate with Sultan Moulay Isma‘īl regarding the French captives held in his custody.⁴ Algeria continued to send envoys to Meknes to resolve bilateral disputes—particularly concerning spoils and captives—as documented in a dispatch from the French Consul in Salé dated June 16, 1691 CE (20

¹ John B. Wolf, *Al-Jazā'ir wa-Ūrubbā 1500–1830*, trans. Abū al-Qāsim Sa‘d Allāh, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2005, p. 167.

² During this period, the number of European captives—particularly French nationals—increased significantly in Algeria due to the state of war following French naval campaigns against Algiers, leaving French ships vulnerable to capture and overcrowding Algiers with French captives.

³ These details were documented by the English captive Francis Brooke. See: Bilqāsim Qurbāsh, "Al-Hujūm al-Jazā'irī ‘alā al-Maghrib 1688 min khilāl wathīqah ašliyyah Injilīziyyah," *Al-Majallah al-Maghribiyyah li-al-Dirāsāt al-Tārīkhiyyah wa-al-Ijtimā‘iyyah*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Sidi Bel Abbès, 2018, pp. 33–34.

⁴ Khalīfah Ḥammāsh, *Kashshāf wathā’iq tārīkh al-Jazā'ir fī al-kitābāt al-muta‘alliqa bi-al-Maghrib min al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmānī ilā al-‘ahd al-rāhin*, Constantine: Publications of the Faculty of Letters and Islamic Civilization, Vol. 2, p. 286.

Ramadan 1102 AH).¹ These envoys addressed cases where captives seized at sea by Algerians were transported through Moroccan territory and subsequently detained by the Moroccan Sultan.²

In a related incident in 1688 CE, an Algerian vessel anchored along the Moroccan coast carrying one hundred French captives. While sixty of them were intended for transport to Algeria via Moroccan overland routes, Moulay Isma‘īl confiscated them and added them to his captive population.³ This action occurred within a context where both France and Morocco were seeking avenues for captive exchange; expanding Moulay Isma‘īl’s pool of French captives strengthened his bargaining position in negotiations with King Louis XIV.

Regarding bilateral captive exchanges, the Bey of the Western Beylik presented nine Spanish captives as a gift to Sultan Moulay Isma‘īl. This occurred after Commander Awzan Ḥasan—son-in-law and minister of Dey Muḥammad Baktāsh ibn ‘Alī—captured the Fort of Ibn Zahrah⁴ on 5 Sha‘bān 1119 AH (October 31, 1707 CE). The Algerian force killed all 120 enemy defenders except for nine (or eight) soldiers who fled to the Bey’s sanctuary, whereupon the Bey dispatched them as a diplomatic gift to the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Isma‘īl.⁵

3.2. Muslim Captives in Europe and Maghrebi Liberation Endeavors

3.2.1. Living Conditions of Muslim Captives in Europe

During the eleventh century AH / seventeenth century CE, privateering escalated significantly across both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, resulting in the routine seizure of vessels and the captivity of their passengers. Muslim captives endured appalling living conditions during an era when captivity and the slave trade had evolved into a lucrative global scourge.

When overland transport to other municipal centers was required, captives were bound by neck chains and marched two abreast in extended columns. A heavy primary chain was passed through the individual neck rings, effectively binding the entire cohort into a single chain gang comprising between 200 and 500 prisoners.⁶

The vast majority of Muslim captives were deployed as galley rowers (*galériens*). Galley labor frequently operated continuously for twenty-four hours without cessation, enforced through sadistic corporal punishment and whipping. Recaptured escapees routinely suffered severe mutilation, including the amputation of their noses and ears. Their daily sustenance was restricted to twenty-six ounces of hard dry bread alongside four ounces of poorly cooked, hardened fava beans dressed with

¹ Khalīfah Ḥammāsh, *Kashshāf wathā’iq tārikh al-Jazā’ir*, p. 289.

² Khalīfah Ḥammāsh, *Kashshāf wathā’iq tārikh al-Jazā’ir*, p. 286.

³ Ja‘far ibn Aḥmad al-Nāṣirī, *Salā wa-Ribāṭ al-Faṭḥ: Uṣūluhumā wa-qirṣanatuhumā al-jihādiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad ibn Ja‘far al-Nāṣirī, Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīdah, 2006, Vol. 3, p. 91.

⁴ The fort derived its name from a Jewish resident named Zāwī ibn Kabīṣah (known as "Ibn Zahrah"), who conspired with Spanish forces to assist their entry into Oran on condition that they grant him this tower. Formerly known as Burj al-Marsā (The Harbor Tower), it was subsequently renamed after his community. See: Muḥammad ibn Maymūn al-Jazā’irī, *Al-Tuḥfah al-marḍiyyah fī al-dawlah al-Baktāshiyyah fī bilād al-Jazā’ir al-maḥmiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Bin ‘Abd al-Karīm, Algiers, 2007, note 3, p. 222.

⁵ Muḥammad ibn Maymūn al-Jazā’irī, *Al-Tuḥfah al-marḍiyyah fī al-dawlah al-Baktāshiyyah*, p. 222.

⁶ Idrīs Abū Idrīs, "Al-Jihād al-baḥrī fī al-tārikh al-‘Arabī al-Islāmī," *Proceedings of the International Symposium* (May 31 – June 4, 1997), Salé: Publications of the Salé Association, Morocco, p. 310.

minimal oil and salt. Captives were issued a single red uniform annually, which provided negligible protection against harsh cold climates.¹

Consequently, approximately 44% of galley captives succumbed to brutal treatment, severe deprivation, and rampant disease. A substantial proportion perished within their first three years of captivity, exacerbated by the stark environmental and climatic contrast between their home regions and their new environment. Each galley housed approximately 300 rowers packed for months into cramped, unsanitary quarters below deck, tasked with maneuvering massive sixteen-meter wooden oars.²

3.2.2. Reciprocal Captive Exchange Protocols

As the number of Muslim captives in Europe expanded—particularly those originating from the Maghreb, and most notably from Algeria and Morocco—it became imperative for Algerian and Moroccan authorities to secure their liberation, mirroring European efforts for their own nationals. Significantly, Algerian and Moroccan rulers maintained that redemption efforts should not be restricted solely to their own subjects, but ought to encompass all Muslim captives regardless of origin.

- Exchange Between Christian and Muslim Captives

A defining feature of the captivity system was the bilateral exchange of prisoners resulting from formal treaties. Following the French naval campaign against Algiers in 1683 CE, France demanded the release of its captives, to which Algerian authorities responded:

"...If you desire peace with us, surrender to us the Muslim captives in your custody—whether Turks or others—numbering over four hundred, and we shall conclude peace..."³

However, peace negotiations between Algeria and France frequently faltered due to French reluctance to repatriate healthy Muslim captives. France required a labor force of over one thousand Muslims for heavy infrastructure labor and naval galley rowing (*galériens*). Consequently, French authorities routinely offered elderly, infirm, or incapacitated prisoners instead.⁴ Just as Louis XIV held tightly to Algerian captives, he similarly retained Moroccan captives to maneuver French naval oars; releasing healthy, productive captives was viewed as a severe blow to the physical power of the French fleet.

The second half of the seventeenth century witnessed a surge in the number of Muslim captives—particularly Algerians and Moroccans—held in France during the reign of Louis XIV. Regarding Muslim captives in Spain, the prevailing state of hostility severely hindered redemption efforts. Few Muslim captives were successfully ransomed or exchanged, as Spain was in an active state of war with both Algeria and Morocco over the Spanish occupation of Moroccan coastal

¹ 'Izz al-Maghrib Ma'nūn, "Qaḍāyā asrā al-jihād al-baḥrī fī al-riḥlah al-sifāriyyah: Al-Ṣūrah al-muqanna'ah li-al-ākhar," International Conference on Arab and Muslim Travel Literature, Doha, 2010, p. 4.

² 'Izz al-Maghrib Ma'nūn, "Qaḍāyā asrā al-jihād al-baḥrī fī al-riḥlah al-sifāriyyah," p. 3.

³ Muḥammad ibn Ruqayyah al-Tilmisānī, *Al-Zahrah al-nā'irah fī-mā jarā li-al-Jazā'ir ḥīna aghārat 'alayhā al-kafarah*, ed. Khayr al-Dīn Sa'īdī, Algiers: Awraq Thaqāfiyyah, 2017, p. 131.

⁴ John B. Wolf, *Al-Jazā'ir wa-Ūrubbā 1500–1830*, trans. Abū al-Qāsim Sa'd Allāh, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2005, p. 219.

strongholds (*presidios*) and Oran. Furthermore, no institutional Islamic redemption organizations existed, nor did Morocco or Algeria maintain diplomatic consuls in Spain.¹

Nevertheless, periodic correspondences and diplomatic missions took place. Algerian authorities consistently sought to maximize the number of redeemed Muslim captives during negotiations with visiting European redemption fathers. Between 1695 and 1696 CE, Dey Ḥājj Aḥmad addressed three formal letters to King Charles II of Spain concerning Algerian captives. The first letter protested the harsh mistreatment endured by Algerian captives in Spain, offering to exchange two Christian friars in Algiers provided Spanish authorities permitted a group of Algerian captives to return home alongside redemption envoys. The second and third letters addressed the plight of specific Algerian captives held by an Italian merchant in Naples.²

Direct exchanges of Spanish and Algerian captives also occurred through third-party mediation. On occasion, foreign rulers mediated between Spain and Algerian authorities to arrange captive exchanges, enabling hundreds of Algerians to regain their freedom.³

Following the Algerian liberation of Oran and the capture of hundreds of Spanish soldiers, Father Francisco Ximénez recorded that a formal prisoner exchange took place in 1722 CE between Muslim captives held in Barcelona and Christian captives held in Oran.⁴ Additionally, European merchants and French consuls served as commercial intermediaries; European traders purchased Muslim captives from Spanish cities such as Málaga and Palma, transporting them to Algiers to swap them for Christian captives.⁵

- The Role of the Moroccan Sultan in Liberating Moroccan and Algerian Captives

Since the establishment of the nascent Alaouite state in the late seventeenth century, the liberation of Muslim captives constituted an active cornerstone of Moroccan foreign policy, giving rise to what became known as "Captive Diplomacy" (*Diblūmāsiyyat al-Asīr*). Religious imperatives transformed diplomatic missions into an extension of Jihad, driven by a profound spiritual commitment to rescue Muslims from European hands. This policy was most vividly manifested during the reign of Sultan Moulay Ismaʿīl (1672–1727 CE), who dedicated immense efforts to securing the release of Muslim captives.

Relations with France

Moulay Ismaʿīl focused his primary diplomatic attention on the issue of captives through treaties and correspondences addressed to King Louis XIV.⁶ Captive redemption was regarded as a paramount duty of the Sovereign, occupying center stage in Franco-Moroccan diplomatic relations. Consequently, captives superseded diplomatic gifts, as their release was viewed as an absolute religious necessity adhering to Islamic teachings.

¹ Ibrāhīm Sayyūd, "Al-Asrā al-Maghāribah fī Ṭālīyā khilāl al-ʿahd al-ʿUthmānī," PhD diss., Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, University of Algiers, 2009–2010, p. 193.

² ʿAbd al-Qādir Fakāyir, *Al-Ghazw al-Isbānī li-al-sawāḥil al-Jazāʾiriyyah wa-āthāruh* 910–1206H/1505–1792M, 2nd ed., Algiers: Dār Hūmah, 2015, p. 326.

³ ʿAbd al-Qādir Fakāyir, *Al-Ghazw al-Isbānī li-al-sawāḥil al-Jazāʾiriyyah*, p. 333.

⁴ ʿAbd al-Qādir Fakāyir, *Al-Ghazw al-Isbānī li-al-sawāḥil al-Jazāʾiriyyah*, p. 330.

⁵ ʿAbd al-Qādir Fakāyir, *Al-Ghazw al-Isbānī li-al-sawāḥil al-Jazāʾiriyyah*, p. 330.

⁶ King Louis XIV governed France between 1661 and 1715 CE, consolidating absolute monarchical power. See: Mīlād al-Miqrāḥī, *Tārīkh Ūrubbā al-ḥadīth* 1453–1848, Benghazi: Publications of Qāzyūnās, n.d.

In a report dated 14 Dhu al-Hijjah 1093 AH / December 1682 CE, the French Consul Saint-Amans recorded that Moulay Isma‘īl declared:

"...Had your ambassador and his entourage brought with them to our palace some of the Moroccan captives held in France, it would have pleased us more than all worldly possessions; for our greatest joy lies in freeing a captive—a deed pertaining to the realm of the Hereafter, which is far better and more enduring..."¹

Moulay Isma‘īl sought to bring every Christian captive taken by Moroccan mariners under his direct personal custody, thereby maintaining absolute control over diplomatic communications with European monarchs regarding the captive question and leveraging European captives as a bargaining chip to liberate Muslims.²

Consequently, the Sultan firmly refused to ransom European captives solely for monetary sums, insisting instead on direct prisoner swaps. He refused the release of any Christian captive unless paired with the repatriation of a Muslim captive, supplemented by monetary indemnities and military matériel.³

Despite European and French policies aimed at pressuring Moroccan mariners to suppress corsair activity, Moulay Isma‘īl repeatedly demanded that Louis XIV release held mariners. Among these was the renegade Ramaḍān Muḥammad Qandīl, whose release the Sultan demanded in exchange for Captain Duval and a female captive named Marie.⁴ Moulay Isma‘īl formally offered Louis XIV a one-to-one exchange of Muslim captives for an equivalent number of French captives.⁵

However, Louis XIV remained steadfast in retaining healthy, physically able Muslim captives to maneuver French naval galleys, offering instead incapacitated, elderly, or Turkish captives on a head-for-head basis. On certain occasions, Moulay Isma‘īl demanded three Moroccan captives in exchange for a single French captive. This strategy was exemplified by the diplomatic embassy he dispatched to France in 1698 CE led by ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Ā’ishah,⁶ which demanded the mutual exchange of 600 Moroccan captives for 200 French captives.⁷

¹ Henry de Castries, *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc: Deuxième série, Dynastie Filalienne*. Archives et bibliothèques de France, Vol. 2, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1903, p. 299.

² Ibrāhīm Bū Ṭālib, "Al-Mūlāy Ismā‘īl 1672–1727," *Mudhakkirāt min al-turāth al-Maghribī*, Morocco, Vol. 4, p. 70.

³ Ja‘far ibn Aḥmad al-Nāṣirī, *Salā wa-Ribāṭ al-Faṭḥ: Uṣūluhumā wa-qirṣanatuhumā al-jihādiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad ibn Ja‘far al-Nāṣirī, Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīdah, 2006, Vol. 3, p. 96.

⁴ Ḥasan Amīlī, *Al-Maghāribah wa-al-majāl al-baḥrī fī al-qarnayn 17 wa-18M*, 1st ed., Rabat: Dār Abī Raqrāq, 2011, p. 144.

⁵ Ḥasan Amīlī, *Al-Maghāribah wa-al-majāl al-baḥrī fī al-qarnayn 17 wa-18M*, p. 150.

⁶ ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Ā’ishah al-Andalusī al-Ribāṭī was born in Rabat in the mid-11th century AH / 17th century CE and became the most famous corsair of Salé. Moulay Isma‘īl appointed him Grand Admiral (Qābūṭān ‘Āmm) and Warden of the Seas. Henri Coindreau described him as the last of the great Salé corsairs whose exploits terrified European coasts. In 1671 CE (1103 AH), he captured a fleet of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian ships. Captured in 1680 CE by an English vessel, he was held in Britain for three years until James, Duke of York (brother of Charles II), intervened to secure his release. See: Ibrāhīm Ḥarakāt, "Ibn ‘Ā’ishah amīr al-baḥr fī ‘ahd al-Mūlāy Ismā‘īl," *Majallat Da‘wat al-Ḥaqq*, No. 4, Morocco, 1969, p. 126; Henri Coindreau, *Les corsaires de Salé*, Paris: Victor Attinger, 1948, p. 97.

⁷ Ḥasan Amīlī, *Al-Maghāribah wa-al-majāl al-baḥrī fī al-qarnayn 17 wa-18M*, p. 153.

France rejected these terms, attempting instead to exert pressure on the Sultan through his Jewish treasurer, Maimaran, to accept monetary ransom and agree to receive 53 incapacitated mariners from Salé alongside 105 Turkish captives. This stance illustrated France's persistence in repatriating only those unfit for labor.

Significantly, Moulay Ismaʿīl's redemption efforts were not restricted solely to Moroccan subjects; they encompassed captives from across North Africa, including Algerians, Tunisians, and Tripolitanians. However, his communications with Louis XIV frequently stalled, breaking off completely in 1708 CE due to the French King's intransigence. Louis XIV routinely argued that Muslim captives in France were not exclusively Moroccans but originated from various Islamic states. This European differentiation between Muslim nationalities deeply offended Moulay Ismaʿīl, who maintained that it was his solemn Islamic obligation to redeem all Muslim captives regardless of their specific regional origin.¹

Relations with Spain

As previously noted, the prevailing state of hostility between Spain, Morocco, and Algeria rendered captive redemption exceptionally challenging. However, following the liberation of the coastal city of Larache in 1689 CE and the surrender of its two-thousand-strong Spanish garrison, Sultan Moulay Ismaʿīl leveraged this major captive pool to secure the release of Muslim captives held in Spain and recover historical Arabic manuscripts remaining in Spanish libraries and mosques. To accomplish this mission, the Sultan selected Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Ghassānī.²

The Embassy of Minister Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Ghassānī

Spanish authorities sought a diplomatic rapprochement with Morocco to resolve bilateral disputes through negotiation. Recognizing a favorable opportunity, Moulay Ismaʿīl dispatched an ambassador thoroughly versed in statecraft and Spanish affairs. He entrusted Minister Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Ghassānī—a distinguished scholar, accomplished jurist, and master scribe possessing refined literary culture and political expertise.³ Descended from an Andalusian lineage that migrated to Fez following the fall of Islamic Spain,⁴ al-Ghassānī undertook the embassy driven by two primary objectives:

–**Captive Exchange:** Exchanging the Spanish garrison captured by Moulay Ismaʿīl during the liberation of Moroccan coastal strongholds—particularly the 500 soldiers taken at Larache—for Muslim captives in Spain.⁵ The Sultan stipulated that for one hundred Spanish

¹ Ibrāhīm Bū Ṭālib, "Shahādah mawḍūʿiyyah ʿan ḥayāt asrā al-Naṣārā bi-Dār al-Makhzan bi-qalam al-Injilīzī Brīthwayt 1727M," *Mudhakkirāt min al-turāth al-Maghribī*, Morocco, Vol. 4, p. 71.

² ʿIzz al-Maghrib Maʿnūn, "Qaḍāyā asrā al-jihād al-baḥrī fī al-riḥlah al-sifāriyyah: Al-Ṣūrah al-muqannaʿah li-al-ākhar," *International Conference on Arab and Muslim Travel Literature*, Doha, 2010, p. 4.

³ Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh, "Riḥlah sifāriyyah ilā Isbāniyā fī ʿahd al-Mūlāy Ismaʿīl," *Majallat Daʿwat al-Ḥaqq*, No. 4, Morocco, 1969.

⁴ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Zīdān, *Ifṭihāf aʿlām al-nās bi-jamāl ḥādirat akhbār Maknās*, ed. ʿAlī ʿUmar, Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2008, Vol. 4, p. 64.

⁵ Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh, "Riḥlah sifāriyyah ilā Isbāniyā fī ʿahd al-Mūlāy Ismaʿīl," p. 147.

officers, Spain must surrender 5,000 Arabic manuscripts for fifty of them, and release 500 Muslim captives for the remaining fifty.¹

–**Manuscript Recovery:** Recovering the royal manuscript collection of Sultan Moulay Zīdān,² which had been seized at sea and housed in the Library of the Royal Monastery of El Escorial in Spain.³

Upon arriving in Spain, al-Ghassānī discovered that the requested manuscripts were unavailable, prompting him to demand additional Muslim captives as compensation: if the manuscripts could not be produced, Spain was required to complete a total repatriation of one thousand Muslim captives.⁴ Spanish officials conducted the ambassador to the Escorial Library⁵ to display the structural damage from a 1671 CE fire that had reportedly consumed the manuscript collection. However, it subsequently emerged that approximately 3,000 Arabic manuscripts stored in the monastery vaults had survived the fire intact.⁶

To execute the terms negotiated during this embassy, a formal captive exchange took place in Morocco. Spain surrendered one thousand Muslim captives (700 men and 300 women) in exchange for 100 Spanish officers. The remaining 351 Spanish captives were ransomed monetarily at 250 piastres per head, while 1,500 Spanish captives remained unredeemed. This exchange was executed under the supervision of Commander ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh on June 16, 1691 CE.⁷

Significantly, these redemption efforts extended beyond Moroccan subjects to encompass Algerian captives through Moulay Isma‘īl's mediation with Spanish authorities. In a letter written on 6 Sha‘bān 1119 AH (November 1707 CE) by a liberated Algerian captive named ‘Uthmān ibn Qāsim al-Jazā’irī al-A‘raj, he recorded:

*"...I was held captive in Spain for two years, and my Lord Isma‘īl secured my release among fifteen hundred captives whom he freed from Spain. We journeyed to his presence to present ourselves before him; thereupon he bade us farewell, and dispatched every traveler back to his home country..."*⁸

Furthermore, a dispatch from the French Consul dated January 14, 1692 CE (25 Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1103 AH) reported that Moulay Isma‘īl repatriated 200 Algerian captives alongside 1,200 Muslim

¹ Ibrāhīm ibn Khalaf al-‘Ubaydī, *Ḥarakat al-jihād al-baḥrī fī al-Maghrib khilāl al-‘ahd al-‘Alawī*, Baghdad: Publications of the Iraqi Academy of Sciences, 2002, p. 14.

² Following his defeat by Abū Maḥallī, Sultan Moulay Zīdān fled Safī in Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1020 AH / June 1612 CE, chartering a vessel captained by Jean-Philippe de Castellane to transport his art treasures and a 3,000-volume library collected by his father, Ahmad al-Mansur. The vessel was seized by Spanish corsairs, and King Philip III deposited the collection in the Escorial Library in 1626. See: Al-Ḥasan al-Sā‘ih, *Al-Ḥaḍārah al-Islāmiyyah fī al-Maghrib*, Casablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1986, p. 378.

³ Muḥammad al-Mustī Qandīl, "Riḥlat al-Wazīr al-Ghassānī ilā bilād al-Isbān," *Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts Symposium*, Kuwait University, 2007, p. 2.

⁴ Muḥammad al-Andalusī al-Ghassānī, *Riḥlat al-Wazīr fī iftikāk al-asīr* (1690M/1691M), ed. Nūrī al-Jarrāh, Abu Dhabi: Dār al-Suwaydī, 2002, p. 85.

⁵ Built under King Philip II of Spain in 1584 CE, the Escorial contained a dedicated wing for Arabic manuscripts collected from Andalusian cities like Cordoba, Seville, Granada, and Valencia. A fire severely damaged the library in 1671 CE.

⁶ Muḥammad al-Mustī Qandīl, "Riḥlat al-Wazīr al-Ghassānī ilā bilād al-Isbān," p. 6.

⁷ Ja‘far ibn Aḥmad al-Nāṣirī, *Salā wa-Ribāṭ al-Faṭḥ: Uṣṭūluhumā wa-qirṣanatuhumā al-jihādiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad ibn Ja‘far al-Nāṣirī, Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīdah, 2006, Vol. 3, p. 251.

⁸ Jamāl Qanān, *Nuṣuṣ wa-wathā’iq fī tārikh al-Jazā’ir al-ḥadīth*, Algiers: ENAG, 1987, p. 144.

captives released by Spain in exchange for 100 Spanish officers captured at Larache. The Consul noted that the Sultan undertook this gesture to strengthen peace ties and demonstrate that recent border skirmishes by Moroccan military units along the Algerian frontier were merely unauthorized errors by local commanders.¹

In reality, Moulay Isma‘īl viewed the redemption of Muslim captives as a sacred religious obligation, exerting continuous efforts to secure the liberation of all Muslim captives—whether Moroccan, Algerian, or originating from other Islamic regions.

Redemption via Peace Treaties

The peace treaties concluded between Algeria, Morocco, and European powers—particularly France—frequently encountered friction due to France's reluctance to repatriate healthy, physically able Muslim captives, offering instead incapacitated or elderly prisoners.

Among the most significant treaties concluded between Algeria and France was the Peace Treaty of 1684 CE. Dey Ḥusayn Mezzomorto² made the cessation of hostilities explicitly conditional upon the release of 400 Muslim captives. To ensure compliance, Dey Ḥusayn dispatched three official Algerian representatives—Al-Ḥājj Ja‘far, Muṣṭafā Odabaşı, and Shāṭir Bāshā—to identify and escort the Muslim captives home in exchange for the French captives released by Algiers. Through this resolute stance, which forced Louis XIV to comply with Algerian demands, the embassy successfully secured the liberation of 400 Muslim captives.³ This episode demonstrates the strategic parity and diplomatic assertiveness that characterized Algerian-French relations during this era.

Similarly, diplomatic agreements concerning captives were negotiated between Morocco and France, most notably the Treaty of La Mamora (*Al-Ma‘mūrah*) signed by Commander ‘Umar ibn Ḥaddū on July 13, 1681 CE, which stipulated a head-for-head captive exchange. However, King Louis XIV ultimately rejected this clause, ordering the continuation of naval operations against the mariners of Salé⁴.

These diplomatic impasses highlight the complex nature of the captive issue. Nevertheless, while European powers—particularly France and England—maintained consular representatives in Algeria and Morocco to negotiate peace treaties and secure the release of Christian captives, both Algeria and Morocco frequently leveraged these treaties to liberate substantial numbers of Muslim captives through reciprocal exchanges. Furthermore, Muslim merchants operating in European states occasionally acted as diplomatic intermediaries to purchase and redeem Muslim captives.

- Escape from Captivity

¹ Khalīfah Ḥammāsh, *Kashshāf wathā‘iq tārikh al-Jazā‘ir fī al-kitābāt al-muta‘alliqah bi-al-Maghrib min al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmānī ilā al-‘ahd al-rāhin*, Constantine: Publications of the Faculty of Letters and Islamic Civilization, Vol. 2, pp. 291–292.

² Dey Ḥusayn Mezzomorto governed Algeria from 1683 to 1689 CE following the overthrow of Dey Bābā Ḥasan, subsequently receiving the title of Beylerbey from the Ottoman Sultan. Continued French naval bombardment and internal unrest led to his departure from office in 1100 AH / 1689 CE. See: Na‘īmah Ḥamshūsh, *Al-Nuẓum al-siyāsiyyah: Al-Dawlah al-Jazā‘iriyyah al-ḥadīthah wa-mu‘assasātuhā*, Algiers: Publications of the National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the November 1st Revolution, 2007, p. 54.

³ Muḥammad ibn Ruqayyah al-Tilmisānī, *Al-Zahrah al-nā‘irah fī mā jarā li-al-Jazā‘ir ḥīna aghārat ‘alayhā al-kafarah*, ed. Khayr al-Dīn Sa‘īdī, Algiers: Awraq Thaqāfiyyah, 2017, pp. 133–134.

⁴ ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Tāzī, *Al-Tārikh al-diblūmāsī li-al-Maghrib*, 1st ed., Morocco, 1988, Vol. 9, p. 71.

Escape constituted another vital avenue through which Muslim captives secured their freedom. Because the majority of Muslim captives were deployed as galley rowers (*galériens*), opportunities to escape emerged primarily when vessels anchored along coastal shores adjacent to Islamic territories, or during naval engagements when captives seized the chaos of battle to revolt. However, these attempts frequently proved fatal;¹ a notable case involved Ibrāhīm Chāwush, whose attempted escape from French captivity resulted in the surgical amputation of his nose and ears as punishment.²

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding analytical study, several key historical conclusions emerge regarding the captivity system and diplomatic engagements between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean during the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries:

–**Separation of Naval Jihad from Political Friction:** Despite diplomatic tensions and cautious relations between Algeria and Morocco during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—spanning from the rise of the Alaouite Dynasty to the end of Sultan Moulay Isma‘īl's reign (1069–1139 AH / 1659–1727 CE)—naval Jihad remained largely insulated from political rivalries. Ports in Salé and Tetouan routinely served Algerian privateers, while Algerian ports provided logistical support, supplies, and prize-sale venues for Moroccan mariners in a unified posture against European adversaries, particularly Spain.

–**Shared Maritime Ethos:** Mutual maritime cooperation was fostered by rulers and supported by popular and naval leaderships in both countries, maintaining a shared regional defense ethic that withstood European diplomatic efforts to sever bilateral ties.

–**Geographic Expansion:** Although formal zones of operation existed for Algerian and Moroccan maritime fleets, corsair vessels frequently crossed these boundaries, with Algerian ships venturing into the central Atlantic Ocean. Human captives represented primary war prizes for powers on both sides of the Mediterranean basin.

–**Failure of Permanent Peace:** European powers failed to establish enduring peace agreements with Algeria and Morocco during this era due to persistent privateering activities, prompting powers like France and England to launch multiple naval bombardments and military expeditions against North African ports.

–**Decline in Maritime Prizes:** Maritime spoils declined toward the turn of the eighteenth century as bilateral peace treaties proliferated between Maghrebi states and European powers, incorporating clauses safeguarding commercial shipping lanes.

–**Bilateral Dynamics and Captive Influx:** The continuation of Mediterranean conflicts and corsair operations resulted in high captive populations across both shores. North African states housed thousands of European Christian captives, while European powers held vast numbers of Muslim captives—particularly Algerians and Moroccans—necessitating joint Maghrebi diplomatic efforts to redeem captives as a unified block without distinguishing between Moroccan and Algerian subjects.

–**Historiographical Exaggerations:** Historical evidence demonstrates that the living conditions of Christian captives in Algeria and Morocco were markedly better than portrayed in contemporary European captive narratives and travelogues, which often exaggerated hardships for ideological or commercial reasons.

–**Transient vs. Permanent Captivity:** Captivity proved temporary for many individuals who regained freedom through ransom, reciprocal exchange, or escape. However, others converted to new faiths—European captives becoming renegades (*al-A‘lāj*) and Muslim captives suffering forced baptism—while many succumbed to forced labor and harsh conditions prior to securing release.

–**Rise of Special Diplomatic Missions:** The seventeenth century was characterized by the emergence of specialized Maghrebi diplomatic embassies dispatched specifically to negotiate captive dossiers and sign formal exchange conventions.

–**Ad-Hoc Diplomatic Representation:** Neither Algeria nor Morocco established permanent resident embassies in European capitals during the early modern period, relying instead on temporary special envoys, European consular officers residing in North Africa, and commercial merchant networks to convey diplomatic communications to European monarchs.

–**Captives as Diplomatic Leverage:** The captive question served as a primary catalyst for Mediterranean diplomacy, utilized consistently as a strategic pressure point in treaty negotiations.

–**Socio-Economic Utility:** Captives constituted a critical labor force powering naval fleets, urban architecture, fortifications, domestic service, and medical facilities across both shores.

–**Ideological Dimension:** The captive dossier was not merely a commercial or military conflict; it served as a primary arena for cultural, religious, and diplomatic confrontation within the broader framework of trans-Mediterranean rivalry.

–**Severe Conditions in Europe:** Algerian and Moroccan captives in European states faced severe hardship, confronting harsh choices involving torture, forced labor, and intense pressure to undergo religious conversion.

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