CHAPTER FIVE

IBERIA, NORTH AFRICA, AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

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CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The conquest of Ceuta by the Portuguese in 1415 was the first chapter in the latter’s imperial expansion. From that point on and for more than a century, the Iberian powers carried out an aggressive policy of military and economic expansion in North Africa. Portuguese expansion took place throughout the fifteenth century and reached its peak during the reign of Afonso V, who conquered Azila, Larache, and Tangiers. Spanish expansion in North Africa began later, after the conquest of the Nazarid kingdom of Granada in 1492. Melilla was occupied in 1497; Mazalquivir and the rock fortress of Vélez de la Gomera were taken (in 1505 and 1508, respectively) in the lead-up to the campaign against Orán (1509), which was one of the greatest military and political episodes in Cardinal Francisco de Cisneros’ career. Spain went on to take Béjaïa and Tripoli, but the campaign against the island of Djerba in 1510 ended in a resounding defeat. Thus, we can say that this date marks the end of the period of Iberian expansion in North Africa. In fact, in 1516, shortly after the debacle in Djerba, Aruj Barbarossa seized power in Algiers, placing it under the Ottoman Empire’s sphere of influence, which was definitive in making the Mediterranean a frontier in the conflict between the two empires. After that date, there were a few important developments—such as Charles V’s campaign against Tunis in 1534—that make sense in the context of that border conflict. Moreover, at that point in the sixteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese resources were being directed elsewhere in the empire, toward the Americas, Italy or Asia, at the expense of the North African strongholds, which were too costly to maintain. Thus, the reign of João III (1521–1557) saw Portugal’s gradual withdrawal from its Moroccan strongholds, which it was economically impracticable to keep up, in order to focus on her American silver mines. But this abandonment had consequences for Portugal, among them the thousands of Moroccans who, between 1520 and 1540, emigrated for economic reasons to the Portuguese fortified enclaves and later made their way to Portugal, establishing a community of mouriscos, who—unlike Spanish Moriscos—were of North African origin (Mendes 2011).
For Spain, the frontier with the Ottomans functioned as one of the empire’s most important political horizons. It is no coincidence that, following the Spanish victory at Tunis (1534), Emperor Charles V made his triumphal entry into Italy, passing first through Sicily (where the imperial visit left its mark on Palermo) and arriving finally in Pope Paul III’s Rome. This link between Spain’s Italian policy and the conflict with the Turks reached its peak in the 1570s, when Spanish diplomacy succeeded in organising the Holy League against the Ottomans, which led to the victory at Lepanto (1571). This victory had relatively little military significance; shortly after their defeat, the Ottomans were able to rebuild their fleet and reconstitute their naval power in the Mediterranean. However, from a political standpoint, Lepanto marks the greatest consolidation of Spain’s power in Rome, where the legacy of the battle would long remain as part of the political imaginary (Dandelet 2001, 95).

After this point, the strategic situation changed radically. A new enemy, the Safavid Empire in Iran, threatened the eastern flank of the Ottoman Empire, which was thus obliged to divide its military forces between two fronts. Spain lost Tunis and La Goleta in 1574, and at the end of that decade the Portuguese king, Don Sebastião, organised a crusade against Sa’di Morocco. This expedition (preceded by a previous attempt in 1574) was undertaken for a series of reasons, both religious and political. Morocco had become an important aspect of the Ottoman Empire’s strategy to expand its influence into the Atlantic and was, therefore, one of the axes of the Iberian struggle against the Ottomans. Inspired by passionate religious zeal, the Portuguese crusade was in fact an anachronistic move that did not take account of the existing balance of power, and it culminated in the disastrous Battle of Alcácer Quibir (1578), which extinguished a good part of the Portuguese nobility and took the life of the king himself. Portugal was annexed by the Spanish monarchy two years later. D. António, Prior do Crato, who had participated in the Battle of Alcácer Quibir, became the main Portuguese rival of Philip II. Together with other enemies of Spain, like England and France, he tried to create a great alliance with the Ottomans and the Sultan of Morocco to attack Spain. However, such an attack never took place, and the military frontier with Islam was definitively stabilised from the 1570s onwards.

From this moment the violence engendered by the conflict between the Ottoman empire and Spain continued by other means—especially privateering and piracy. In fact, after the Battle of Lepanto there was a remarkable increase in corsair activity, with all its political, economic, and sociological consequences. Establishing the mechanisms for regulating this activity—and the exchange of goods and peoples that it gave rise to—was the focus of relations between Iberia and North Africa during this period. At the same time, a larger change took place that would lead to the emergence of new imperial actors and a new scheme for world domination: colonialism.

The status of North Africa within Iberian imperial expansion is, thus, ambiguous: on the one hand, it represents the first stage in that expansion; on the other, in terms of territory, North Africa made up only a very small part of the Iberian empires at the middle of the sixteenth century. We can say that, from the standpoint of Spain and Portugal, the North African dimension was important for numerous reasons beyond territorial occupation. From the perspective of constructing an imperial narrative, there seemed to be a connection between imperial expansion and the confrontation with Islam: indeed, João de Barros begins his Décadas with the
Hegira and the history of the origins of Islam (Thomaz 1994, 11). Moreover, if we consider the Iberian empires not as a project already defined at the beginning of the fifteenth century but as a complex process that developed gradually and that gave rise to various political, administrative, and economic solutions, we can say that it was precisely the North African experience wherein some of the essential features of those empires took shape, and that these features help to explain the later phases of expansion (Mendes 2014).

In the first place, 1415 marks a radical change in the history of the western Mediterranean. During the fourteenth century, the Strait of Gibraltar had had great strategic importance, and control over it had been at the centre of the military and diplomatic dispute between the foremost political actors in the region—the Naṣrids in Granada, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and so on—and even more remote powers such as the Mamlūks in Egypt. One of the earliest circumstances that favoured Iberian expansion was the weakening of the Muslim political formations in North Africa, from the Merinids in Morocco to the Ḥafṣids in Tunis. This process can largely be explained with reference to the evolution of the trade routes for sub-Saharan gold. For multiple reasons, in the fourteenth century these routes shifted to the east, to areas under Mamlūk control, which weakened the Maghreb states (Devisse 1972). In the longue durée, the evolution of African trade explains major traits of medieval Mediterranean history, such as the intervention of Italian and Aragonese merchants in North Africa, and gave rise, in the end, to an essential development beginning in the thirteenth century: the displacement of naval and commercial hegemony from the south to the north of the Mediterranean. The forms of Italian and Aragonese mercantile and financial colonisation that were established in the western Mediterranean illustrate a special economic dynamic that will be essential in the first stages of Atlantic expansion, such as the conquest of the Canary Islands, which was supported largely by Genovese interests (Fernández-Armesto 1987). The opening of the Atlantic prompted the first substantial change in the structure of Iberian trade: the Portuguese conquered enclaves on the west coast of Africa by taking advantage of the extreme fragmentation and political weakness of the Maghreb states, but they also gained direct access to the African gold trade.

The example of Ceuta shows that, beyond territorial expansion, the management of the new possessions prompted significant changes in the configuration of the Iberian empires. The conquest of Ceuta meant—and this is true for Spanish expansion in North Africa as well—the triumph of new aristocratic families that supported an aggressive policy toward Islam, both within and beyond Portugal. In Iberia, the Crusade constituted an opportunity for collaboration between the Church and the monarchy, as is shown by the creation in Spain of the “Council of the Crusade”, which managed the resources granted by the Holy See, in a not-always-balanced attempt to establish fiscal collaboration between the two entities. On the level of the economy, the first economic benefit of the North African conquests was control over the sub-Saharan gold trade, but the exponential growth of another kind of trade soon became clear: the trade in slaves and captives. The enormous profits involved in human trafficking led the monarchy to become actively involved in overseeing the rescue of captives, which thereby was transformed from a private concern into a matter of foreign policy (Barata 2008). Ceuta is an example of how important the
African stage was in transforming decisive aspects of the construction of the new Atlantic space.

FROM IDEOLOGY TO PRESIDIOS

Iberian imperial expansion did not follow a pre-established and coherent ideological agenda. The link between the Reconquest and imperial expansion has been studied from many different angles: the early development of dynamic state administrative structures in the Iberian peninsula during the Middle Ages; the formation of a military aristocracy with an aggressive ideology based on chivalrous ideals; the moral and financial alliance of the Church with the monarchy. These elements would be merged into the ideology of the Crusade, which inspired the occupation of the African strongholds (Rosenberger 1993a). This ideology also provided the first instruments of imperial legitimacy, which were forged in the context of the rivalry between Spain and Portugal, which was mediated by diplomatic treaties and, above all, by the authority of Rome. In this sense, papal bulls were the first programmatic documents to legitimise the Iberian empires, and they reflect, moreover, the political tensions being played out in a three-character drama with Portugal, Spain, and the Church, as well as the basic legal issue of jurisdiction over infidels and slavery (Marcocci 2011, 28ff; Avalos 2014).

North Africa—like the Americas—was part of the division of the world between Spain and Portugal; the kingdom of Tremecén was granted to the former, and the kingdom of Fes to the latter. Given this context, Pope Alexander VI’s bulls have been interpreted as an attempt by a Spanish pope to promote the interests of the Reyes Católicos in Africa to the detriment of the Portuguese. But these bulls also reflect the construction of an imperial ideology in which the pope arrogated to himself the authority to concede to the kings of Castile and Portugal the right to conquer territories and populations. At the same time, the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies made political use of the legitimising value of the struggle against Islam. This political and economic opportunism had, also, an eschatological dimension. A clear example is the ideology of the crusade that fuelled the North African campaigns organised by Cardinal Cisneros, whose ultimate objective was the conquest of Jerusalem, in which he attempted to involve the Portuguese themselves (Pérez 2014, 146–147).

What we see here is a reprise of the same Franciscan millenarian spirit that had inspired Columbus’ voyages—a spirit that prophesied the conversion of Muslims and Jews, and all of humanity unified under a single monarch (Milhou 1983). The persistence of this dream throughout the first half of the sixteenth century was supported by very powerful religious memories—after all, the old Marinid capital was where the Holy Prince (“o Infante Santo”) Fernando had been martyred, after being captured in the siege of Tangier in 1437 and after the Portuguese refused to relinquish Ceuta in exchange for his release.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the messianic impulse linked to these conquests crystallised in a new formulation: the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, and the Muslims were forced to convert in 1502; in Portugal, both Jews and Muslims were expelled in 1496-1497. The relationship between the two events is clear: with the expulsion, Manoel I of Portugal proclaimed himself the “defender of Christianity”,
in a political gesture clearly intended to compete with the Reyes Católicos, Isabel, and Ferdinand. It is clear that for the Iberian powers, foreign expansion—whose eschatological horizon was the conquest of Jerusalem—was connected to the problem of managing societies characterised by religious pluralism, a problem that at this point took on the dramatic features of expulsion and mass conversion (Barros 2014). This connection can be seen, for example, in the development of similar methods of evangelisation in Europe and in the colonies. A single monarch and a single flock, united under a single faith: on the basis of imperial political thinking, discursive devices were introduced that created the modern categories of exclusion: the Jew, the Infidel, the Savage (Prosperi 2012). These categories were organised around various fundamental issues during the whole of the sixteenth century: the legal status of conquered peoples and the development of a theory of natural rights; the slave trade, which became one of the main profit-making enterprises of the Iberian empires; the management of vast populations of converts, in which ideas of race were at odds with theological principles.

The survival of the ideology of the Crusade among certain political circles coincides to a large extent with the experience of the impossibility of territorial occupation in North Africa, which imposed its own practical imperatives. The mentality of the early conquerors linked the ideology of the Crusade to the old spirit of chivalry, whose themes permeate the historical narratives. Thus, the chronicles that narrate the history of the Portuguese in Safi, for example, recount the exploits of Captain Nuno Fernandes d’Ataíde and his knights and give a detailed account of all the battles and the names of their protagonists (Lopes 1939). In one of their razzias, the Portuguese got as far as the walls of Marrakech. In these histories, the reader perceives a tension between the agendas of military conquest and territorial occupation, on the one hand, and the more concrete goal of maintaining control over specific areas.

In the end, following the first attempts to conquer territory, this tension was resolved in practice by the occupation of specific coastal enclaves that ensured control over trade routes or strategic military points but that in principle did not seek continued, sustained territorial expansion. Portuguese occupation of points on the coast of West Africa gave it control over African trade and the logistics for the great imperial voyages to the East. For their part, the Spanish made successive incursions into North African cities in order to gain strategic control over Mediterranean navigation and to thwart corsair activity and the growing power of the Ottomans. This kind of partial, coastal intervention gave rise to a distinctive form of occupation expressed by the Spanish word presidio: a military fort under constant threat from the hinterland whose survival depended on provisioning from Spain or on plundering surrounding areas in search of booty and slaves. The word presidio also refers to a prison and thus suggests the jail-like nature of these cities, where condemned criminals ended up being sent and which thus became one of the worst possible places for a soldier to be sent (Bunes 1988).

Among the North Africans a singular figure emerged, known as “moros de paces”—in other words, a local person or population who collaborated with the presidios in some way. The trajectory of some of these figures that had dealings with the Iberian conquerors illustrates the ways in which the occupied cities influenced local politics. A good example is Yahyā-u-Ta’fūt, who attempted to impose his
political authority in the region during the final decades of the fifteenth century largely on the basis of his relations with the Portuguese and with the Waṭṭāsid dynasty in Fez (Rosenberger 1993b; Subrahmanyam 2011). Thus, the role played by the occupied cities—the presidios—was not merely predatory but also political, in that they sometimes constituted a decisive factor in local power struggles.

**CORSAIR, CONVERSION, AND RANSOM**

Up to this point, I have been using the concept of frontier in a strictly military sense. The proposed chronological framework is based on the vicissitudes of armed conflict and has a clear focal point in the 1520s, when the consolidation of the so-called “Berber Regencies” strengthened the hand of the Ottoman Empire, which wielded enormous naval power in the Mediterranean and also threatened the eastern fronts of European Christendom and of the Habsburg monarchy. The military frontier is the violent expression of the consolidation of the two great empires that gave shape to the Mediterranean in the early modern period: Spain and the Ottoman Empire. From the European standpoint, there is a clear awareness of this confrontation on multiple levels: from the soldiers who participated in imperial campaigns to overarching strategic conceptions and concepts in political philosophy, the “Turk” functions as a measure of military experience or as a category of cultural difference and political thought.

All of these circumstances can be seen as coalescing around one phenomenon—captivity—which was a familiar experience in the lives of the inhabitants of the early

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**Image 5.1** Re-enactment of a naval battle in the Mediterranean, by Jacopo Tintoretto, *The abduction of Helen*, 1578–1579

Source: Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain
modern Mediterranean world, in addition to being a fundamental economic factor in its development. Anyone who undertook a sea voyage or who lived on the coast and was therefore potentially prey to an armed incursion lived in anticipation and fear of corsair attacks. Some of these attacks were spectacular, and the number of prisoners taken contributed to the idea that the corsairs enjoyed a certain degree of impunity and increased the fear of and hatred toward them. Many of the Muslim corsairs were converts, former Christians who had converted to Islam and moved to North Africa, and thus could act as guides to other corsairs because of their familiarity with the territory. Many others were Andalusians or Moriscos who had fled or been expelled from Spain. The fear of these corsair incursions led by former coreligionists who had converted to Islam was accompanied in Spain by the perception of the Morisco population as an internal threat, a community that was impossible to integrate and could potentially act as a fifth column facilitating an Ottoman attack (Vincent 2006).

The impact of Mediterranean corsair activity is astounding—in the first place, because of the sheer number of people affected by human trafficking (Kaiser 2008). Although it is difficult to quantify with precision the number of victims, it has been estimated that there were well over a million slaves in the Mediterranean world between 1530 and 1780. Given that both Christians and Muslims carried out the corsair activity, the phenomenon was distributed—though not evenly—over both the sides of Mediterranean, unlike what happened in the Atlantic, where human trafficking only affected Africans (Fiume 2009, 4). The slaves and captives—who were basically treated as merchandise for exchange or as labour—represented a major stimulus for the European economy, as objects of a trading system based on the logic of growth and distribution of wealth at the expense of the victims. While the dominant propaganda insisted on religious animosity and recited the need to inflict economic harm on the enemy, human trafficking served to cover up or legitimise other kinds of dealings with that same enemy and gave rise to new types of business ventures, such as marine insurance.

The experiences of those captured by corsairs varied and included a whole range of situations depending on the captives’ social class or wealth, on the possibility of ransom, and on where they served out their captivity, whether they were used as goods to be exchanged, as royal possessions, or as manpower assigned to more or less hard labour in the cities (Martínez Torres 2004). The greater or lesser harshness in living conditions depended on those circumstances and frequently led to the conversion to Islam in cases where the captive hoped that doing so would provide relief from harsh treatment, or even would allow him a rise socially and politically in the service of an Ottoman or Moroccan lord. One of the main centres of corsair activity in North Africa was Algiers. This city’s huge jails, which the Spanish called “baths”, held a great number of captives of diverse origins and varied status in common spaces with chapels where Christians could worship, taverns, and hospitals. The baths in Algiers are well known because one of their prisoners was Cervantes, whose status as a captive had far-reaching literary repercussions (Garcés 2002), as well as because of the Topographía e historia general de Argel, by Antonio de Sosa, one of the main sources of information for European readers on life in Algiers.

Not all North African jails were like the baths in Algiers; the testimony of captives held in Morocco, for example, attests to much more gruelling experiences. The
accounts written by those who returned to Europe describe the cruel conditions of their captivity, which were frequently given as a justification for conversion to Islam. European archives are full of accounts by captives who converted to Islam and then returned to the Christian fold following an interrogation by the Inquisition that did not tend to be particularly arduous (Bennassar and Bennassar 1989). Many of those interrogated claimed that their conversion had been only superficial and that they had continued to be Christians at heart. This was a credible argument as far as the Inquisition was concerned, given that it was precisely this question of the distance between external practice and internal conviction that was being sounded in the Inquisition’s own trials of converts. It was an urgent question, because of its intractability: How can the sincerity of religious faith be established? In answer to this question, various solutions were considered. On the one hand, there emerged a radical legal equivalence between lineage and religious creed; in Spain, this took the form of the statutes of blood purity. On the other hand, and from the point of view of the construction of the modern subject, the distance between internal and external became yet another factor in the construction of dissimulation as a moral and political category. Among Muslims, the status of the Moriscos was also the subject of legal debate, as is shown by the important fatwā (legal opinion) issued by the alfaqū al-Wahrānī in Fez, which permitted Moriscos in Spain to conceal their Muslim faith and to adapt externally to the Christian religion; this debate invokes the precept of tāqiyya, according to which a Muslim could legitimately conceal his or her religion when not in the dār al-islām (Stewart 2013). The issue demonstrates how difficult it is to reduce to comprehensible categories a complex world in which confessionalisation, violence, and corsair activity put individuals in the position of having to conceal their beliefs.

Although there was by far a greater number of converts from Christianity to Islam, there was also a significant number of Muslim converts to Christianity, besides the Moriscos. This was the case of the many members of North African royal families that fled to Europe out of fear of the political situation in their kingdoms (Alonso Acero 2006). These princes, who ended up being used as a political and diplomatic weapon, met with different fortunes. Many converted and became loyal vassals of the Spanish monarchy, such as Gaspar Benimerín and Carlos de África, a Zayyānid prince who became a knight of the Order of Saint James. A unique figure is Felipe de África, a Sa’di prince from Morocco who converted to Christianity in 1593 during the pilgrimage of the Virgen de la Cabeza, was the godson of Philip II (whose name he adopted), settled in Madrid, and befriended writers such as Lope de Vega, who recounted his conversion in his Tragedia del rey don Sebastián (Oliver Asín 1955).

The case of Portuguese mouriscos is a special one. They were mainly of African origin and often crypto-Muslims, who kept their observance of Islam hidden. An example is the religious brotherhood of Lisbon’s church of São João, where mouriscos created a way to become integrated into Portuguese society through a kind of mimesis of their own crypto-Muslim practice with the Catholic cult (Ribas 2004, I, 199).

Christian conversion to Islam was undoubtedly a much larger phenomenon and constitutes an important feature of the history of North African societies. The trace of the majority of these converts in dār al-islām is impossible to follow, but many others secured important posts in the courts or in the armies of Moroccan or Ottoman lords. The status of these converts was ambiguous: despite not being
assimilated within the local populations, their factions, or their forms of religious authority (or rather because of this), they represent in a structural way the political figure of the foreigner who is directly dependent on the monarch and to whom he can therefore look for support. The foreigner is thus a central character in the descriptions made by Europeans of Muslim political systems, and specifically those of North Africa: a political world that, from the European perspective, is centred on the closed universe of the court, which is ruled by passions and in which the relationship between the sovereign and his favourite is the core of Oriental despotism—a lasting theme in Orientalist representations. It ought to be asked, to the contrary, whether the inclusion of foreign converts in Muslim courts should actually be understood not as a symptom of the passions of the despot’s hermetic inner circle, but as an expression of the permeability of North Africa’s political world to different practices and representations, since it was capable of absorbing these apostates, who operated at different levels of the political apparatus and the social order and whose real impact on North African culture has yet to be established (Dakhlia 2005).

The degree to which these apostates were integrated into North African societies had its limits. Hierónimo de Mendonça, for example, recounts how the Moroccan sultan ‘Abd al-Malik al-Sa’di would go into churches with his elches (i.e., “converts”), and, to mock them, would sometimes douse them with holy water, saying that it was pointless to deny that their conversion was not altogether sincere, since the only thing he was interested in was people who served him well and the soul meant nothing to him (Rodríguez Mediano 2001). This is a crude expression of the indeterminate nature of the religious status of these converts. In fact, endogamy was frequent among them, and we know that many of them kept up relations with other captives from their own nations or made use of their influence to help them. On the other end of the Mediterranean, in the Ottoman Empire, conversion to Islam made it necessary to redefine the category of the Rûm, which had a decisive influence on the gradual confessionalisation and disciplining of Ottoman society (Krstić 2011, 6).

One of the most important consequences in Europe of Mediterranean captivity was the mobilisation of resources for redeeming captives. Philip II did not establish an institution dedicated to redemption and instead relied on the “redemptive orders”, the Trinitarians and Mercedarians, to carry out most of these efforts. It was a system of collaboration between the monarchy and these orders that required the economic and logistical support of the general public. To that end, the redemption campaign set in motion a propaganda machine that included everything from preaching to public ceremonies and processions for redeemed captives, whose goal was to mobilize the support of the general population, which was essential for both the economic and symbolic maintenance of the system (Martínez Torres 2004). This political, ritual, and religious apparatus, however, cannot hide the existence of other actors and interests engaged in the ransoming of captives. Frequently, redemption was used as a way to conceal or justify other kinds of economic exchanges between Christians and Muslims by mobilising intermediaries of different sorts, who facilitated the negotiations, cultivated credit (in both senses of the word), or derived some economic benefit. We know, for example, of private companies that specialised in ransoming captives or insuring Mediterranean voyages. Moreover, a good part of the releases obtained were not negotiated by the redemptive orders. After all, a delay in redeeming captives could mean economic loss, and for this
reason in many cases, ransom was decided immediately following capture, through a type of brief negotiation called *alaffia* (Andújar Castillo 2008). The redemption of captives in Spain and Portugal can be considered, in fact, a “pious business”: an economic affair in which the activities of the “redemptive orders” had to compete with other actors, private merchants and even the crown, which wanted to control a process that involved the mobilisation of vast administrative, economic and political resources” (Alberto 2010).

**NEGOTIATION AND DIPLOMACY**

These types of negotiation and mediation allow us to look at the phenomenon of corsairs and captivity from another perspective: it was not only a form of economic warfare, a sort of low-level confrontation between Christianity and Islam in the Mediterranean that intensified after open military conflict came to an end with the Battle of Lepanto. It was, in reality, an economic and cultural exchange phenomenon that fluctuated throughout the seventeenth century but that functioned because of the reliability of a series of informal intermediary institutions whose efficacy was backed by a centuries-old practice. Corsair violence can therefore be interpreted as belonging to a wide range of forms of negotiation going from official diplomatic contacts between kingdoms to more or less informal contacts at the local level. Ever since the Middle Ages, the gears of Mediterranean trade had been greased by regular diplomatic contacts between the Crown of Aragon and different North African and Andalusi powers (Salicrú 1998). Iberian archives preserve many of the letters that the Sa’dis in Morocco, the Ottomans, the Hafsids in Tunis, and the ‘Abdelwādids in Algiers exchanged with Spanish monarchs or other authorities. This correspondence reflects the different political and linguistic contexts in which it was produced. The letters written in the royal chancelleries in Marrakech, in Tunis, or of the King of Cuco reflect the elegant style of classical Arabic, with the complex, knotty epistolary formulas characteristic of courtly tradition. This correspondence helps us to understand the genesis of bilingual diplomatic accords, in Arabic and Castilian, such as those that were signed by Charles V and the Hafsīd caliphs (Mariño and Morán 1980). Other kinds of relations, however, did not directly involve the royal chancelleries but rather other agents who moved on different levels of political or linguistic competence: governors of cities, tribal sheikhs, agents with commercial interests, spies, etc. As a result, what we have is a jumble of documents in which political negotiations are entangled with the circulation of information and the construction of forms of knowledge, and which marshal a variety linguistic resources: the registers of Arabic range from highly cultured to closed dialects. We know of the case of the Moroccan sultan ‘Abd al-Malik al-Sa’dī, who spoke Turkish and Castilian perfectly, and local governors who appear to have retained Portuguese Jews in their service and whose correspondence is in a Castilian strongly influenced by Portuguese (García-Arenal, Rodríguez Mediano, and El Hour 2002). Sometimes, the Arabic letters are translated into Castilian or Portuguese at their place of origin, which testifies to the work of translators in the North African courts. Many letters, however, are translated in the Iberian peninsula by people whose identities are often hard to make out, such as Alonso del Castillo, a Morisco doctor and translator of the Arabic inscriptions at the Alhambra (Cabanelas 1991). At the informal end of
the spectrum, we have the correspondence that Alvar Gómez de Horozco, known as El Zagal, *alcaide*, and captain of Bona, exchanged with local Algerian sheikhs. These communications are in Algerian dialect and lack the formality associated with the court, but they illustrate an immediate kind of negotiation, exchange of goods and information, and, in short, the integration of the Spanish occupiers into the networks of local North African society.

One of the greatest diplomatic missions of the early modern period was led by Pedro Martír de Anglería to Mamlûk Egypt in the name of the Reyes Católicos (1501–1502), an account of which was published in 1511, at the time of Cardinal Cisneros’ great African expeditions (Álvarez-Moreno 2013). This was an especially interesting delegation, led by a humanist who, in addition to this African experience, was also a chronicler of the conquest of America. He was, therefore, a figure at the centre of the construction of the first ideological representations of Spanish imperial expansion. The mission was a response to complaints lodged by the Mamlûk sultan over the treatment of Spanish Muslims (at the time of the great forced conversion), but Anglería’s text largely expresses the forms of the representation of alterity, constructed in a parallel fashion on the basis of his American and African experiences. Anglería provides a detailed description of the interpreter Tangaribardino, a Valencian apostate who worked as a translator and envoy for the Mamlûks. Looked at from the perspective of the processes of circulation of information, the pair Anglería-Tangaribardino illustrates the dual nature of translation and religious polemic, based on the work of two people (patron and slave, bishop and convert, theologian and *alfaqih*) who operate on separate linguistic, cultural, and political levels.

Diplomatic missions in both directions were plentiful. Pedro Venegas de Córdoba was dispatched as ambassador to Morocco in 1579 to negotiate, among other things, the possibility of Larache being ceded to Spain, an issue that would culminate in 1609–1610 with a visit by the Moroccan sultan himself, Muhammad al-Shaykh, to Spain for talks with Philip III. The first stop in al-Shaikh’s visit to the peninsula was Vilanova de Portimão, in the Portuguese Algarve, where he engaged in negotiations with the Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, before moving to Carmona (Seville), where he arrived at the very moment when the Moriscos were being expelled from Spain. Shortly thereafter, the Morisco Ahmad b. Qâsim al-Hajarî, from Extremadura, travelled to France and the Low Countries as an envoy of the Moroccan sultan Mûlây Zidân to negotiate the ransom of some Morisco captives (al-Hajarî 2015). The extraordinary account of his visit relates, among other things, his meetings with prominent European Orientalists such as Thomas van Erpen, which places him at the inception of a new way of understanding the Orient on the part of European scholars (Wiegers 1988). Another Moroccan ambassador who wrote an account of his voyage was the vizier ‘Abd al-Wahhâb al-Ghassâni, who travelled to Spain at the end of the seventeenth century to negotiate, among other things, the ransom of Moroccan slaves (al-Ghassâni 1940).

From the practices of exchange, ransoming, and trade at the local level up to large official diplomatic missions, the Mediterranean border can be defined, not just as a military boundary but as a network of economic, political, and cultural relations whose focal point is corsair activity and the mercantilisation of human beings, which propels and mobilizes all manner of resources. A good index of this complex mixture of political and economic interests with religious and ideological issues is
the polemic about the lawfulness of doing business with Muslims. In Portugal, for example, uneasiness over trading with infidels and its moral implications gave way, by the end of the fifteenth century, to seeing trade as a possible tool for religious evangelisation under the auspices of the crown. The African experience was essential for forging the alliance between trade and religion that defined the Portuguese colonial project (Marcocci 2011, 92–93).

As has been mentioned, the intensity of corsair activity is inversely proportional to that of military confrontation. In fact, beginning in 1633 there was a significant increase in redemptions, proof of the European states’ growing political and economic investment in ransom activities. However, paradoxically, this increase was accompanied by a decrease in the number of Christian captives, who were gradually replaced, in North Africa, by populations of slaves from sub-Saharan Africa (Martínez Torres 2004). By the end of the eighteenth century we see the culmination of a process by which the procedures based on traditional practices were gradually replaced by the imposition of the system of European public law as a way to regulate diplomatic relations. The imposition of the French-inspired consular system (the Ottomans set up diplomatic representation in the major European capitals starting in 1790) culminated in the secularisation of diplomatic practices, which no longer appealed to the old principles associated with the Crusade against the infidel (Windler 1999). This fact testifies to an important change in the balance of power in the Mediterranean and functions as a precursor to the colonial era, which began with Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt in 1798 and the mixture of military, political, and scientific objectives that is characteristic of the next stage of European imperialism.

**DIASPORAS**

The conception of the Mediterranean defined basically as a communications network has generated notable historiographical interest in the figure of the intermediary: a person who is capable of moving among different settings, wielding many languages, buying and selling, translating. “Passeurs”, “cultural brokers” are terms that attempt to capture the distinctive attributes of these mediating figures. This interest has turned the focus onto communities that seem to have played a crucial role in the different types of Mediterranean negotiation, such as the Jews. The Jews were a community scattered all over Europe, Asia, and Africa, with a long tradition of establishing communication and trade networks. Historiography on this subject makes reference to communities that were able to secure credit (both economic and moral) for long-distance commercial exchanges, that had a particular legal relationship to the different political authorities in the Mediterranean region, and whose geographic distribution throughout this region increased as a result of the diaspora brought about by the expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492. The expansion of the Iberian empires also produced various phenomena that lent new currency to this intermediary function: many converts of Jewish origin settled in the North African enclaves in order to escape inquisitorial repression; here they made contact with important Jewish communities in North African cities such as Fes and thus became an essential factor in the region’s commercial activity (Tavim 1997). In addition, North African cities under Iberian rule had legally established Jewish communities that in many cases were quite numerous.
An example is the Jewish community in the Spanish-rulled city of Orán. Among its members were the well-known families of the Cansinos and the Sasportas, who worked as translators and played a crucial role in the relations between the Spanish and the surrounding areas (Alonso Acero 2000, 202ff; Schaub 1999). We know the names of other Jews who worked as translators in the North African courts, such as the Rute and Senanes families in Fez. The way in which Jewish families constructed networks of relationships and mediation is well illustrated by the example of the Pallache family. This Jewish family from Fes acted as mediators between Morocco, Spain, the Low Countries, and the Ottoman Empire, developing strategies to diversify their market that included, in some cases, the religious conversion of family members. The history of the Pallache family brings into play a number of resources that raise questions about the modalities of identity manipulation and the introduction of the techniques of incipient mercantilism—a series of questions that can be summed up in the issue of the establishment and the value of credit (in both the moral and economic meaning of the word) in modern Europe (García-Arenal and Wiegers 2014).

Another large diaspora out of Iberia was brought about by the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain in 1609. This exodus of 300,000 people was the culmination of a long process of emigration of Andalusians, essentially to North Africa, that began during the final days of the kingdom of Granada. The expulsion of the Moriscos was an especially traumatic moment for many people, who were deprived of their possessions, forced into exile and received—often with hostility—in North Africa. The diaspora gave rise to a network of aid and communication throughout the Mediterranean region (García-Arenal and Wiegers 2014). Over time, “Andalusi” identity became a recurrent cultural reference point in North Africa and was especially significant in places like northern Morocco or Tunis. In spite of this, it is difficult to define with any precision what constituted Andalusi identity, given that the term could be used to refer to the participants in many different movements of population between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. It is impossible to equate the Andalusi community in Tetuan, refounded by the emigré Andalusi al-Manḍarī in 1483, with the extremely populous community of Moriscos that settled in Tunis. One of these Tunisian Moriscos was able to reproduce verses from Lope de Vega and fragments from Quevedo’s Sueños from memory (Oliver Asín 1933). Elsewhere in North Africa, Moriscos in Salé, many of whom hailed from a town in Extremadura called Hornachos, established what has come to be called a corsair republic that preserved its political independence vis-à-vis other authorities in Morocco. These corsairs continued referring to themselves by their Spanish names, and for a long period they were in negotiation with the Spanish monarchy, even contemplating a possible return to Spain; at the same time, the Salé case exemplifies how Muslim corsairs established ties with European powers such as the Dutch who—thanks to their technical innovations—could intervene in North Africa to counteract Spanish interests (Maziane 2007).

RELIGION AND REPRESENTATION

The fate of these communities raises the question of religious categories when defining the Mediterranean frontier. Historiography has largely understood the
military border has as an extension of a cultural and religious region, adopting as its own the assumptions of the ideology of the crusade and the confrontation with Islam belonging to the so-called “Reconquista”. From this perspective, the relationship between Christianity and Islam would have been expressed mainly through religious polemic. Medieval Christian polemicists had neither the interest nor the means to assemble a rigorous knowledge of Islam, so their polemic was focused on certain theological, scriptural, and character-based features that were reiterated within the polemical tradition itself. Islam became, then, an essentially ahistorical phenomenon, and around it an immutable and hostile anthropology was constructed (Bunes 1989). The expression of this hostility would unify, under a religious heading, a series of political, ritual, and cultural representations whose function would be to construct a strong identity boundary with Islam based on a specular view of the Christians’ own identity and that would find the perfect genealogical articulation in the statutes of blood purity. One of the works that encapsulates all these representations of Muslims and Jews is the *Fortalicium fidei* (1464–1476), by the Franciscan friar Alonso de Espina, a book that was widely disseminated throughout Europe. The relationship between the Franciscans and Islam as a target of evangelisation evoked a reference to the foundational history of the encounter between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kāmil, which legitimised the missionary vocation of the Franciscans and therefore their longstanding medieval tradition of voluntary martyrdom in North Africa—yet another example of this cultural and religious border (Tolan 2007).

Yet, the issue of the frontier and the representation of alterity does not seem sufficient to comprehend the religious complexity of the Mediterranean world. Rather than a place of alterity, we might say that North Africa becomes a privileged space where the religious categories of the modern world undergo mutation, where forms of religious thought circulate, take on new meanings, and become resources for expressing new forms of spirituality. This is a space not only where syncretic phenomena arise (for example, shared sanctuaries), but that also permits the spread of certain phenomena such as messianism that seem to have an enormous potential for transmission and contagion (García-Arenal 2003).

These slippages of meaning, this appropriation of religious resources within different contexts, are a testament to processes of transmission that are incomprehensible if we fail to keep in mind the conflict between the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. A text composed in Spanish in 1583, *Los Diálogos de Marruecos*, recounts how a young Flemish man, Andrés Antonio, discovers that his brother Bernardo has converted to Judaism in Marrakesh, adopting the name Obadía Ben Israel. Andrés goes to Morocco to find him, and there the two engage in a religious dialogue in which Obadía narrates, among other things, his conversion to Judaism, which began on a ship en route from Flanders to Morocco, where he heard some Protestants speaking about the Bible. When he undertakes to read it, Bernardo discovers inconsistencies in the sacred text. By the time he arrives in Africa, what began as a voyage made for reasons of trade has also become a personal journey toward truth. The author of the work has been identified as Estévão Dias, a member of a Portuguese family of crypto-Jews who was persecuted by the Inquisition, was in contact with Protestant reformers in the Low Countries, converted to Judaism, and travelled to Morocco (Wilke 2014). The *Diálogos* allows us to reconstruct not
only the connection between trade and conversion but also other processes of far-reaching cultural significance, such as the movement of Portuguese Jews through the Iberian peninsula, Morocco, and the Low Countries; the different kinds of contact between Judaism, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, and Islam; and the configuration of a culture in which we observe, in Spanish, the transformation (in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries) of the dialectic and dialogue forms from an emphasis on scholastic rhetoric to the expression of sceptical perplexity.

The same phenomenon can be found in a number of Morisco texts. We know, for example, that *La Apología contra la ley cristiana*—written by a Morisco from Pastrana, Ahmad Alguazir, who later fled to Morocco—was known in Europe—in England and the Low Countries, for example—at the same time that it was being read in Tunis and Algiers. Also, the text known as *Evangelio de S. Bernabé*, a forged Morisco gospel, was used by the English freethinker John Toland in his critique of religion (Champion 2010). This example demonstrates not only that information circulated but also that the features of this information were appropriated and reused by different people in different contexts.

In 1594, Cipriano de Valera published his *Tratado para confirmar en la fe cristiana a los cautivos de Berbería* in London. This treatise is unique among others by Spanish religious writers in that Valera was a Protestant who had fled Spain and was one of the translators of the Castilian Bible that is still today the canonical Spanish version for Protestants. In his *Tratado*, Valera invoked the sufferings of the captives in Barbary Africa, but at the same time he denounced the errors of the papists and the need for direct reading of sacred scripture. It is not difficult to see in his description of the suffering of Christian captives in Africa an allusion to the persecution of “true Christians” in inquisitorial Spain and a plea for their liberation. Thus, the work makes use of a rhetorical device similar to that used by the anonymous author of the *Viaje de Turquía*, an autobiographical tale of debatable authenticity that expresses religious anxiety by means of the estrangement induced by a journey through Islamic lands.

These examples make clear the problematic nature of religious identity, which was being threatened by the widening gap between inner experience and outer appearance, by the experience of mass conversion, and by the need to conceal one’s faith in the face of ever greater instruments of ideological homogenisation. Thus, in the sequel to Lazarillo de Tormes’ adventures, he participates in the Conquest of Tunis (1534), but his ship sinks and the soldiers—abandoned by their commanders—drown; only Lázaro survives, though he is transformed into a tuna fish (that is, he converts to Islam), in a perfect metaphor for conversion and concealment as a means of survival (Delpech 2014, 150).

Living in exile, Valera was able to criticize the mechanisms for controlling conscience introduced by modern confessionalisation—not only the Inquisition but above all the relentlessness of preaching. Popular preachers saw their own countrymen as targets of evangelisation not unlike Indians or Muslims. In 1665–1668, during his popular missions in Spain, the future superior general of the Society of Jesus, Tirso González de Santalla, met some Muslim captives whom he attempted to convert. This encounter with Islam later led him to write a large manual on conversion of Muslims, *Manuedctio ad conversionem Mahumetanorum* (Madrid, 1687), which was later translated into Arabic (Colombo 2007). It is a very different kind of
text from Alonso de Espina’s *Fortalicium fidei*; from its very beginning it makes use of the improvements in the historical and theological knowledge of Islam made by European Orientalism, including the use of the printing press with Arabic characters. The work also draws from the Jesuits’ own agenda and their view of contact with and evangelisation of other peoples, which vacillated between the Rome’s centralisation of the missions through the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and the problematic strategy of accommodation to other cultures.

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE**

The experience of religious contact is, to a certain extent, an experience of subjectivity but also a narrative experience. As is well known, constant contact with Muslims in Al-Andalus spawned a prolific Maurophile literary tradition—tales of romance and chivalry about life on the frontier with Islam—that ended up permeating European literary taste, in the salons of absolutist France, where the novel as a genre was being codified and where it was being debated whether the origin of the novel was to be found in the Arabic literary tradition (Carrasco Urgoiti 1956). This long-lasting controversy included a discussion of the role of *Don Quixote* in the history of literature but can also be understood in terms that have nothing to do with the issue of origins, but rather with the processes by which cultural forms take on new meanings: for example, the sublimation of the age-old themes of the “discovery of islands” and “captivity” in Byzantine novels (González Rovira 1996, 139–142).

But the crisis of narration also affects historical narrative and its methodological foundations. An example is Leo Africanus. Born in Granada, he emigrated to Morocco at the end of the fifteenth century. There he worked for the Waṭṭāsid sultans and travelled throughout Morocco and North Africa before being captured in 1519–1520, taken to Rome, and baptised as a godson of Leo X. Among other works, Leo Africanus wrote a *Descrizione dell’Africa*, in which he described the kingdoms, regions, cities, rivers, and mountains of North Africa, many of which he had personally visited. The manuscript of the *Descrizione* circulated among Italian humanists and geographers even before it was published, and the work’s influence is obvious, for example, in the representation of Africa found in the maps that Jacopo Gastaldi drew for Pietro Andrea Mattiolo’s translation of Ptolomy’s *Geography* (Zhiri 1991, 51)—an attempt to correct the erudite tradition in geography through an insertion onto old maps of “i nuovi nomi” (new names).

An attempt was made to combine the new African place names with the Ptolemaic tradition, but in the end this tradition was abrogated, and the new toponyms came to constitute the image of North Africa that would predominate in Europe until at least the eighteenth century. Contributing to the remarkable dissemination of Leo Africanus’ book was the use made of it in Spain by Luis del Mármol, whose *Descripción General de África* was a very important link for the knowledge of Africa in Europe in the early modern period. Mármol defined the intention of his work as being absolutely original in Spain, in that it incorporated ostensibly distinct categories—the history of Islam and of Al-Andalus and the description of Africa (following João de Barros and Damião de Gois)—in a single representation of history that culminated in the Battle of Lepanto. For his *Descripción*, Mármol claimed to have used Arabic sources. Whether or not this claim is true, it indicates
the emergence of greater historiographical concern for the role of Al-Andalus in a providential history of Spain (Rodríguez Mediano 2009).

For Már mol and other historians, the old ideology of the Crusade and religious confrontation was insufficient to the task of constructing a complex historical narrative, in the same way that the accumulation of motifs from polemical literature was inadequate for developing a rigorous knowledge of Islam. The possibility of considering Arabic as an ancient language like Latin, Greek, or Hebrew opened the door to a reflection on the role of the East in Spain’s providential history. Cervantes had dealt ironically with this possibility through his Cide Hamete Benengeli. This famous character in Don Quixote may have been inspired by the Morisco physician and translator Miguel de Luna, the author of Historia Verdadera del rey d. Rodrigo, a bogus translation of a non-existent Arabic source text about the Muslim conquest of Spain in the year 711 (García-Arenal 2010). This work—considered by many to be an authentic chronicle of the conquest—enjoyed great success and was translated multiple times into Italian, French, and English throughout the entire seventeenth century.

It is true that Miguel de Luna’s work was strongly criticised by his contemporaries for being an especially clumsy and ill-composed falsification. It was obviously not a real Arabic chronicle, as historical criticism quickly established. However, in the dialectic between falsification and criticism, documentary and historical materials were being collected that made it possible to construct an Orientalist body of knowledge that highlighted the presence of the Arab past in the history of Spain: between the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, various Oriental and North African chronicles in Arabic were translated into Castilian (García-Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano 2013). Between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, European learning had transformed the topoi of alterity into forms of historical knowledge that amounted to more resources for thinking about the past. Many of these resources used by modern Orientalism had to do with the representation of the origins of the nations of Europe and the projection of this representation into the present in political terms. Thus, Guillaume Postel was able to imagine an “Israeli-Gallic” monarchy, and Benito Arias Montano, who signed his name in Arabic as al-tilmīd (“the student”), could envision a biblical and Oriental past for Spain that had a decisive influence on the conception of sacred history and geography in Europe, in the course of the long process of developing a properly secular history (Shalev 2012).

In this sense, the relationship between Iberia and North Africa, or better yet, the Mediterranean space defined by Iberian globalisation cannot be characterised only as a network of exchanges where agents involved in mediation and translation—“passeurs” or “cultural brokers”—move about; the idea of mediation itself implicitly entails the reification of (cultural or political) spaces among which these brokers move. A radical critique of these cultural categories might be the definition of the Mediterranean as a “cultural continuum” (Dakhlia and Kaiser 2013).

NOTE

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