

Migrations | Privateering and captivity in the Mediterranean | Captives

Some victims of the privateers' wars suffered an exceptional fate.

Captives seized by privateers were generally dispersed far from their homelands. Spaniards, Italians, Portuguese, French, Dutch and English ended up in Tripoli, Algiers, Tunis or Salé. Muslim captives from the Maghreb and Ottoman Turkey were taken to Malta, Marseille, Spain and Italy. Captured prisoners could be freed for a ransom, usually monetary or in kind. The fate of others depended on certain criteria. The most competent could advance socially and even join the court of a sovereign, including some captured Christians of European descent who converted to Islam. For example, the Muradid Beys of Tunis descended from an Italian Corsican, while Hammuda Pasha, the great builder of Tunis, and the reformer Ahmad Pasha Bey I were born to a Genoese captive. Most captives, however, were not so lucky and ended up working on state-sponsored projects, in penal colonies and on galleys.



Working Number: IT1 129

Name: List of 49 men, women and children from the district of Chiavari (on the Italian coast, near Genoa) who were kept as slaves in Tunis, Tripoli and Algiers, in March 1816

Holding Museum: State Archives of Genoa

Date: 23 March 1816

Materials:

Curator

Justification: -

This list of enslaved men, women and children from Chiavari in Italy gives a glimpse of the careful record-keeping after privateering campaigns. Many Italians were taken to Tunisia, many rising to serve as political or military officials. During the reign of Hammuda Pasha Bey, Italian even became the official language of correspondence with foreigners.



Working Number: IT1 127

Name: List of 15 'Tunisian Turks' captured by corsair captain Giuseppe Diano from the Kingdom of Sicily and sold in Palermo

Holding Museum: State Archives of Palermo

Date: 1808–11

Materials:

Curator

Justification: -

This document from the early 19th century lists "Tunisian Turks" who had been taken prisoner by a Sicilian privateer and taken to Palermo for sale.



Working Number: IT1 128

Name: Appraisal by the assessor of the Tribunal of Booty (Tribunale delle prede) of Palermo, of 25 'Turks of the Barbary Coast' captured by Italian corsairs from the Kingdom of Sicily and detained in Palermo

Holding Museum: State Archives of Palermo

Date: 5 August 1811

Materials:

Curator

Justification: -

Booty, including captives, taken during privateering raids was carefully assessed and administrated. This document lists "25 Turks from the Barbary coast", who had been taken to Palermo for sale by Sicilian privateers.



Working Number: TN 028

Name: Le consul Joseph Raffo (painting)

Holding Museum: Musée d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine de Kassar Saïd

Date: 1840

Materials: Canvas, wood, coloured pigments, gold leaf

Curator Justification: Some foreign captives rebuilt their lives very successfully in their new homelands. Joseph Raffo was born in Tunis around 1795, the son of captive parents originally from Chiavari in Italy. Raffo served the Beys from a young age and soon became an influential figure, even serving as minister for foreign affairs.



Working Number: TN 114

Name: List of the Christian captives of Italian origin, written by Mariano Stinca, a Neapolitan captive

Holding Museum: Archives Nationales

Date:

1800

Materials:

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Curator

Justification: Mariano Stinca was a captive of Neapolitan descent who ended up in the service of Hammuda Pasha, the Bey of Tunis (1782–1814). After a long period of activity as a statesman, head of protocol and interpreter, he left a large volume of correspondence written in Italian, now an invaluable historical source.



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