

Migrations / Privateering and captivity in the Mediterranean

Before the age of mass migration, privateering, a central and legitimate component of international relations between the 16th and the early 19th centuries, was a major cause of the forced migration of thousands. From the Mediterranean to the USA, and even in northern European waters, governments granted private shipowners and entrepreneurs the right to attack and loot enemy ships, take a share of the profits from booty and take prisoners for ransom or sale. All the major conventions signed between European powers and rulers in the Near East and North Africa mention privateering as a political, military and economic reality and regulate its geographical scope. Ransoms, tributes and the tragedy of slavery became commonplace as a result of privateering, which was mainly undertaken from Malta and Livorno on the European side and Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli in North Africa. In 1815, following the Congress of Vienna, peace in Europe, the advent of steamships and the official abolition of slavery in the mid-19th century put an end to privateering.



Working Number: IT1 083
Name: Chorographical plan of the attack waged by Lord Exmouth against Algiers on 27 August 1816
Holding Museum: State Archives of Turin
Date: December 1816
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Control of the Mediterranean was a main source of conflict between the European powers and the North African provinces known as the "Barbary" Regencies, with headquarters in Tunis, Algiers and Tripoli. The term Barbary appeared in the 16th century to refer to North African (Berber) pirates, originating among the officers of the Sultan of Istanbul sent to conquer the western Mediterranean.



Working Number: IT1 037
Name: A battle between Algerian ships and ships of the Naples Royal Navy, which chased the Algerian ships and ultimately destroyed them by firing cannon shots on 17 May 1792
Holding Museum: State Archives of Naples
Date: 1792
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Privateering wars were constant problems in the Mediterranean. Here, the frigate of the Kingdom of Naples is seen destroying the privateers from Algiers, the most important privateering hub in North Africa. The incident took place in 1792.



Working Number: TN 107
Name: Treaty of Peace and Trade between France and the Tunisian Regency
Holding Museum: Archives Nationales
Date: 1799
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Until the early 19th century, relationships between European powers were dominated by the consequences of privateering in the Mediterranean. The treaty signed guaranteed the safety of the crew and cargo of French ships at sea and in Tunisian ports.



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: Privateering spread terror throughout the Mediterranean. Muslim and Christian privateers battled relentlessly to take captives that could later serve as political bargaining chips or as a profitable resource that could be sold as workers or into service.



Working Number: TN 001
Name: Palais-Musée du Bardo
Holding Museum: -
Date: 19th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Many prisoners captured by privateers were sold to serve as labourers. The Bardo Palace in Tunis, the official residence of the ruling bey, is a sprawling complex of buildings constructed and fitted out in stages by architects and Christian captives throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.



Working Number: TN 016
Name: Dar Hussein
Holding Museum: -
Date: 18th–19th centuries
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Mamluk slaves often assumed great importance in the societies of their new homelands. The Dar Hassine was named after its builder, a Mamluk of Circassian descent. A close companion of General Khayr al-Din, the reformer of modern Tunisia, he also served as the first president of the municipality of Tunis (1858–65).



Working Number: TN 010
Name: Sahib el-Tabaa Mosque
Holding Museum: -
Date: 17th–18th centuries
Materials: -
Curator Justification: This mosque was built by Yusuf Sahib al-Taba'a, originally a captive of Moldavian descent. A favourite and then minister of Hammuda Pasha Bey of Tunis (1782–1814), he also served as Lord Chancellor and superintendent of taxes. In fact, he was the second most important political figure in the Tunis Regency after the bey himself.



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 083
Name: Slave market
Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie
Date: 20th century
Materials: Paper
Curator Justification: Black slaves were brought to Mediterranean shores as part of the trans-Saharan caravan trade. Many became involved in privateering, and some, indeed, became notorious privateers themselves.



Working Number: TN 040
Name: Document on slavery
Holding Museum: Palais de la Rose – Musée de l'Armée
Date: 1842
Materials: Paper
Curator Justification: Correspondence from Ahmad Pasha Bey ordering the suq to be cleared of slaves and banning the slave trade. The policy of abolition was applied progressively. Following demolition of the premises used for this trade, the children of slaves were declared to be free (December 1842), and all slaves were declared free in 1846.



Working Number: TN 041
Name: Document regarding slavery and piracy
Holding Museum: Palais de la Rose – Musée de l'Armée
Date: 1863
Materials: Paper
Curator Justification: Correspondence from the governor of Rhodes thanking Ahmad Pasha Bey for ending privateering: the establishment of a new European equilibrium following the Congress of Vienna (1815), the arrival of steamships in the mid-19th century and the abolition of privateering by the Treaty of Paris in 1856.
