

Slaves in the Mediterranean, 17th-18th Centuries

Little known today compared to the larger phenomenon of transatlantic slavery, Mediterranean enslavement originated in antiquity and endured through the 19th century. Justified mainly by religious rather than racial differences, it led to the capture of more than two million people by Christian and Muslim corsairs – including Catholic knights and other state-sponsored pirates – and their sale in slave markets on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

The majority of captives were men, forced to row on galleys (merchant or privateer ships) and to perform other forms of labor. But this form of enslavement also affected women, who were exploited for domestic and sexual purposes. Many slaves were ransomed, meaning their enslavement was temporary, but others suffered violent treatment and had to find ways to survive. Mediterranean slavery was a reciprocal form of enslavement affecting mainly Christians and Muslims of various skin colors.

This exhibition features documents and artworks that bear witness to the enslavement of Christian captives in North Africa, notably in Algiers. However, it primarily focuses on the lesser-known histories of enslaved Muslims and, in some cases, West Africans who were enslaved in the Mediterranean ports of Marseille, Genoa, Livorno, and Malta. In Europe, these slaves were referred to as “Turks” or “Moors.”

Their forgotten or suppressed stories are brought to light here through a collection of manuscripts, archival materials, and artworks, which are supplemented by letters in which these enslaved men and women, in their own words, plead for better treatment and release.

In the world of the galleys, the terms “esclaves turcs (enslaved Turks),” or simply “Turcs (Turks),” refer to a legal category of rowers – mostly Muslims, but sometimes Orthodox Christians or Jews. They are distinct from “forçats (convicts)” who are sentenced to the galleys for various crimes.

Slaves known as “Maures (Moors)” may have come from the Maghreb, or they may have been sub-Saharan Africans.

In Maghribi sources written in Arabic, Muslims enslaved in Europe, like Christians enslaved in the Maghreb, are referred to as captives or prisoners of war (asrâ’).

“Corsairs” were pirates who received state licenses to engage in privateering. In Europe, many of them were knights, including members of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (known as the Knights of Malta) and the Order of Saint Stephen, which maintained a fleet of galleys in Livorno.

Jean Baubé (1600-1681), founder, *36-pound cannon, decorated with the head of a Turk*, Royal Foundry of Toulon (France), 1680

Bronze

Paris, musée national de la Marine, inv. 2012.105.1

Reproduction © Meredith Martin et Gillian Weiss

Jean Baubé (1600-1681), founder, *Model of 36-pound cannon*, Toulon, before 1681

Bronze, wood, and ferrous alloys

Paris, musée national de la Marine, inv. 2017.7.1

As master founder at the naval arsenal in Toulon near Marseille, Baubé likely had a real-life enslaved Muslim pose for the figure forming the knob that was used to tie the cannon to a ship's deck. The actual cannon that inspired this miniature captures the slave's anguish while celebrating his suffering. It may have been made for Louis XIV's flagship, the *Royal Louis*.

Map: Enslaved Christians and Muslims in the Western Mediterranean

This map shows the western Mediterranean and the main ports where enslaved people were held. To give a rough idea of the scale of the phenomenon, the map indicates the highest percentage of enslaved members of the population in each port during the period covered (17th-18th centuries). These are approximate estimates, as historical sources do not allow us to calculate precise numbers of enslaved people in each region at any given time.

The images of the ports are taken from a nautical chart made by Romeyn De Hooge in 1694 in anticipation of British naval campaigns. The title cartouche depicts a Maltese knight dragging two chained Muslims.

Reproduction of the cartouches: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0/ David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries

Attributed to Van der Leupen, *Collection box of the Trinitarians*, late 17th-early 18th century

Carved and painted limewood and metal

Dunkirk, mission Patrimoine, classified as a Monument historique by decree of 1906/12/29; owned by the local council, PM59000488

This collection box, housed in Saint-Éloi Church in Dunkirk, portrays an enslaved Christian, chained at his hands and feet, holding out a hat. The box was intended for the collection of alms by the Fathers of the Holy Trinity, a Catholic order dedicated to ransoming Christian captives in Muslim lands, as indicated by the inscriptions on the two medallions at the base.

Arsenal sculpture workshops, *Enslaved Moor* after Pietro Tacca, 19th century

Carved conifer (softwood)

Paris, musée national de la Marine, inv. 41 OA 194

The arsenal's sculpture workshops were still in operation in the 19th century, when this carving was made. It echoes the figure of the seated young man, his hands bound behind his back and his gaze turned upwards, from Pietro Tacca's *Quattro Mori* (1621-1626). The enslaved Moors from this group were frequently reproduced in later periods, even after the abolition of slavery in the French Empire.

Quattro Mori (the “Four Moors”) / Les “Quatre Maures”

Undoubtedly the most famous artwork depicting enslaved Muslims in the Mediterranean, this monument was installed in the port of Livorno in the early 17th century. The central figure, sculpted by Giovanni Bandini, represents Ferdinand I de' Medici (r. 1587-1609), Grand Duke of Tuscany and head of the Knights of St. Stephen, a Catholic order involved in corsairing. At the four corners of the base, chained bronze captives were created by the sculptor Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), who modeled at least two of them on enslaved Muslims from the city's slave prison: a young Black man nicknamed Morgiano and another older slave, originally from Salé in Morocco, named Alì Salettino. Tacca's realism, which captures the anguish and humanity of these enslaved men, aroused the sympathy of onlookers at the time, even as the monument celebrated their enslavement.

For three centuries, the *Quattro Mori* has inspired works created from a variety of materials. Made of porcelain, wood, and even sugar, these figures have circulated throughout Europe. They demonstrate that Mediterranean enslavement was widely visible at the time, even though it has been largely forgotten today.

After Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), *A pair of chained slaves* from the manufactory Capodimonte, Naples, 1743-1759

Soft-paste porcelain embellished with gold

Limoges, musée national Adrien Dubouché - Manufacture nationales - Sèvres & Mobilier national, inv. ADL 5388 and ADL5389

Numerous porcelain figurines inspired by the *Quattro Mori* were produced during the 18th century to adorn the dessert tables of the elite. They replaced sugar sculptures that evoked plantation slavery in France's Caribbean colonies. Copies after Tacca's bronze sculptures, they depict the whitened bodies of Muslim or West African captives.

Pierre-Paul Sevin (1650-1710), *Banquet table depicting the triumph of Cardinal Leopold de Medici*, 1667

Brown ink and grey wash on paper

Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv. NMH THC 3612

Reproduction, CC BY SA 3.0/ Cecilia Heisser / Nationalmuseum

Stefano Della Bella (1610-1664), *Print showing a view of the port of Livorno, featuring a full-length statue of Ferdinand de' Medici on a pedestal with captives*, in *Views of the Port of Livorno*, Paris, Jacques Fagnani (eds), 1645-1665
Print, engraving, and etching
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Arts du spectacle, inv. RESERVE 4-RAE-748

Johannes Lingelbach (1622-1674), *Seaport in Italy*, 1660-1670
Oil on canvas
Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Peintures, inv. 1436

Scenes of everyday life and harbor views in the Mediterranean characterize the work of this Dutch painter: Ottoman merchants, European sailors, and chained galley slaves are busy at work in the foreground. A richly dressed couple watches them, accompanied by a young, dark-skinned servant – likely enslaved – who holds a parasol to shield them from the sun.

The World of the Galleys / Un monde de galères

Present in the Mediterranean since ancient times, galleys were rowing vessels used to transport prisoners, wage war, engage in trade, and carry out corsairing. Designed for navigating shallow, calm waters and for combat at close range, they featured narrow bows that allowed them to ram targets and finish off enemy crews with swords. Despite the violence perpetuated on board, galleys were richly carved and decorated to better showcase the power of modern rulers, inheritors of ancient glory.

On deck, officers armed with whips stood among chained rowers crammed together on benches and forced to man twelve-meter oars. Although they were gradually replaced, beginning in the 17th century, by faster sailing ships, galleys and their enslaved rowers continued to symbolize domination over “infidels,” an idea widely depicted in the art of the period.

After Pierre Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766), and Jean-Baptiste Nattier (1678-1726), album engraved by Claude-Auguste Bery and Gaspard Duchange
The Gallery of Luxembourg Palace painted by P.P. Rubens, 1702
Etching, engraving
Paris, Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, legs Dutuit, 1902, inv. LDUT672

This engraving, part of a famous series on the *Life of Marie de' Medici* (painted by Rubens and subsequently drawn by the Nattier brothers), depicts the “Queen’s arrival at the port of Marseille.” Welcomed by the city’s bishop, Marie de’ Medici, who has just married King Henry IV of France, arrives on a ceremonial galley; on the right, an enslaved Turk and Moor flank a Tuscan knight in armor. At the French court, the new queen was attended by Muslim slaves whom she converted, including a young maid known as “the Queen’s Moor.”

Anonymous, *Model of a Patronne galley*, 1676
Wood, plant fiber, and synthetic material
Marseille, Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Métropolitaine Aix-Marseille-Provence, inv. OHD 0547

A *Patronne* or vice-admiral galley is more lavishly decorated than an ordinary galley, and it has additional rows of oars. This vessel from Livorno, rigged with two striped lateen sails, flies the banners of the Tuscan Knights of St. Stephen and a flag depicting the Virgin Mary, underscoring the Catholic mission of this galley fleet.

Johannes Lingelbach (1622-1674), *Naval Battle between Christians and Turks*, c. 1670
Oil on oak panel
Private collection

Scenes of naval battles between Christians and Turks were a major theme in late 16th-century European art. Many recall the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Lepanto (1571). Lingelbach gives his composition a tight framing to illustrate the chaos, drama, and violence of the conflict and contrasts the verticality of the masts with the oars of the enslaved rowers. Some men attempt to swim to safety, whereas others drown, heightening the dramatic nature of the scene already foreshadowed by the billowing sails and stormy sky.

Jean Lepautre (1618-1682), *Guéridon featuring a Moor carrying a basket on his head*, from the series "Guéridons," Paris, c. 1680
Print
Private collection

This engraving of a *guéridon* or pedestal table evokes the real-life enslaved Moors who lived at Versailles, as well as the depictions of enslaved Africans in furnishings at Louis XIV's court.

Anonymous, *Side view of the stern of a royal galley*, c. 1685
Pen and brown ink, wash, and gouache on vellum
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, inv. RESERVE B-7 (3)-FT5

This admiral's half-galley was part of a model flotilla built for the Grand Canal at Versailles. In 1680, the Crown purchased "fifty-four Moors, true Africans" ("cinquante-quatre Maures, véritables Africains") to row this galley. One of these enslaved African men may have posed as the model for the allegorical figure of "Africa" that decorated its stern (reproduced here).

Attributed to Philippe Caffiéri (1714-1774), *Decoration of the stern of the model galley at Versailles*, 1685
Gilded walnut
Toulon, musée national de la Marine, inv. 37 OA 17
Reproduction ©Musée national de la Marine/C.Rabourdin

Attributed to Jean-Antoine de Barras de la Penne (1650-1730), *Aerial view of a galley*, from *Album of drawings representing the construction, outfitting, and sailing of a galley*, 17th century, plate XXII

Pen, ink, and wash on paper with a calfskin binding

Vincennes, Service historique de la Défense, inv. SH 137

This maritime manual details the construction and operation of a galley. It was written by a Marseille naval commander who hoped to persuade Louis XIV to continue enslaving Turks. This illustration, depicting galley slaves rowing under the command of officers armed with whips, glorifies slavery. Although it is visually very similar to the engraving of the British slave ship *Brooks*, which was widely circulated in 1789, its function contrasts sharply with the use of the *Brooks* image to highlight the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and promote abolition.

Attributed to Jean-Antoine de Barras de la Penne (1650-1730), *Cartouche representing enslaved Muslims*, detail, in *Album of drawings representing the construction, outfitting, and sailing of a galley*, 17th century, plate XXIII

Pen and ink wash on paper, bound in calfskin

Vincennes, Service historique de la Défense, inv. SH 137

Reproduction © Service historique de la Défense, Centre des Archives de Vincennes

Anonymous, *Galley slave chains*, 19th century

Iron

Toulon, musée national de la Marine

A sound piece evoking the clanking of chains on galleys, *Ships Rowing First Century DC Slave Galley, Rowing as Heard from Amidships*, produced by ProSound Effects, 2016, 3.11

© ProSound Effects

Whistle of a Maltese knight, 1741

Engraved bone

Vittoriosa, Malta Maritime Museum/Heritage Malta, gift of Rev. Salvatore Griscti D.D. in September 1911, inv. MMM004135

This foreman's whistle, known as a "bosco," was used by the Knights of Malta to set the pace for enslaved rowers on galleys. While typically made of silver, this example is exceptionally crafted from bone and is richly decorated with engraved motifs, including the insignia of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

Lives of the Enslaved / Une vie d'esclaves

Most of the enslaved people featured in this exhibition were captured or sold into slavery. Sometimes they were targeted for specific reasons. Indeed, in slave markets, certain buyers – Algerians, for example – sought out Christians with shipbuilding skills. Others tried to select members of the elite who were likely to pay high ransoms. The agents of Christian galleys preferred Muslims, particularly North Africans aged 20 to 40, because of their purported strength.

The ranks of galley slaves also included West Africans as well as Native Americans, who were kidnapped from French and British colonies. All these men rowed alongside convicts sentenced for various crimes, ranging from theft and murder to Protestant heresy. While, in principle, enslaved Muslims in good health could be exchanged, ransomed, or freed under peace treaties, many were forced to serve until they became disabled or died.

Disembarking / Débarquer

Sometimes, following a period of quarantine, captives arriving at Catholic or Muslim ports were subjected to examinations to determine their origin, state of health, and skills. When bilateral treaties (between France and Algiers, for example) prohibited mutual enslavement, some were immediately freed. Others, deemed unfit for rowing, were set aside.

In Algiers, as in Malta, political authorities appropriated a fixed percentage of captives for their personal use before auctioning off the rest. Throughout the Mediterranean, male slaves owned by the state were registered, fitted with shackles, and sometimes dressed in uniforms: a long tunic, breeches, and a cap. The fate of female captives is harder to trace. Many became domestic servants, and sometimes wives or concubines of their masters.

Giorgio Mitrovich, *Record of a slave auction*, 1779

Ink on paper

Mdina (Malta), National Archives Malta, Tribunal Armamentorum, (TAR), Verbal Vendita Schiavi Vol.1 (1778-1780), f.173

Reproduction © Stephen Busuttil

This document from the records of the Military Court of Valletta lists the names, ages, and prices of men and women taken captive during raids and subsequently sold at auction. In these legal records, privateers had to prove to the Maltese court that the capture of Muslim ships was lawful in order to be allowed to sell their passengers and cargo.

General register of Turks serving on French galleys, from April 1, 1682, to December 16, 1707, Marseille

Ink on paper

Toulon, Service historique de la Défense, Centre des Archives de Toulon, inv. MT 1-0-106/2

In Marseille, once an enslaved Turk was assigned a number and a galley, a clerk would record his personal information and date of arrival in a register like this, whose margins allowed for subsequent notes to be added. One of the pages, for instance, shows that seventeen years after

becoming No. 1009 on the *Superbe*, "Solimon d'Estanquieu" was deported to "America," meaning in this case a French colony in the Caribbean.

General register of Turks serving on French galleys, from April 1, 1682, to December 16, 1707, Marseille

Ink on paper

Toulon, Service historique de la Défense, Centre des Archives de Toulon, inv. MT 1-0-106/2

Plans of fortresses and factories; plan of the Livorno slave prison: upper level of the dormitories, including the mosques and the church, Livorno, late 17th century

Ink on paper

Florence, Archivio di Stato Firenze, inv. 148-g.

Reproduction © Archivio di Stato Firenze

Whereas in Marseille, galley slaves slept chained to their benches on the ships, others were imprisoned in slave prisons, such as the *bagno* in Livorno depicted here, which was modeled on those in the Maghreb. The one in Livorno incarcerated 3,000 people, including 400 to 1,000 Muslims and, at times, a small number of Jews and women of various faiths. The prison was equipped with taverns, hospitals, mosques, and a church.

Pierre Dan (158.?-1649), *The manner in which Christian slaves are sold in Algiers*, in *Historie van Barbaryen, en des zelfs zee-roovers [...]*, 3 parts in 1 volume, Jan Claesz Ten Hoorn (eds), Amsterdam, 1684

Engraved plate

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, réserve des Livres rares, inv. 4-O3G-24

Alessandro Magnasco (1667-1749), *Embarkation of galley slaves in the port of Genoa*, 17th century

Oil on canvas

Bordeaux, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. Bx 1961.11.1

Magnasco depicts the arrival of galley slaves at the port of Genoa in Italy, a major hub of the Mediterranean slave trade. They are shown being dragged by their chains to be shaved by other rowers wearing the distinctive topknots of enslaved Turks. The artist's expressive, almost frenzied brushwork underscores their suffering.

Work / Travailler

Galley slaves typically spent only a few months a year rowing at sea. On land, they performed a variety of tasks, such as building and outfitting ships or unloading cargo. They worked in arsenals, proto-industrial military complexes that symbolized a state's naval power. Some male and female captives also labored as domestic servants.

During outbreaks of plague, galley slaves were sometimes tasked with collecting and burying contagious corpses. The painter Michel Serre (1658-1733)

immortalized this perilous task in two large-scale paintings of the Great Plague of Marseille, which decimated nearly half the city's population in 1720 (*View of Marseille's Town Hall during the Plague of 1720* and *View of Marseille's Cours during the Plague of 1720*). Whether in arsenals, in port cities, or in artworks, enslaved bodies were constantly on display, in ways that often highlighted their subjugation.

Chevalier Antoine de Favray (1706-1798), *Ladies of Malta paying a visit*, Malta, 1762
Oil on canvas
Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Peintures, inv. 4376

Favray, a painter and Knight of the Order of Malta, depicts a Black woman – the only one in the gathering – in the role of a servant, barely visible to the right and behind the “Maltese ladies.” She is assisting a woman who breastfeeds a child. Are these two women free or enslaved? They serve as a reminder of the plight of such women in the shadows, most likely enslaved, working in the homes of their masters and mistresses.

Ignazio Fabroni (1642-1693), *Album of memories from travels and voyages aboard Tuscan galleys*, 1664 -1688
Watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper
Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Firenze, Rossi Cassigoli 199, f.162r
Facsimile, with the kind authorization of the Ministry of Culture / Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Florence

Compiled by a Tuscan knight of the Order of Saint Stephen, this album contains eight hundred sketches depicting named portraits of enslaved Turks and Moors, along with converts, enslaved women, and free Tuscans, in addition to the region's flora and fauna. Unlike typical depictions of enslaved Muslims toiling under duress, Fabroni captures individuals in rare moments of repose.
No photography allowed

Attributed to Jean-Baptiste de La Rose (1612-1687), *Galley arsenal of the city of Marseille*, Marseille, 1666
Oil on canvas
Marseille, Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Métropolitaine Aix-Marseille-Provence, inv. A4685
Reproduction © La Collection/CCIAMP

Pierre Mortier (1661-1711) after Claude Randon (act. c. 1660-1680), *The Royal Galley at the bow*, in *Plan of several seagoing vessels with their proportions* by Henri Sbonski de Passebon, L. Brémond (eds), Marseille, c. 1690
Gravure
Marseille, musée d'Histoire de Marseille, inv. 2006.O.1246

Jacques Rigaud (1680-1754), *Arming the Galleys*, in *Maritime views depicting various scenes from the galleys*, Paris, 1754
Print, etching, and engraving
Private collection

Michel Serre (1658-1733), *View of Marseille's Town Hall during the Plague of 1720*, detail 1721 (?)

Oil on canvas

Marseille, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. BA 52

Reproduction © Ville de Marseille, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn/Raphaël Chipault, Benjamin Soligny

Jacques Rigaud (1680-1754), *View of Marseille's Cours, drawn on site during the Plague of 1720*, Marseille, 1720

Print on paper

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, inv. RESERVE ZF-85-BOITE FOL

Inspired by a painting by Michel Serre (1658-1733), this engraving shows galley slaves removing corpses during the terrible plague that ravaged Marseille in 1720. In exchange for this work, these men were promised their freedom. However, most of them got sick and died. The enslaved Turk in the foreground evokes the fear that the plague originated in Muslim lands and struck the city because of its “unholy love” of trade, including with the Ottomans.

Survival / Survivre

Enslaved Muslims and Christians performed similar tasks. In the 17th century, however, enslaved men from the Maghreb were less likely to become galley oarsmen than those enslaved in Europe. In exchange for certain jobs performed during the off-season when they were not rowing, many galley slaves received small sums of money that they could use to buy food, acquire other goods, or even purchase their freedom. For example, they worked for shipbuilders and master craftsmen in addition to laboring on public construction sites and on agricultural projects. In Europe, enslaved Turks were permitted to set up temporary stalls or shacks near ports to work as barbers, tooth pullers, or coffee vendors. They produced modest items for sale, including magical remedies and amulets. European artists depicted these stalls as places of commerce and social interaction among galley slaves, where people played, smoked, shared meals, and tried to survive.

Cornelis de Wael (1592-1667), *The Meal of the Slaves*, c. 1647

Oil on canvas

Private collection

A Flemish artist working in Genoa, De Wael specialized in naval battles. He also depicted more peaceful genre scenes representing Muslim slaves eating, smoking, selling wares, and playing trades at port: here, galley slaves are seen preparing a modest meal while two officers converse nearby.

Pipes

Tobacco pipe, Venetian or Dalmatian, c. 1670-1750, terracotta

Tobacco pipe, 17th century, terracotta

Tobacco pipe, 17th century - early 19th Century, terracotta

Tobacco pipe, 17th century, terracotta

Tobacco pipe, 17th century, terracotta

Cannabis or hashish pipe, probably from Lesbos, c. 1670-1700, terracotta

Vittoriosa, Malta Maritime Museum/Heritage Malta, inv. DC'02 BA1/3 0037, DC'02 BA3 0075, DC'02 BA1/2 0025, DC'02 BA3/4 0258, DC'02 BA3 0256, DC'02 BA1/2 0051

Oil lamp, 17th century, terracotta

Cooking pot with a handle (Tigan), 18th century, glazed terracotta

Bowl or pot (Pagna), 18th Century, glazed terracotta

Vittoriosa, Malta Maritime Museum/Heritage Malta, inv. DC'02 BA4 0001, DC'02 BA1/BA2 0007, DC'02 BA3 0125

A bone fragment partially shaped into a die, 18th century, bone

A pair of dice, 18th century, engraved bone and stone

Four dice, 18th century, engraved bone

Vittoriosa, Malta Maritime/ Heritage Malta, inv. DC'02 BA3/4 0220, DC'02 BA4 0166, DC'02 BA3 0103

These objects were discovered during March 2002 excavations at Galley Creek near Birgu (Vittoriosa), a former docking site for the galleys of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, whose knights ruled Malta from 1530 to 1798. Among the thousand or so artifacts unearthed, dice, pipes, and cups offer a glimpse into the daily lives of galley crews. Fragments of terracotta bowls evoke the meals – consisting largely of bean soup and ship biscuit – eaten by rowers at their benches. The bowls of tobacco and cannabis pipes confirm that smoking was widespread, regardless of any regulations. Most of the pipes are of Maghrebi manufacture, except for a long-bowled pipe in Venetian or Dalmatian style and a cannabis pipe known as the “Lesbos pipe.” Despite prohibitions against gambling, rowers indulged in games using dice they fashioned themselves from humble materials.

Cornelis de Wael (1592-1667), *Enslaved Muslims and sailors at the barber's*, Genoa, 1647

Print

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Department of Prints, inv. RP-P-OB-61.603

Reproduction, Public domain/ Rijksmuseum

Cornelis de Wael (1592-1667), *Enslaved Muslims prepare a galley for dry docking*, Genoa, 1647

Print

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Department of Prints, inv. RP-P-OB-61.594

Reproduction, Public domain/ Rijksmuseum

Nicolas de Leroux (1517-1583), *A French Christian slave in Algiers*, Paris, 1685

Print on paper

Marseille, Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Métropolitaine Aix-Marseille-Provence, inv. PGE 00296

This Frenchman, wearing Oriental slippers, is shown knitting, a common job for both Christian and Muslim slaves. Like the image, the text challenges the notion that the Mediterranean was strictly divided between two religions. According to him, most “Barbary pirates” are in fact Christian converts who sell their former compatriots “like horses.”

Anonymous, *The port of Livorno with the galleys of Saint Stephen*, Livorno (Italy), 17th century
Oil on canvas
Pisa, State Archives
Reproduction © With the permission of the Ministry of Culture / Archivio di Stato, Pisa

Religious and Cultural Life / Vie religieuse et culturelle

Throughout the Mediterranean, enslaved Muslims and Christians were allowed to practice their religion. However, they faced pressure to convert, even though – especially in Europe – conversion did not guarantee freedom.

Muslim rowers on Catholic galleys were not initially required to attend Mass, which was celebrated with a portable altar on board or in a tent on shore before embarkation. However, in France, following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, their attendance became mandatory. Galleys thus served as instruments for converting Protestants, and the *Turcs faits chrétiens* (“Turks made Christians”) were particularly prized as trophies by the Church.

Despite their enslavement, some of these men and women produced writings, works of art, and music, most often under duress. A literate minority of slaves worked as copyists and illuminators of religious manuscripts or grammar books. Many wrote letters to their rulers or loved ones. Others carved graffiti and inscriptions, evidence of their presence in Maltese prisons.

Finally, among the enslaved Turks on Louis XIV’s galleys, a few served as models for artists like Pierre Puget (1620-1694), participated in the construction and decoration of galleys, and helped prepare marble sculptures destined for Versailles. Some played music and saw that talent put to use to entertain their masters.

Belief / Croire

Enslaved Muslims and Christians formed religious communities. In the Maghreb, priests – whether captives or not – organized the religious life of their fellow believers, while Protestants practiced their faith independently. Local authorities permitted worship in chapels built within penal colonies and European consulates.

In Europe, Muslims appointed qadis (Islamic judicial authorities) and imams to lead prayers and oversee funerals. They also organized fundraisers to build mosques.

On both sides of the Mediterranean, slaves emphasized the principle of reciprocity to secure equal rights to worship. These men and women, however, had varied relationships with religion. They sometimes engaged in acts deemed “blasphemous,” such as witchcraft. Cases of conversion were frequent, sometimes occurring multiple times for the same individual.

Confessors who spoke Turkish or Arabic were tasked with evangelizing Muslim galley slaves.

Abraham-Louis-Rodolphe Ducros (1748-1810), *Qadi of the Enslaved Turks of Malta*, in *A Trip to Italy, Sicily, and Malta*, album, 1778, n°233
Graphite, chalk, and watercolor on paper
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, gift of Mrs Hansen-van den Bruggen, The Hague, inv. RP-T-00-494-6B

Respected for their knowledge of Islamic texts, enslaved qadis were present in Malta and other Catholic Mediterranean ports. Fellow slaves chose them to serve as their spokesmen and to draft letters and legal documents, including manumission deeds. This one, shown in traditional garb and a turban, smokes a pipe like those found in the archaeological excavations in Malta.

Marsa shoreline [Inner Grand Harbour area], late 18th-early 19th century
Ink on paper
Valletta, The National Library of Malta, inv. M33
Reproduction © The National Library of Malta

Jean-Baptiste de Faudran (1611-1669), *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Gault, archbishop of Marseille*, c. 1660
Oil on copper
Marseille, musée d'Histoire de Marseille, inv. 2012.4.1

This posthumous portrait of Marseille's bishop depicts him in a medallion held aloft by an enslaved Turk and a convict, in front of a galley and the city's arsenal. During his brief tenure, Gault focused his efforts on converting Muslim rowers and built a hospital for galley slaves. He died of plague, purportedly contracted by contact with these oarsmen.

Anonymous, *The officers' mass at the port in front of the galleys*, c. 1680
Oil on canvas
Private collection

Colophon of a Qur'an copied in Maghribi script in Malta by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāhid ibn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fāsī, Malta, 16 Muḥarram 1065 H./November 26, 1654, f. 238r
Red, yellow, blue, gold, and brown ink on paper
Philadelphia, UPenn Ms. Codex 1904, University of Pennsylvania Libraries
Facsimile, Domaine public / University of Pennsylvania Libraries

Anonymous, *Balthazar Mendez de Loyola (1631-1667), born Muhammed El Attaz, called "Muḥammad al-Tāzī,"* Béziers, 1667

Oil on canvas

Brussels, Centre de la Culture Judéo-marocaine, inv. 22865

A slave in Malta, the Moroccan imam who copied this Quran from memory is sometimes referred to as al-Fāsi, and sometimes as al-Tāzī. In the colophon, he added the phrase "May God destroy it!" every time he mentioned the island. Once freed, he converted to Catholicism and joined the Jesuits, then devoted himself to evangelizing Muslim slaves in Italy before dying on his way to India. This painting depicts him after his conversion. The crescent moon in the lower left corner symbolizes his former faith.

Verse from the Surah of Women on slavery: "You must be kind to your parents [...] and to your slaves," Qur'an copied in Maghribi script in Malta by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāhid ibn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fāsī, Surah IV "an-Nisa" (Women), v. 36, Malta, 16 Muḥarram 1065 H/November 26, 1654

Red, yellow, blue, gold, and brown ink on paper

Philadelphia, UPenn Ms. Codex 1904, University of Pennsylvania Libraries

Facsimile, Domaine public / University of Pennsylvania Libraries

A long manuscript with magical properties containing an Arabic text with formulas repeated several times, evidence presented to the inquisitor Giulio Carpegna, 1793, manuscript 1.11., vol. 136B, dossier 88, f. 568A

Ink and gouache on paper

Mdina (Malta), The Metropolitan Cathedral Archives, inv. AIM Proc vol. 136 B, case 88, f. 568A

Facsimile © The Metropolitan Chapter, Malta

Nicolas Onesco, a slave of Romanian origin, was wearing this talisman when he was brought ashore in Malta and interrogated by the Catholic Inquisition. Accused of renouncing his faith to become a Muslim in Istanbul, he confessed that this scroll – which depicts the holy site of Mecca along with magical and religious incantations – was meant to protect him in battle and "free him from the devil."

Artists, Models, and Writers / Artistes, modèles et lettrés

In 1668, the artist Pierre Puget (1620-1694) came to Paris, accompanied by two enslaved Muslims, likely named "Candie" and "Mustapha," to serve as nude models for the artists of the Royal Academy at the Louvre. These men may have also posed for the representation of captives surrounding Louis XIV in the *Prow of a Royal Warship* designed around 1680 by Charles Le Brun (1619-1690).

Slaves were sometimes artists or artisans themselves: they worked in the studios of naval artists near ports and depicted themselves in portraits and ship sculptures. Others, after their conversion, became copyists, translators, or manuscript illuminators.

Galley slaves were also employed as musicians. Music accompanied the daily sounds of their lives, whether shouts to keep the rowing rhythm or the clinking of chains.

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), *Slave*, c. 1647-1679
Black chalk and white chalk highlights on beige paper mounted on canvas
Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques, inv. 29985

This drawing is one of eight studies depicting chained captives intended to decorate the ceiling of the Ambassadors' Staircase at Versailles (destroyed in 1752). It celebrates Louis XIV's dominance in the Mediterranean, embodied here by a slave, his helmet and turban ground abandoned on the ground. His downward gaze and furrowed brow evoke Le Brun's studies of expressions, particularly the figure of "Despair." Two enslaved Turks, models brought to the Royal Academy, may have inspired the artist.

Studio of Charles Le Brun (1619-1690) et Pierre Puget (1620-1694), *Prow of a Royal Warship*, c. 1680
Pen, India ink, and wash on paper
Paris, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, inv. O.180
Reproduction © Beaux-Arts de Paris, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / image Beaux-Arts de Paris

Nicolas Ponce (1746-1831), *Pierre Puget*, in *The Illustrious Frenchman, or Historical Portraits of the Great Men of France...up to the year 1792... by M. Ponce*, Paris, 1816, pl. 18
Print
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Philosophie, Histoire, sciences de l'homme, inv. FOL-LN1-21 (A)

Statement of expenses [submitted by Puget indicating that he employed « slaves » to work in his studio], 1692
Ink on paper
Paris, Archives nationales de France, inv. O/1/1922B

To prepare marble sculptures intended for Versailles, Pierre Puget employed enslaved Turks. This document reveals that the artist, who headed the naval sculpture workshop at Toulon, sought to recoup the money he spent on hiring galley slaves to help him finish his monumental statue of Milo of Croton and his relief sculpture of Alexander and Diogenes, both now in the collection of the Louvre.

'Alī ibn Yaḥyā ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Bu-Yūsufī al-Zwāwī (copyist), *Colophon of a grammar book based on the Gospel of Saint John*, 19 dhu al-hija 1040H/ July 19, 1631, Malta Series I 1063, f. 217
Ink and gouache on paper
Valletta (Malta), Franciscan Provincial Archives, inv. MS A. 11
Facsimile, Courtesy of Franciscan Friars of Valletta, Malta/ David Plummer with the assistance of Notarial Archives of Malta

At the behest of the Franciscans, the slave 'Alī al-Zwāwī (a native of Kabylie) copied this manuscript, a grammatical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint John. Works of this kind

were used to convert enslaved Muslims to Christianity. Here, Zwāwī acknowledges his role as a copyist while distancing himself from the Franciscan evangelizing project. In colophons of other Arabic works, he even calls for the destruction of Malta.

Giacomo Gandolli, *Spell depicting a hanged man, evidence presented by the inquisitor Lazzaro Pallavicino*, 1718-1719, f.193

Ink on paper

Mdina (Malta), The Metropolitan Cathedral Archives, inv. AIM Proc Vol. 107A, f. 193

Facsimile © The Metropolitan Chapter, Malta

An enslaved Muslim who had converted to Catholicism, Gandolli wrote this spell for the convict Alberto, who wished to take revenge on a creditor, likely represented by the hanged man. The text opens with the phrase: "Solomon, son of David, [...] holds all the demons in his hand," and concludes with the repetition of the word "Satan." Fearing severe punishment if he were denounced by a third party, Gandolli chose to preempt any accusations by handing the document over to the Inquisition.

Rabab (fiddle), Mauritania, 20th century

Wood, goatskin, metal, and nylon

Paris, musée de l'Institut du monde arabe, inv. AE 84-27

This stringed instrument was likely used by West African peoples, particularly by griots. It resembles the hurdy-gurdy played by a Turkish slave depicted by the Italian Baroque artist Giovanni Battista Bracelli. A contemporary composition by Ergün Erdem, "Dalisman'a Haydar Reis," is accompanied by a rabab: its title refers to the Ottoman sailor and painter Haydar Reis, who painted portraits of the Ottoman sultans, the pirate Barbarossa, and European monarchs.

"*Nafir*" trumpet, Egypt, before 1801

Copper alloy

Paris, musée de la Musique-Philharmonie de Paris, inv. E.762

This *nafir* is one of the oldest surviving Arabo-African instruments. This example was collected by Guillaume André Villoteau, a priest and opera singer who belonged to the team of scholars that accompanied Napoleon's army during the Egyptian campaign (1798-1801). It is featured in the encyclopedic work *Description de l'Égypte*. This instrument resembles the trumpets used by enslaved Turks during visits by dignitaries to the galleys or to signal other ships at sea.

Recordings

Dalisman'a Haydar Reis, "chanson turcquesque," contemporary adaptation by Ergün Erdem from a composition by Charles Tessier, *Airs et villanelles* (1604), inspired by a Turkish villanelle, 1:48
© Ergün Erdem (musician and performer)

Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Te Deum* (1677), excerpt performed by Les Arts Florissants, William Christie, musical director

Excerpt from the concert "Les grands motets pour la Chapelle du roi" given on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Les Arts Florissants at the Salle Pleyel (Paris), November 17, 2009

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These recordings evoke music associated with galley slaves. The first Turkish song honors an Ottoman ship captain and painter, Haydar Reis (1492-1572), also known as Nigari. The second

piece is a *Te Deum* composed by Lully, one of the hymns recited during baptism ceremonies for Muslim converts as well as during processions of ransomed Christians.

M. Schaep after Cornelis de Wael (1592-1667), *Muslim galley slaves on either side of a cartouche*, Netherlands, 1649
Engraving on paper
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-P-1906-4240
Reproduction, Public domain/ Rijksmuseum

Two slaves dressed in tunics stand upright: one blows a *nafir* (trumpet), the other plays a drum. At their feet, two chained captives are shown surrounded by iconographic motifs evoking the world of the galleys: cannons, oars, sails, and emblems of power. Under threat of violence, galley slaves were forced to play music to entertain the officers on the flagship, perform salutes, and relay signals at sea. They also played portside for tips.

Giovanni Battista Bracelli (v. 1584-v. 1650), *Musicians*, in *Figures with musical and folk instruments*, ill. 75 et 77, vers 1625-1630
Engraving
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv. RESERVE BE-6-FOL
Reproduction © Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie / RESERVE BE-6-FOL, SIGNET

Andreas Matthäus Wolfgang (1660-1736), *When I was a slave to the king of Algiers and served him coffee and hot chocolate, I felt humiliated*, in *Book of Traditional Costumes* by Jeremias Wolf, Augsburg, c. 1701, f. 41r
Engraving on paper
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, inv. Chalc. 116, fol.41r
Reproduction, CCO licence/ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

Andreas Matthäus Wolfgang (1660-1736), *View of Algiers*, 1688
Etching and engraving on paper
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, inv. RESERVE QB-201 (64) -FOL

The engraver Andreas Wolfgang, originally from Augsburg, was kidnapped and then sold at auction in Algiers. He then entered the service of dey "Mezzomorto," future grand admiral of the Ottoman navy. After his ransom, he published a series of thirteen engravings: in this one, he portrays himself being forced to serve coffee to his master, whose long tobacco pipe he also lit. The *View of Algiers*, created before the city's capture in 1830, depicts the city's main landmarks such as Djamaa el Kebir Mosque, the port, Bab Azoun Gate, and the dey's palace.

Writings of the Enslaved / Ecris d'esclaves

Many slaves sent letters. In these missives, often written by literate fellow believers, they shared news with their families or rulers and requested financial assistance to regain their freedom.

In the case of enslaved Muslims, these letters constitute rare personal accounts of their lives and experiences. On both sides of the Mediterranean, some letters were

intercepted and never delivered to their intended recipients because they contained information detrimental to the states that enslaved them.

Slaves also had notarial deeds drawn up, such as acknowledgments of debt for their ransoms. Muslims paid notaries to write petitions on their behalf, in which they requested that European authorities improve their plight.

Europeans produced more accounts of captivity than Maghribi slaves. Widely read, these texts circulated extensively in the West and helped to overshadow the parallel history of enslaved Muslims.

Graffiti of a rose and a carnation with an Arabic inscription, southeast wall of a medium-sized Pannellini, Inquisition Prison in Malta, 1708-1709
Engraved limestone covered with red plaster
Vittoriosa, Malta, Inquisitor's Palace, National Museum of Ethnography / Heritage Malta
Reproduction, Courtesy of Heritage Malta

On one of the walls of the Inquisitorial Prison in Malta, where he was imprisoned, a Muslim slave from Damietta carved and signed this floral graffiti – inspired by the Ottoman motifs of the “four flowers” (tulip, carnation, rose, hyacinth). The signature reveals his name, Muhammad ‘Arifin, who was convicted of selling love potions and talismans featuring magic squares.

The fifth letter in a series of about ten letters that were to be sent from Naples to Tripoli via Livorno, in *Volume I* (1638-1682), Naples, f. 204 et 208
Ink on paper
Vatican, Propaganda Fide Archives, inv. ASPF Barbaria SC - Volume I (1638-82), f. 206 à f. 223
Reproduction © Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide

This is one in a batch of ten letters in Arabic from captives in Naples addressed to loved ones and to the governors of Tunis and Tripoli, describing mistreatment and begging for release. Intended to be sent via Livorno, these writings were intercepted instead. On this page, the author draws a chain, a symbol of his captivity. The inscription reads, “This is a depiction of the chain.”

Graffiti of a rose and a tulip with an Arabic inscription, southwest wall of a medium-sized Pannellini, Inquisition Prison in Malta, 1708-1709
Engraved limestone covered with red plaster
Vittoriosa, Malta, Inquisitor's Palace, National Museum of Ethnography / Heritage Malta
Reproduction, Courtesy of Heritage Malta

Antoine Broglia, *Letter of 8 September 1690*, Alger
Ink on paper
Marseille, Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Métropolitaine Aix-Marseille-Provence, inv. G41

Here, Antoine Broglia, a Christian from Marseille enslaved in Algiers, compares himself to a soul in purgatory and begs local authorities to ransom him. After the third French bombardment of Algiers (1688), he was among the approximately 800 French Catholic and Huguenot slaves awaiting liberation, which would take several years to arrive. Regaining their freedom depended on funds from families, cities, religious orders, and the king.

Register containing an anonymous letter from 1735 [48 Moroccans held captive in France, five of whom had been purchased in Malta by pilgrims, pleading with Moulay Abd Allah to secure their release], Marseille 28 sha'ban 1145H. / 13 February 1733

Ink on paper

Paris, Archives nationales de France, inv. AE/B/1/830

In this letter, 48 Moroccan captives – including five who had been ransomed in Malta by pilgrims – implore their sovereign, Moulay 'Abd Allah, to liberate them. They claim to be the last North Africans to have not been evacuated from France. “The Algerians have freed their people,” as have the Tunisians and the Tripolitans; “and we remain the laughingstock of the Christians!”

Lālla Fāṭna, Letter sent to her sultan by a Moroccan captive in Malta, 1798

Ink on paper

Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, legajo"3576"

Reproduction © España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo Histórico Nacional

These letters from a Moroccan woman, Lālla Fāṭna, offering a rare perspective from a female captive, are addressed to her sultan, Moulay Sulayman. She pleads to be liberated along with her husband and denounces the abuse she endured at the hands of her Maltese master: in particular, the blows she received to her stomach that caused a miscarriage. She would be later freed by French revolutionary troops.

Finding Freedom / Retrouver la liberté

Many slaves attempt to escape, though not without difficulty. Taking a land route to a friendly port required linguistic and geographical knowledge, and often the use of a disguise to conceal one's identity.

Escaping by sea involved stealing or building a boat, organizing a mutiny, sneaking onto a ship, or swimming to shore during a naval battle. In fact, liberation through force, exchange, or ransom was more common. At the end of the 17th century, the bombardment of North African cities led to the liberation of hundreds of Christians and the signing of peace treaties, which protected certain European subjects. Skillful diplomacy also resulted in the liberation of hundreds of Muslim captives in Europe, as demonstrated by the intervention of the Moroccan embassy in Vienna in 1783.

At the end of the 18th century, wars waged by French troops emerging from the Revolution of 1789 ushered in a new era. Paradoxically, these French armies freed slaves in the name of universal freedom, even as they conquered new territories, from Italy to Algiers. Napoleon Bonaparte reestablished

slavery in the Caribbean in 1802 while at the same time seeking to abolish it in the Mediterranean.

Revolt / Se révolter

Among the revolts and mutinies led by enslaved Christians and Muslims, the most notorious took place in 1748-1749 in Malta. At that time, most Catholic powers were reducing the number of galleys and, consequently, the number of enslaved rowers. The goal of the rebellious slaves in Malta was to poison the Grand Master of the Order of the Knights and to conquer the island in the name of the Ottoman sultan. This major slave conspiracy is still commemorated in Malta today. It gave rise to numerous accounts and a series of nineteen anonymous watercolors, three of which are presented here. They illustrate in detail the capture of an Ottoman galley in Rhodes and the tortures inflicted by the Maltese authorities to uncover the plot and punish the alleged conspirators.

This section contains images that may be disturbing to some viewers.

Anonymous, Hacimucsa [Haec Musa] and the papasso, after being tortured with pincers and clubs, were conducted to the middle of the harbor, where they were quartered by caiques and finished by axe blows, 1749, Malta, n° 10 of a series of 19
Graphite, pen and ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper
Vittoriosa, Inquisitor's Palace, National Museum of Ethnography / Heritage Malta, inv. FAS/P/1927

An interfaith mutiny on an Ottoman galley, led by Cara Mehmed, a Black slave from Tripoli, triggered a plot to free the slaves and drive out the Knights of Malta. As these scenes show, inquisitorial torture was used to extract confessions from the alleged conspirators. During the suppression of this failed revolt, thirty-five Muslims, some of whom had recently converted to Catholicism, were executed after enduring horrific punishments.

Anonymous, The galley of Rhodes in revolt, led by the Black slave [Cara Mehmed] and steered to the Island of Malta, where the said slave, after being baptized and rewarded by His Serene Highness, seeks to set in motion the perfidious conspiracy, Malta, 1749, n° 1 of a series of 19
Graphite, pen and ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper
Vittoriosa, Inquisitor's Palace, National Museum of Ethnography / Heritage Malta, inv. FAS/P/1927

Anonymous, Sallti [Imsetlet] was similarly accused by the Black slave [Cara Mehmed] and was subjected to the cavalletto, whereby he accused many slaves working on land and on the galleys, Malta, 1749, n° 6 of a series of 19
Graphite, pen and ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper
Vittoriosa, Inquisitor's Palace, National Museum of Ethnography / Heritage Malta, inv. FAS/P/1927

Flight or Redemption / Fuir ou se racheter

In 1683, when French naval forces bombarded Algiers, a few North African rowers fled by sea. However, most captives spent years waiting to be ransomed, saving money or taking out loans to buy their freedom.

In practice, ransoms were not always easily negotiable: captives represented a low-cost labor force and possessed valuable skills.

Freeing captives was, however, considered a pious act in all monotheistic religions. Christians, Muslims, and Jews organized fundraisers to pay ransoms for their fellow believers and to send agents authorized to negotiate exchanges. The Fathers of the Holy Trinity (Trinitarian Fathers) and the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy (Mercedarians) used the proceeds from these collections to free Catholic captives.

Protestants relied on donations, public funds, and ransom insurance schemes known as “sklavekassen.” Maghreb rulers, for their part, sent emissaries to ransom their subjects, but the Moroccan sultans, in particular, also took the initiative to secure the release of Muslims regardless of their origin.

Thomas Worlidge (1700-1766), *Mahomet, a Turkish Merchant, and Hamet, companion to Mahomet*, London, c. 1760
Drypoint engraving on laid paper
Private collection

Anonymous, *Safe-conduct for Mohamed et Abdallah, Algerian slaves who had escaped from Spain and were on their way to Marseille*, July 5, 1784
Ink on paper
Marseille, Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Métropolitaine Aix-Marseille-Provence, inv. G34

Under Louis XIV, despite Franco-Algerian treaties promising reciprocal asylum for fugitives, Muslim runaways might well have been re-enslaved on the royal galleys. However, by the end of the 18th century, when such men were no longer needed as oarsmen, an officer in the border town of Perpignan issued them a safe-conduct pass to travel from Spain to Marseille.

William Okeley, Frontispiece to *Eben-ezer*, 2nd edition, London, Peacock in the Poultry, 1684
Engraving on paper
Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, inv. 233-173q
Reproduction, CCO licence/ Folger Shakespeare Library

The Puritan author of this account was abducted by “Barbary” corsairs while seeking religious asylum in the Caribbean. The book’s frontispiece depicts his abduction and sale in Algiers, followed by his escape to Majorca with other captives aboard a handmade boat made of canvas. It also graphically depicts the tortures that Muslims allegedly inflicted on Christians.

Ending Enslavement / Mettre fin à l'esclavage

In the 18th century, peace treaties between European and Maghribi powers that aimed to put an end to Mediterranean enslavement became increasingly common.

Beginning in 1777, the Sultan of Morocco proposed to his Europeans counterparts that they stop enslaving women and men over the age of 70. His appeal, however, went largely unheeded. Nonetheless, he dispatched embassies to sign peace treaties and free captives, as shown in the engraving depicting the entry of the Moroccan Ambassador into Vienna in 1783.

Around 1798, the French revolutionary armies also sought to eradicate slavery in the Mediterranean: they freed hundreds of Muslims in Malta and (unsuccessfully) urged the authorities in Livorno to demolish the Quattro Mori monument.

After 1815, European naval campaigns sought to put an end to Mediterranean enslavement and corsairing – two practices that were already in decline – to the point that during the 1830 capture of Algiers, French troops found few Christian captives, contrary to the claims of the French press at the time.

List of the last enslaved Muslims held captive in Malta and freed by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798, in List of freed slaves, June 17, 1798

Ink on paper

Valletta, The National Library of Malta, inv. NLM, AOM 6501

Reproduction © The National Library of Malta

The names of seven women with origins in the Maghreb come at the end of a roster of 630 Muslim captives freed by the French troops who invaded the island of Malta in the summer of 1798. The army led by Bonaparte aimed to upend the social order in Malta, in part by manumitting the remaining slaves. Lālla Fāṭna, mentioned here, is likely the author of the liberation appeals sent that same year to the sultan of Morocco.

Johann Hieronymus Löschenkohl (1753-1807), *The Entry of the Moroccan Ambassador, Muhamed Ben Abdil Malek, Pasha of Tanger, into Vienna on February 28, 1783*, Vienna, 1783

Copper engraving, hand-colored on paper

Vienna, Wien Museum, inv. 55566

Reproduction, CCO Licence/ Wien Museum

Jacques Chéreau (1688-1776), *Order and route of the procession of French captives ransomed by the two Orders of the Redemption—namely, the Canons Regular of the Holy Trinity (known as the Mathurins) and the Order of Our Lady of Mercy—as they departed from the Abbey of St. Anthony and made their way to the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris on October 17, 1785*, Paris Color etching on paper

Private collection

These two processions look similar but depict distinct liberation projects. The first shows a Moroccan embassy entering Vienna to establish peace and free Muslims enslaved in Europe. The

second concerns French captives freed from Algiers, marching through Paris with hands still bound, guided by children in angel wings during a ceremony sponsored by Trinitarians and Mercedarians, two orders dedicated to ransoming Catholics from Islamic lands.

Antonio Poggioli (1712-1798), *The French evacuation of Livorno, May 14, 1797*, Livorno, 1799
Etching and engraving on paper
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la photographie, inv. QB-1 (1797-05-14) -FOL

During the French Revolutionary occupation of Livorno in the late 18th century, French General Sextius de Miollis denounced the Quattro Mori as “a monument to tyranny that insults humanity.” He suggested replacing it with a Liberty statue. That didn’t happen, but Napoleon’s armies made a show of freeing Muslims in Italy during the Revolutionary Wars.

Rodolphe-Henri Deckherr, pub. (1785-1855), *The Bombardment and Capture of Algiers (3-5 July 1830)*, dans *Events, Apotheoses and Allegories*, c. 1830
Letterpress printing on paper
Paris, musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris
Reproduction, CCO Licence/Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris

This page pictures the bombardment and invasion of Algiers in July 1830, showing French soldiers fighting turbaned cavalry. The text describes the offensive as an act of “revenge for the long-standing insults [...] inflicted by the Barbary pirates” and the end of the “harsh slavery” that Muslims had long imposed on “so many” Christians. While partly justifying the conquest of Algiers as necessary to end the enslavement of Europeans, the French army freed only 122 captives.

Kevork Mourad (b. 1970), *Suspended in Time*, 2026
Ink and acrylic on cotton fabric, hand-cut
Collection of the artist

Kevork Mourad, a Syrian artist of Armenian descent born in Qamishli, lives and works in New York. In his practice, he focuses on drawing, which he transfers from paper to cotton fabric. Using ink and acrylic, he draws figures that he places within an environment imbued with a unique heritage, pulling from both the Islamic world and Armenian architectural traditions. The dynamic movement of his compositions reflects his interest in music: his canvases are sometimes executed spontaneously to the rhythm of the music that frequently animates his installations. This work, inspired by the history of the enslavement of Muslims and Christians in the Mediterranean, brings to life these forgotten figures, such as the two models for the *Quattro Mori*, Morgiano and Ali Salettino. These captives come back to life, subject to the desires of the ruling powers or their masters; they march in procession near a port arcade or row in boats to recount their journey toward freedom. These beings, suspended in time, also embody the memory of the Armenian women deported during the genocide of 1915-1923. During their forced march, some were abducted, enslaved, and converted.

Adam Perelle (1638-1695), *Saint-Bernard Gate*, Paris, between 1674 and 1695
Etching on paper
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, inv. VA-256(D)-FOL

Amet Mahamet, a 73-year-old sailor from Tetouan with a cannonball wound, was among the 45 Muslims captured when his ship was shipwrecked on the Breton coast in 1707. These men were forced to march as part of a “chaîne” of convicts from Brest to Marseille. In Paris, Mahamet was likely imprisoned in the “Tower of the Galley Slaves,” a building that no longer exists but once stood very close to the current site of the Institut du monde arabe – a reminder that history, even when forgotten, is never far away.