Piracy in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Ransoming Networks and the Emancipation of Muslim Captives

In 1673, Mamure Hatun, an ordinary Ottoman Muslim woman residing in Istanbul, agreed to pay the Frenchman Garaske to save her son Mehmed who had been captured six years ago on his way to Crete and was now being held in France.¹ Mamure Hatun’s ability to contact Garaske reveals various crucial points related to contact, fluidity, and interdependence in 17th-century Galata, the main commercial and diplomatic district of the Ottoman capital Istanbul. During the late 16th and 17th centuries, political and economic balances on regional and global levels were redefined owing to more or less concurrent phenomena, most notably the cessation of the Ottoman-Habsburg war and the rise of the Atlantic trade. These changes also brought in their wake a redistribution of powers in the Mediterranean marked by increasing density of captivity, corsair, and privateering activities. In the face of these transformations, hundreds of Ottoman subjects traversing the Mediterranean for commerce, military missions, or pilgrimage had unfortunate encounters with pirates of different religions and regions and lost their freedom.

Galata belonged to many different worlds at different levels, enjoyed highly important roles as part of the Ottoman imperial capital and one of the main centers of Afro-Eurasian trade, and it was increasingly connected to the wider world through the activities of its trans-cultural subjects operating within and beyond the Mediterranean. A borderland co-inhabited by diverse people, the Mediterranean was home to different cultures, legal systems, and economic and political mechanisms without physically or territorially belonging to any of the participating states.² Galata was Istanbul’s entry point to this borderland and partook

---

¹ İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi, Şer’iye Sicilleri Arşivi, Galata Şer’iye Sicilleri (hereafter GŞS), 117: 13a/2.
² Considering the relatively unstable borders of the pre-modern period and their being primarily military frontiers organized around fortresses and citadels rather than borderlands, it is difficult to make connections between these areas and contemporary borders dividing/uniting different nations. Thus, the dominant area of early modern borderland dynamics was the sea and port-cities, which, regardless of changing boundaries, harbored the mixing and mingling of local people and outsiders, and represented in varying degrees borderland dynamics such as fluidity, coexistence, cooperation, interdependence, and conflict. The Mediterranean Sea with its diverse actors and their interactions constitutes a flesh and blood example of a borderland. See Darling, ‘Mediterranean as a Borderland’. For a theoretical discussion of borders and borderlands and issues of living in the borderland, see Martínez, Border People; Baud and Van Schendel, ‘Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands’; Pavlakovich-Kochi, Morehouse, and Wastl-Walter, Challenged Borderlands.
of its characteristics of cross-cultural and cross-religious exchange. The density of foreign residency in Galata and the ransoming services they provided resulted in the district’s becoming a solution zone. Women and men of different ethnic and confessional identities, socioeconomic status, and geographical backgrounds crossed paths with each other and sought legal evidence or solutions for their cases through the legal window that the court of Galata provided to the Mediterranean.

This paper examines cases of ransoming registered in the Ottoman legal court records belonging mainly to the court of Galata and, to a lesser degree, to other courts in Istanbul during the second half of the seventeenth century. Ransoming and the diverse ways in which it occurred provide a fruitful avenue that sheds light onto many crucial characteristics of Galata, ranging from population dynamics and women’s involvement in sociocultural world of the district to cross-cultural and cross-religious interactions between Europeans and local Ottoman subjects. Hundreds of cases in which Ottoman subjects appealed to Europeans with the hope of saving their relatives or friends from captivity show that Galata was a major center of micro-diplomacy and that both Ottoman subjects and Europeans utilized this characteristic of the district for their own ends. By analyzing these cases, this paper will both highlight the borderland and connection point characteristics of Galata and offer evaluations related to early modern diplomacy. It proposes the idea that diplomacy from below provides a useful way to encapsulate the networks of ransoming that formed and operated beyond macro diplomacy.

1) Ransoming in the Early Modern Mediterranean

The last decade has witnessed heightened scholarly interest in pursuing themes such as transculturalism, identity politics and the permeability of social bonds, as well as re-conceptualizing borders in the early modern period. In tandem with its favorable reception of the idea of a global early modernity and connected histories as well as the revival of interest in Braudel, Ottoman scholarship in particular, and the field of Mediterranean studies in general, have been eager to employ these perspectives. The result has been the

For some examples of this literature, see Ortega, ‘Across Religious and Ethnic Boundaries’; Rothman, *Brokering Empire*; Maria Fusaro, ‘Cooperating Mercantile Networks in the Early Modern Mediterranean’;
emergence of a valuable body of literature that challenges both nationalist readings of the past and overemphasis on the idea of “clash of civilizations” at the micro and macro levels. As a part of this academic interest in the early modern Mediterranean and the set of relations and interactions it harbored, scholars have made an effort to map out the main defining characteristics that shaped the sea, the geographies that were directly or indirectly part of it, as well as its diverse subjects and their individual and collective trajectories.\(^4\) One of the outcomes of this scholarly attention has been covering the waterfront of piracy and corsairing activities, which informed Braudel’s designation of the period from the later 16\(^{th}\) to 18\(^{th}\) centuries as “the century of corsairing”, and their implications for the parties involved.\(^5\)

In addition to paying a belated tribute to Braudel, these studies have made crucial epistemological and historiographical contributions. First, they have deepened our knowledge and understanding of the early modern Mediterranean by delving into the complex set of interactions between diverse institutions and individuals that were part of the human trafficking in the region as well as the multiple political, legal, economic, and sociocultural systems and repertoires involved in different processes related to piracy and ransoming and contributed to the collective making of the region’s history. The unearthing of sources previously unexamined or examined from different perspectives and the methodologically novel ways of using them not only created a valuable body of sources for the use of social scientists but also contributed to the recovery of the lives of thousands of individuals through case studies, thereby restoring them to historical memory. Works on piracy and human trafficking have gone beyond monolithic analyses of interactions and the involved actors by emphasizing the particularities stemming from context, time, and the characteristics of networks and relations. In doing so, they have revealed that ‘Trans-imperial’ subjects\(^6\),

4 Emiralioglu, Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture; Tabak, The Waning of the Mediterranean; Brummett, Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy.
5 White, Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean; Lofkrantz and Ojo, Ransoming, Captivity & Piracy; Dávid and Fodor, Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders; Matar, British Captives from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic; Weiss, Captives and Corsairs; Appleby, Women and English Piracy; Hershenzon, Early Modern Spain and the Creation of the Mediterranean.
6 The term was first proposed by Natalie Rothman and has been frequently used in the relevant literature since then as a useful concept in addressing the diversity of actors in the early Mediterranean world; see Rothman, Brokering Empire, 13.
such as diplomats, merchants, travelers, servants, dragomans, secretaries, migrants, converts, slaves, etc.,
all played their own roles but with different functions, ambitions, problems, limits, and tools, thus with
varying degree of agency.

In terms of their historiographical contribution, these studies have solidified the shift from dominantly
political and economic interpretations of the topic in favor of a more nuanced understanding highlighting
its sociocultural aspects. Embedded in this shift has been the tendency to appreciate and further examine
the roles of non-state actors in such a way as to dismantle the perception of an omnipotent and omnipresent
image of the early modern state. Lastly, these studies have enriched the otherwise invaluable works on
cross-cultural and cross-cultural interactions in the early modern Mediterranean that in their opposition to
the overemphasis on the idea of clash of civilizations have focused on interdependence and cooperation
rather than conflict. Through analysis of a subject that included extensive instances of cooperation and
conflict feeding and generating each other rather than following a monolithic, uniform and reducible
pattern, they have underlined complexity in the scales of the interactions.

2) Historical Context
Due to the changing dynamics of the Mediterranean in particular and the world in general, the seventeenth
century represented one of the periods with the highest density of captivity, corsair, and privateering
activities.\(^7\) During this period, piracy became a well-established enterprise threatening state-sponsored and
individual operations.\(^8\) As widely noted in the relevant literature, the Ottoman-Habsburg treaty of 1581
signified the beginning of a new era for the Mediterranean as these empires realized that they could not

---

\(^7\) It would be useful at this point to mention the difference between corsairing and piracy. Kaiser and Calafat
provide a succinct clarification in this regard: “Corsairs were official and legitimate warriors, who acted
under the formal supervision of a state and according to the laws of war and peace; they carried on
themselves either passports or commissions, and were supposed only to attack enemy ships in wartime, like
the so-called “privateers” in the North European and Baltic seas, as well as in the Atlantic. By contrast,
pirates were “the enemies of all nations” (hostes humani generis): they acted for themselves and did not

\(^8\) Based on the figures presented in various works on the early modern Mediterranean captivity, Hershenzon
points to an estimated three million people, Muslims and Christians combined, who lost their freedom and
were enslaved between 1450 and 1850. See, Hershenzon, ‘The Political Economy of Ransom in the Early
Modern Mediterranean’, 61.
outmaneuver each other to achieve an imperial monopoly over the region and withdrew to their respective
domains, resulting in a power vacuum and the subsequent boom of corsair activities and captivity. As such,
the late sixteenth century marked the end of the ‘age of war by armada’ in the Mediterranean, a process that
continued throughout the seventeenth century. Related to this, corsairs and pirates started to take more
captives than imperial armadas and the majority of these captives were not soldiers but civilians.

As Braudel noted, wherever there were merchant vessels, there were also pirates. While there were
many different groups of pirates and corsairs, four of them seem to have been most prominent in terms of
the extent and degree of their activities and the threat they posed to the members of the Mediterranean
world: the Uskoks in the Adriatic Sea, the Barbary corsairs in North Africa, the Knights of Malta, and the
northerners, mainly the British and the Dutch. This extensive threat led to the creation of institutions for
the redemption of captives and the gradual formation of common diplomatic and legal frameworks through
joint effort by states for the prevention of pirate and corsair attacks in favor of the protection of their subjects
and a functioning trade. While they suffered greatly from corsair activities, however, the imperial powers
also contributed to the phenomenon by creating a large demand for captives and slaves to be used as rowers,
as especially evident in the well-known semi-official ties between the Maltese corsairs and the French, or
the Barbary corsairs and the Ottomans.

As one of the major actors of the Mediterranean world, the Ottomans contributed greatly to the pool
of Mediterranean captivity both as captives and captors and were actively involved in legal and diplomatic
processes concerning captivity and redemption. They thus participated in the creation of a legal framework
for the exchange and treatment of captives as well as other details related to the issue of captivity. Like

---

9 Hershenzon’s dissertation provides a detailed discussion of the importance of the treaty as well as an
overview of the relevant literature. See Hershenzon, Early Modern Spain, 5-20. See also Braudel, The
Mediterranean, 1161-1166.
10 Hershenzon, Early Modern Spain, 15-16; Braduel, The Mediterranean, 865, 882.
12 Tenenti, Piracy and the Decline of Venice; Bracewell, The Uskoks of Senj; Faroqhi, ‘Ottoman Views on
Corsairs and Piracy in the Adriatic’; Braudel, The Mediterranean; Earle, Corsairs of Malta and Barbary;
Fisher, Barbary Legend; Fontenay, ‘L’Empire Ottoman et le Risque Corsaire au XVIIe Siècle’.
13 Several works have been dedicated to this issue. Most relevant to my discussion here are: White, Piracy
and Law; Harlaftis and Starkey, Corsairs and Pirates; Dávid and Fodor, Ransom Slavery; Weiss, Captives
and Corsairs.
other actors in the region, the Ottomans were negatively affected by the increasing piracy as well as the participation of the so-called northerners in the Mediterranean game, further complicating the political and economic balances of the region as well as the volume and dynamics of the human trafficking.\footnote{Regarding the literature on the so-called Northerners, see Braudel, \textit{The Mediterranean}, vol.1, 615-42; Greene, ‘Beyond the Northern Invasion’; Heywood, ‘The English in the Mediterranean’.} While new players and the increasing activity of pirates threatened Ottoman interests and safety in the region, the Ottomans also suffered from a series of major wars, namely, the Cretan war (1645-1669), the Austro-Ottoman war (1663-64), the Kamenice campaign (1672-73), the battle of Khotyn (1673), the Russo-Ottoman war (1676-1681), the second siege of Vienna (1683) and the following Austro-Ottoman war (1683-1697).\footnote{For some general remarks on Ottoman warfare during this time period, see Murphey, \textit{Ottoman Warfare}.} In addition to these wars, the Ottoman state also had to deal with a series of economic, political, and social crises during the seventeenth century. Cessation of territorial expansion, financial problems and the resultant social upheaval as reflected in rebellions in the provinces as well as the capital, the increasing role of factions and other interest groups in politics, stiff competition for administrative and judicial posts, and debates and struggles concerning appropriate religious practices marked the crisis and change that the Ottoman central state experienced during this period.\footnote{Özel, ‘Reign of Violene’; Tezcan, \textit{The Second Ottoman Empire}; Baer, \textit{Honored by the Glory of Islam}; Faroqhi, ‘Crisis and Change, 1590–1699’; Pamuk, ‘In the Absence of Domestic Currency’.}

The upsurge in piracy and major wars combined resulted in captivity for hundreds of Ottoman subjects. The state offered no substantial help in rescuing ordinary Ottoman subjects from captivity. The frequent wars and internal problems diverted the Ottoman state’s attention away from individual cases of ransoming in favor of large-scale diplomatic issues and the redemption of high-status military officers, leaving more room and need for micro-diplomacy at the individual level. The fact that the Ottoman court resided in Edirne rather than the capital Istanbul during most of the period in question meant that ordinary residents of Istanbul lost their relatively easier access to the key ruling mechanisms as well as their ability to utilize these mechanisms in their favor, especially when it came to diplomatic issues requiring trans-local action. The gap was filled by an active network of micro-diplomacy composed mostly of non-state actors, European intermediaries as well as local Ottoman subjects. Whenever possible, people tried to minimize
potential problems stemming from the unpredictable and inevitably irregular nature of these networks through legal means, enhancing the role of local institutions and officers, especially the court of Galata. This paper argues that the court of Galata operated as a ‘borderland court’ with the necessary legal expertise and tools to respond to the needs of its diverse population and the practical challenges of administering Mediterranean encounters.

3) Ransoming Ottoman Subjects

Galata proves to be a useful prism through which to trace global and regional processes and transformations that informed human trafficking. During the period from 1650 to 1700, hundreds of Ottoman subjects from different parts of the empire made a visit to the Galata court to commission intermediaries for the release of their relatives, friends, and neighbors or resolve disputes related to ransoming. While most of the people who appealed to foreigners’ intermediacy for ransoming were from Istanbul, due to the fact that Istanbul was also the center of Ottoman army and thus the captives were mostly from Istanbul, this was not always the case. In this respect, people from different parts of Istanbul, Anatolia, the Balkans, North Africa, and Europe appealed to the Galata court. It can be said that these people’s mobility presents a case of indirect mobility: lacking necessary legal and logistical means to realize the act of moving, they instead invested in and relied on the mobility of intermediaries.

In the records under examination, there are at least 130 cases related to the captivity and release of Ottoman captives from different parts of the Mediterranean. The majority of the captives were male, Muslim Ottoman subjects. Most of the Ottoman captives that appear in the sources fell captive to Malta, which Peter Earle succinctly calls the capital of Christian piracy. Before showing signs of decline in piracy activities in the 18th century, the Maltese economy derived crucial profits from piracy and even enjoyed a population growth during the course of the 17th century despite the remarkable demographic crises experienced by most of the Mediterranean societies at that time. Captured Ottoman subjects were mostly sold to slave markets in Malta and Livorno. While some of these captives were retained as potentially

17 Earle, Corsairs of Malta and Barbary.
valuable to generate a good ransom, others were sold to serve as rowers on the galleys of the king of France or the Pope, and to a lesser degree as labor on land.18

In most cases appearing in the court records, the captives are people who were away from the Ottoman realm for trade and military campaigns, with the former predominating. This dominance of merchants is important because it is a corrective to the dominant assumption that Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire were not that active in maritime trade.19 Our records point to a busy traffic of Ottoman Muslims operating between different parts of the Mediterranean as captains or crew members. While these Muslims could own their own ships, they also frequently rented ships from or entered into partnerships with Europeans to conduct business. The reason of this dominance of merchants in captivity cases also stems from their vulnerable position. In fact, trading in the 17th-Century Mediterranean was a risky venture in the midst of intense corsair activities and an already well-established imperial domination game. Lacking efficient military means and loaded mostly with merchandise, merchant ships were relatively easy and profitable targets for pirates. Once they fell captives, merchants’ releases were also remarkably more difficult than those of army members: while the release of war captives was a diplomatic phenomenon that usually resulted in the state’s involvement and if successful in the collective exchange of captives, people traveling for trade and personal reasons had to rely on non-state individual solutions. As such, they constituted the largest group that appealed to intermediaries’ services. Besides merchants and military members, pilgrims form another sizeable group in the captive cases appearing in the records.

The people who were present at the court to contract a typical ransoming agreement were the judge, a relative or friend of the captive, the intermediary, sometimes intermediaries’ translators, and witnesses.20 The standard ransoming record states the names of the captives, their relatives or friends who appealed to

---

18 White, ‘Catch and Release’, 45; Weiss, ‘Ransoming “Turks”’.
19 Some important works for the Muslim presence in Europe are Takeda, Between Crown and Commerce; Weiss, Captives and Corsairs; Ortega, Negotiating Transcultural Relations in the Early Modern Mediterranean.
20 In quite a few cases, the records involving foreigners do not mention the presence of translators. Considering the deliberateness of the Ottoman judiciary system in recording all the involved parties, most of the time with their names, this suggests that the reason was most probably not the scribes’ negligence but that some foreigners were linguistically capable enough not to need translators.
intermediaries, and the intermediaries themselves, in addition to some other basic information including
the term and place of captivity, the amount of ransom, and the essential conditions of the agreement.
Sometimes, the term and place of captivity are stated in rather vague and general terms such as bundan
akdem (previously) and Daru’l-harbde (in the abode of Law) instead of more precise information.21 Almost
all ransoming cases include these kinds of information. It is also possible to find information regarding the
original purpose of the captives’ trips. Since it is commonly stated whether someone fell captive to the
enemy during a war, it is safe to assume that the trips whose purposes are not mentioned were mostly trade-
related, and to a lesser degree for other personal purposes. After giving the basic details, the sources usually
cite the amount of the ransom and the conditions to be fulfilled by the intermediary to receive the total
payment. The records do not mention the breakdown of the amount paid by the Ottoman subjects except
for a few cases that cite travel expenditures in addition to ransom as expense items. Even in those cases,
they do not cite exact amounts for ransom and travel expenses but mention the total amount instead. As in
almost all cases the payments were remitted in two instalments, it might be safe to assume that the first
instalment included the ransom and travel expenditures and the second instalment was the share of the
intermediary paid upon successful release of the captive.22

While the intermediaries usually received the first instalment of the agreed amount beforehand for
tavel expenses and ransom money, the Ottoman subjects usually retained the second instalment until the
process of redemption was complete. While some agreements laid down as a condition the intermediary’s

21 Ottoman Muslim political theory divided the world into two: daru’l-harb and daru’l-Islam. While daru’l-
Islam meant the territories under Islamic hegemony, daru’l-harb was used to define the enemy and ‘infidel’
territories that remained outside of daru’l-Islam. Foreigners were the people from daru’l-harb, and as such,
their presence in daru’l-Islam was illegal unless they acquired an official document called berat, without
which the safety of their lives and property was not guaranteed. The people who wanted to be protected by
the Ottoman state had to apply for aman (protection). Once their demand was satisfied officially by the
Ottoman state, they became müste’min (protected foreigners). Prior to being provided with these legal
documents, foreigners had to take an oath stating that they would refrain from acts disturbing the peace and
abide by Ottoman law.

22 Based on one of his sources, Pal Fodor provides a breakdown composed of three items, namely, the
ransom (baha), the so-called kapu hakkı (it was probably the price of the safe conduct written out in their
name), and the charge for a ship’s passage (gemi or sefine kirasi). His study is on the ransoming cases that
involved the French consul in Izmir as intermediary; the absence of kapu hakkı in the cases from Galata
might relate to the fact that it was almost always European individuals rather than diplomatic personnel
who served as intermediaries. See Fodor, ‘Maltese Pirates, Ottoman Captives’, 230.
receiving the second instalment the arrival of the captive in the *Daru’l-Islam*, some others limited the intermediary’s role to the successful redemption of the captive. In such cases, the Ottoman subjects usually agreed to pay the second instalment even if the captive did not make it back home for reasons such as dying or getting recaptured on the way home. However, the intermediaries were usually expected to prove that they paid the ransom and released the captive by producing witnesses or written evidence, mainly in the form of a legal document issued by the judicial authorities of the place where the captive was held. While a *hujjet* from a *kadı* was preferred whenever possible, legal documents from local judiciary authorities confirming the captive’s release were considered valid as well. In Malta, where most of the Ottoman captives were held, there was a *kadı* for the Ottoman subjects, and intermediaries were required to obtain a *hujjet* from him upon the completion of the redemption.23 The standard process included the purchase of the captive’s freedom by the intermediary, the breaking of their shackles before the *kadı*, and the reception of a *hujjet* issued by him before the trip back to the Ottoman realm.

In most cases, ransoming was the method for securing the release of the Ottoman captives. However, in some rare cases, it was possible for them to be exchanged for European captives in Ottoman hands. We have several cases in which the Ottoman subjects submit their slaves of European origin (*Ebrenciyıy’l-ask*) to intermediaries to exchange with their relatives and specifically mention that it was demanded by the captors. In one such case from 1660, for instance, an Ottoman Muslim named Ahmed Odabasi comes to the court with a Maltese merchant named Tarako. Ahmed states that his brother Arslan was held in Malta and he agrees to give his slave Karlo who is of European origin to Tarako to exchange for Arslan. The parties also agree that if one of them, Arslan or Karlo, dies on their way, the other will still get his freedom.24 The fact that both the intermediary and the captor of the Muslim captive were Maltese points to the possibility that Karlo was also Maltese, but it is impossible to be certain, as Karlo’s origin is not specified

---

23 The *Kadis* of Malta were Ottoman judges who were captured by Maltese corsairs on the sea on their way from Istanbul to their posts in different parts of the empire. As White shows in detail, they served their captors as judge-notaries and contracted surety documents, agency appointments, and ransoming agreements, thereby facilitating and validating legal procedures concerning Ottoman captives in Malta. As such, they were one of the central figures of the legal web of ransoming between Istanbul and Malta. White, ‘Piracy and Law’, 60-99.
24 GŞS 90: 23b/3.
in favor of the generic term *Efrençiyü‘l-asl*. As such, it is also possible that the Maltese involved in this case were appointed by a third party to save Karlo and that they used Arslan to realize a lucrative business.

This method, however, seems to be rather limited and a privilege for powerful individuals like pashas who could claim war captives and use them as household slaves. Not having the opportunity of an equal exchange, most ordinary Ottoman subjects had to pay money to intermediary foreigners. As the records show, raising the ransom money could be a big problem for people of modest income, obligating them to borrow money or sell their properties. Since captives, even if they had enough money to buy their freedom, did not have access to their property, especially in the case of immovable property, they sometimes authorized their relatives or friends to sell their properties to generate ransom money.\(^{25}\) Alternatively, captives also cut deals with intermediaries in which the intermediaries paid their ransom money from their own funds, to be paid back by the captives upon their arrival in the Ottoman realm. However, intermediaries almost always required guarantors for the captive’s debt before making the payment in question on the captives’ behalf. This was one of the essential items that was specified in the agreements concluded in the Ottoman legal courts.

While it was extremely important for future claims for parties to have their agreements recorded clearly with all the details, there was always room for disputes related to ransoming. One of the cases demonstrates the importance of some of these fine details. In 1673, a certain Ahmed Celebi sued the French merchant Garaske, asking him to pay back the money Ahmed paid for his brother’s ransoming. Ahmed argued that he gave Garaske a certain amount of money to save his brother Mehmed Hoca from Malta, where he was held as a captive after being captured on his way from Egypt to Istanbul in a Muslim captain’s ship. As in most other ransoming cases, it seems that the parties had agreed upon certain conditions, including the money’s payment to Garaske in case of the captive’s death after being released. Ahmed argued that his brother died before being released and therefore Garaske did not use the money in question for ransoming and needed to pay it back. In his response, Garaske rejected the claim and argued that he used the money for travel expenses and ransoming and successfully saved Mehmed Hoca and presented a legal document

\(^{25}\) For an example to this effect, see GŞS 165: 20b/2.
showing that he actually released Mehmed Hoca. While Garaske accepted that Mehmed Hoca died, he maintained that he fell sick and died after the release. Ahmed called into question the ransoming document’s authenticity and the court asked Garaske for further evidence. In support of his claim, Garaske provided two Muslim witnesses who were captives in the same place as Mehmed Hoca prior to their release. The court ruled in favor of Garaske and banned Ahmed Celebi from any further actions related to the issue. While it is impossible to know whose claim was rightful, this case is very important because it shows the intricate nature of these kinds of cases as they pertain to different people, geographies, legal systems, and sociocultural repertoires. It also shows the special role that intermediaries played. As we learn from Mehmed’s testimony, he sent a man to Malta and learned about his brother’s death. It is crucial that Mehmed, and possibly other like him, had the ability to reach different parts of the Mediterranean, in this case Malta, for ransoming or other issues. However, they still needed intermediaries for ransoming agreements due to their special connections and networks. In other words, being a border-crosser was more than just crossing the borders; it also required flexibility and the ability to cope with sociocultural and linguistic boundaries as well.26

While not always as tragic as Mehmed Hoca’s death immediately before gaining his freedom, dying in captivity was common. Inheritance records of such people sometimes, though not always, state the fact that the deceased died in the Daru’l-Harp while still in captivity.27 Judging by the data in the ransoming agreements, it seems that the terms of captivity varied widely, from a period of several months up to as long as 20 years. The agency of the captives in this process was quite limited, as their possibility of redemption depended completely on their captors’ willingness to ransom them. Once they were officially on the ransom market and a ransom was specified, the captives had to find a way to inform their relatives or friends of their situation and secure financial support, or least surety, from them. Captives could reach out to their relatives and friends through several sources. In rare cases, captives informed their relatives regarding their

26 GŞS 124: 8a/2.
27 While we encounter captives in the court records and learn about them through ransoming cases, it is impossible to know about the ones who could not find a way to set themselves free and died in captivity. In some rare cases, we learn about these people through their inheritance records. For an example, see GŞS 111: 75a/3.
whereabouts through Ottoman merchants with whom they somehow happened to communicate. Alternatively, released captives might inform the kin of other Ottoman captives held in the same place. The most common method, however, seems to have been intermediaries’ informing captive’s families in an effort to garner more customers. In other words, they not only informed them of their relatives’ captivity but also went on to make monetary arrangements to release them.

One can safely argue that war periods provided an opportunity for long-term captives to reach out to their relatives, as ransoming became a hot business for intermediaries during those times. It is also possible that releases after long-term captivity can be explained by the usefulness of the captives to their captors. The captives’ socioeconomic status, age, gender, physical features, and professions were all decisive in shortening or extending their captivity terms. The longest ransoming case in our records covered a period of 20 years. In 1673, a Muslim man from Anatolia named Elhac Suleyman commissioned a French national named Garaske to save his fellow townsman Receb by paying his ransom. From Suleyman’s statement, we learn that Receb was a rower in the Ottoman navy who was taken captive 20 years before the date of the record and was still in Malta. His lengthy captivity and ultimate release can be explained by several hints that this short record provides. First, the fact that he was a rower in the Ottoman navy shows that he had the necessary physical qualities and skills to serve in the same capacity for his captors. Second, that he was a rower from Anatolia, most probably with a modest socioeconomic status, gave the Ottoman state little or no motivation to make an effort to save him. Assuming that he served as a rower for 20 years during his captivity, he most likely ceased physically to be fit for rowing, leading his captors to be willing to ransom him.28

4) Ottoman Women as Indispensable Actors

In addition to serving as a useful strategy to dismantle the overemphasis on religious polarization in the early modern Mediterranean by revealing frequent instances of cooperation between Muslim Ottoman subjects and Christian Europeans, ransoming cases give crucial insights into the gender dynamics of 17th-

century Galata. Judging by the court records, it seems that agreements for ransoming were one of the most common ways in which Ottoman Muslim women interacted with Europeans. It is true that Muslim women appear in the sources in different roles, such as prostitutes, landlords, and parties in transactions regarding their contact with Europeans. However, the most common occasion seems to have been ransoming cases. The presence of such women and their ability to make agreements with resident Europeans for the release of their husbands, sons, and brothers, among other things, calls into question the traditional depiction of Galata as a ‘Christian’ and ‘European’ district. It also undermines the assumption that Muslim women’s access to the district and its actors could only be indirect and through Muslim men.

In quite a few cases, Muslim Ottoman women went to the Galata court to contract ransom arrangements with European intermediaries or to resolve related disputes. While some of these women were from Istanbul, some others traveled long distances upon learning their captured male relatives’ whereabouts to come to Galata where they engaged the services of European intermediaries and went to the court together. In most cases, these women were mothers or from among the close female kin of the captives. It is rather rare to find captives’ wives in ransoming arrangements. Several explanations can be offered to explain this phenomenon. First, due to the correlation between mobility and bachelorhood, it can be assumed that at least some of these captives were not married. Second, women could ask for divorce in case of their husbands’ lengthy absences, either by agreeing with their husbands beforehand to have the marriage annulled in case of the latter’s delayed return or by providing witnesses for their husbands’ death away from home. Lastly, one should also take into consideration the socio-cultural convention preferring elderly women to handle such matters rather than young ones. We have, nevertheless, several cases in which Muslim women appear in the court for captivity-related issues. In one of these cases from 1673, an Ottoman Muslim woman named Meryem entered into a ransoming agreement with the Frenchman Garaske for the release of her husband. Her husband Kemal Ali had been captured on his way to Istanbul from Egypt about

29 The lengthy absences of their husbands sometimes led women to appeal to false witnesses to get a divorce, who were not difficult to find, as the court records attest. Lawsuits by returned husbands against their wives who had obtained a divorce suggest the prevalence of this practice.
a year and a half previously and Meryem had heard that he was in the hands of the prison barber in Malta.\textsuperscript{30}

While it is a rare and important case because of the captive’s wife’s involvement, it should also be noted that the cited term of captivity was too short for Meryem to give up her hope of her husband’s return and seek a divorce.\textsuperscript{31}

In all other cases under examination, women who took part in the process were the mothers and female kin of captives. One of the challenges for Ottoman women in saving their male relatives was the fact that ransoming was not the first choice for the captors when the captive was a healthy young male. In other words, their redemption was more difficult than that of old and sick males, women, and children, whose most reasonable use for the captor would be to bring a lucrative ransom. Such was clearly stated in the instructions given to captors and slave dealers by their superiors in Malta and France.\textsuperscript{32}

Apart from these structural obstacles, intermediaries could render women’s efforts to save their relatives inconclusive. In one such case from 1656, a Muslim woman named Emine from the Besiktas district of Istanbul went to court with a non-Muslim named Papataro (it is not certain if Papataro was a foreigner, as it is not stated in the record). Emine sued Papataro on the grounds that she had paid him to save her son Mehmed, who had been captured by the Genoese eight years earlier, but Papataro did not save her son and used the money for his own needs instead. While Papataro rejected Emine’s claim as well as the deed showing his debt to her, Emine won the case because of the testimony of witnesses.\textsuperscript{33}

When the women who were trying to save male Muslim captives were their female kin rather than wives, the main concern was not always to have them return home upon release. They cared instead about their redemption and return to the \textit{Daru’l-Islam}. In a case in which a Muslim female relative of a captive appealed to European intermediaries’ help, we learn about some unique details in this regard. In 1657, a Muslim woman named Emine arrived in court with the agent of the French merchant Garaske named Mikel. Mikel and Emine agreed upon a certain amount of ransom money, to be paid by Emine to Garaske for the

\textsuperscript{30} GŞS 131: 19b/2.

\textsuperscript{31} For an analysis of the legal procedure concerning missing husbands see Zecevic, “Missing Husbands”.

\textsuperscript{32} Weiss, ‘Ransoming “Turk”’, 48; Wolfgang and Calafat, \textit{A Form of Cross-Cultural Trade}, 115.

\textsuperscript{33} GŞS 88: 40b/1.
release of Emine’s brother, Mustafa the goldsmith, from Malta, where he was kept as a captive. While at first the case seems to be an ordinary ransoming agreement, including Emine’s pledge to pay the amount even if the captive died or fell captive again upon his release, it contains a crucial but uncommon detail: Emine pledges that she will pay the amount even if Mustafa willingly decides to go elsewhere without any external pressure upon his release. Usually, ransom agreements are conditional upon the intermediary’s success in bringing the captive back to the Daru’l-Islam. Regardless of whether this particular condition was added to the agreement due to Mustafa’s specific condition that is unknown to us or just as a formality, it is a very rare case judging by the examples belonging to the records under examination.34

In some cases, we encounter women not as those seeking to save someone from captivity but as captives themselves. While the phenomenon of women from Istanbul as well as other parts of the empire appealing to foreigners proves to be strongly antithetical to notions of women’s seclusion and invisibility in public space, several other ways in which women were involved in captivity and slavery suggests further evidence for their mobility and public presence. One of these cases from 1675 concerns a certain Zahide Hatun, a Muslim Ottoman woman. A Muslim man named Dervis came to court with Garaske for a ransoming case. The case concerned the payment of ransom by Dervis for the release of Zahida Hatun, who was captured on her way from Damiata to Jerusalem and held in Malta by an infidel captain named Corci. Neither the relationship between Dervis and Zahide nor the reason of Zahide’s trip is stated in the record.35 However, Zahide Hatun was probably on her way to Mecca for the pilgrimage, given the route cited in the record. In fact, this was one of the ways in which women’s mobility and travel was legally and religiously encouraged.

While free women traveled for pilgrimage and probably for other reasons that are not possible to detect in the sources, ironically, female slaves and concubines were relatively more mobile in the early modern Mediterranean. This mobility of course was a forced one rather than for leisure or religious duties and related to their role as commodities. In one of these cases from 1674, Yorgi, probably a non-Muslim

34 GŞS 122: 4a/3
35 GŞS 123: 114b/2.
Ottoman subject, sued Fatma Hatun. Yorgi claimed that he saved Fatma Hatun’s slave Latife from the
Venetians by paying her ransom and Fatma Hatun did not pay him back. The parties compromised on a
certain amount and the court registered the case. As the details are not provided, it is difficult to know how
Latife ended up in the hands of the Venetians and whether Yorgi and Latife entered an agreement without
Fatma Hatun’s knowledge.\textsuperscript{36} One can speculate that Latife may have fallen captive as a runaway. Another
possibility is that she was traveling with the military. While the presence of women in the Ottoman army
has not been systematically studied, it seems that high-ranking military officers like pashas could take
female slaves in their company.

\textbf{5) European Intermediaries}

As the sea was the borderland, the problem was not only crossing it but surviving and maneuvering on the
high seas. In other words, border-crossing was as much about the ability to return as the ability to cross.
Not surprisingly, ransoming required certain characteristics on the intermediaries’ part. While for local
people the problems were simply money and the ability to reach out to intermediaries, intermediaries had
to have more resources to be in the business. It is certain that ransoming was more than just a random
arrangement for Europeans; rather, it was a profitable business for them, as most of them appear in the
sources more than once. Ransom arrangements were carried out by individuals who were well-established
in the region and had extensive networks both in Istanbul and the parts where the captives were held. These
people were individuals who converted their border-crossing abilities into money through playing a role
similar to that of mediators in contemporary alternative conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{37}

Ransoming cases were more than random legal agreements and should be seen as a valuable venue of
cross-cultural and cross-religious interaction. Most of the time the intermediaries who arranged the
ransoming of Ottoman subjects were European residents of Galata. Given the central role they played in

\textsuperscript{36} GSS 95: 17a/3.
\textsuperscript{37} For a discussion of the contemporary mediation processes, their functioning, and the ways in which they
provide a relatively informal alternative to the existing formal judicial and diplomatic processes, see Moore, \textit{The Mediation Process}; Bercovitch and Jackson, \textit{Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-First Century}. 
the process, it is worth dedicating a few words to these intermediaries and their common characteristics. While Europeans had always constituted a remarkable portion of Galata’s population due to its role as a port town, the 17th century presented quite a different picture. As a result of regional and global changes that were fueled by the rise of the Atlantic world, the power balance of the Mediterranean world that Istanbul and, as its main port, Galata were part of underwent crucial changes. The British and French replaced the Venetians as the main European trading partners of the Ottomans, and consequently the members of these newly expanding transoceanic empires outnumbered the Venetians in Galata, a transition which has not yet been systematically studied. The British and French, composed of officials and actors constantly moving back and forth between their colonies and trading posts in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, differed from the Italian merchants and diplomats because they were members of transoceanic enterprises.

As a pattern proving the importance of local-regional ties, intermediaries for the time period at hand are mostly French. It seems that they took over this role from the Venetians as the dominance of the latter gradually decreased in the region’s economic and diplomatic affairs. For the British, on the other hand, it was very rare to serve as intermediaries in this capacity as far as the ransoming of Ottoman subjects are concerned. The relative dominance of the Venetians and French in the ransoming business vis-à-vis the British resulted from the latter’s not originally being a Mediterranean power. Unlike the Venetians and the

---

38 While this transition still remains to be studied, early modern Venetian-Ottoman encounters have been studied more extensively compared to Ottoman-French-British relations thanks to recent works by Eric Dursteler, Natalie Rothman, Maria Pia Pedani, and Steven Ortega. Some noteworthy exceptions in this regard are: Goffman, *Britons in the Ottoman Empire*; Talbot, *Ottoman-British Relations*; Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel*; idem., ‘Shifting Identities’.

39 Deteriorating relations and ongoing wars between Ottomans and Venetians also played a role, as it became riskier for Venetian subjects to serve as intermediaries at a time when they were under threat of captivity themselves not only by corsairs and pirates but also by the Ottoman navy. See Greene, ‘A Shared World’.

40 There is only one case in Galata court records with a British intermediary. The case in question includes crucial details related to the economic and social aspects of these agreements. A British and the Muslim he saved from captivity came to court for a legal solution for their dispute over ransoming money. The British man sued the Muslim on the grounds that he did not pay the agreed amount. In response, the Muslim argued that their agreement was for a lesser amount. Remarkably enough, the British man won the case with the testimony of two Muslims who were also captives at the same place. Although the nature of the relationship between the British and the Muslims testifying in his favor is unknown, it is still important that they supported the British man’s claim against a Muslim. See GŞS 97: 67a/1.
French, who had been part of the Mediterranean world and its diplomacy for centuries, the British were relatively new in the Mediterranean and found ransoming “a flourishing trade.”.\(^{41}\) The degree of French involvement in the captivity business had also to do with the strong political and economic ties between the Maltese pirates and France, giving French intermediaries linguistic and cultural advantages in arranging the ransom of Ottoman subjects in Malta. At least until the late seventeenth century, French citizens served as pirates in the Maltese corso under the Maltese flag, and a majority of the victims of Maltese corso were sold to the French crown.\(^{42}\)

While many different Europeans appear in the records as intermediaries, several names seem to have dominated the business. For instance, the French merchants Garaske, Andriye, and Anton appear in quite a few cases belonging to the period from 1650 to 1700. These individuals can hardly be considered as non-professionals: even if their border-crossing enterprise was initially concerned only with trading goods, they eventually started prioritizing their role as intermediaries in human trafficking. Given the degree of institutionalization they attained, one can describe the sophisticated ransoming networks that such individuals formed as informal guilds. In some ways, these Christian European merchants who specialized in ransoming Ottoman captives in the Christian Mediterranean were the equivalent of the *fakkak-in* or alfaqueques of the western Mediterranean who made a living by arranging ransom agreements to liberate Muslims held in Christian parts of the Mediterranean or Christians in the port cities of North Africa.\(^{43}\)

Intermediaries did not perform this business single-handedly, for it was not only risky but also logistically dependent on the cooperation of a number of people. In addition to forming local networks that enabled them to expedite legal and monetary issues, European intermediaries worked closely with each other as well as some ship captains for a smooth and rapid process. It is likely that after buying the captives’ freedom and obtaining their legal proofs, the intermediaries handed them off to the captains of ships with whom they collaborated. Upon the arrival of the captive in the *Darul-Islam* and the Ottoman port of Galata, an agent

\(^{41}\) The National Archives UK, State Papers 98/22/85.

\(^{42}\) Engel, *L’Ordre de Malte en Méditerranée*; Fontenay, ‘Corsaires de la foi ou rentiers du sol?’.

of the intermediary stepped in to finalize the process at the court by receiving the second installment of the agreed amount or having the debt of the saved person recorded to be paid later, depending on the terms of the original agreement. This basic division of labor proved to be logistically convenient, as it saved intermediaries from the trouble of traveling with the liberated person all the way back to Istanbul each time and being present at each and every stage of the process.

Apart from its logistical convenience, this multi-layered organizational pattern responded to the risks of operating within the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean. The line between freedom and captivity was so thin that intermediaries themselves could easily fall into captivity while trying to save someone else. Related to this, intermediaries sometimes authorized agents to receive the final payment if they fell into captivity. This was the case with an agreement from 1673. In his agreement with Ali to save his brother Halil, for instance, the French merchant and frequent ransom intermediary Livani had such a condition added to the agreement. The captive, Ali, from Balikesir, an Ottoman town in western Anatolia, fell captive to pirates on his way to Crete, and was sold to France. As usual, the agreement mentions the ransom money as well as the conditions to be satisfied by Livani to get the full payment. Pointing to the risk of being captured, Livani asked the court to record Garaske as his agent to collect the final payment if Livani himself got captured on his way to Istanbul upon releasing Ali.\textsuperscript{44} Not surprisingly, these risks were higher during wartime, as the state-induced violence not only added to the existing tension caused by pirates and corsairs but also created further risks for non-state actors by complicating notions of subjecthood and identity, issues that mattered remarkably in captivity and ransoming.

6) Freedom and Identity

Generally speaking, premodern personal identity was defined by “interpersonal relationships, shared experiences, and social bonds tied between members of embedded communities” in considerably local settings, and as such, “a traveler venturing outside the sphere of interpersonal relations became unknown,

\textsuperscript{44} GŞS 143: 4b/2.
and deprived of this social ties, was no longer recognized, that is, identified."\(^{45}\) In other words, while recognition and validation were more about people’s identities when they were in their local settings, they came to be more about identification when they were traveling. The invention and effective use of passports, identity cards, and similar technologies to observe, regulate, and control the movement of individuals are a relatively recent phenomenon belonging to the 19th and 20th centuries.\(^{46}\) Although the overemphasis on the French Revolution as the turning point for the development of the identification of individuals might be misleading, one cannot deny the remarkable differences from the application and efficiency of identification practices in the premodern world, especially when it comes to mobility at regional and global levels.\(^{47}\)

In the case of Ottoman and European captives in the early modern Mediterranean, the gradual erasure of personal identity as people traveled from their localities was further complicated by moving between different legal spheres because of the distinction between the Daru’l-Islam and the Daru’l-Harb. This shift remarkably changed peoples’ identities and legal status and made it possible for a free person to become a slave. Individuals relied on their home states’ protection and legal guarantees as they acquired special permission to travel. Europeans acquired *aman* from the Ottoman empire and became müste ‘mins, protected foreigners. However, the problem with these documents was the fact that they were only accepted by states, and even then, the guarantee they provided was only theoretical and subject to local negotiation. In practice, while corsairs did obviously not care much about these permissions because they could easily erase captives’ identity through selling them far from their home country, state officials could do the same thing for individual motives.

Legal cautions and guarantees could always fall victim to the personal agendas of diverse actors operating within the Mediterranean. A case in point is that of Antoni, whose life started in Marseilles as a

\(^{46}\) For a discussion on identity and identification in the modern Mediterranean, see Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, 205-212.
\(^{47}\) For some analyses on identity and identification in the early modern world, see Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*; Groebner, ‘Who Are You?; Caplan and Toppey, *Documenting Individual Identity*. On identification of captives, see Kaiser, ‘Vérifier les histoires, localier les personnes’. 
free French citizen but took an unfortunate turn on the sea, and he ended up in slavery in the hands of two Ottoman individuals, despite his legitimate documents. According to the court record, in 1695 a slave of European origin named Antoni sued his master. As customary for the cases involving slaves, the record defines his physical features: a light-colored browed, hazel-eyed young male, probably 18 years old. According to his testimony, Antoni was a free French citizen who was taken captive by infidels on his way from Marseilles to Istanbul with an *aman* granted by the Ottoman state. He somehow managed to escape and came across an Ottoman captain named Mustafa who was traveling to Istanbul with his ship. Mustafa gave him to a more powerful Muslim captain named Mehmed Hoca whom Antoni served as an enslaved servant for a while before being given back to Mustafa to serve as a servant again. This period took almost one year, according to the testimony. Mustafa rejected Antoni’s claim on the grounds that he had bought him from Mehmed Hoca and he (Antoni) was not a free person. Upon Mustafa’s response, the court asked Antoni to provide evidence for his free status. The two Muslim witnesses for Antoni stated that they were at the Galata customs the day that the French ship from Marseilles arrived. It should be stated that these witnesses did not know the plaintiff and did not testify to his *müste’min* status. They just testified to the arrival of a French ship in the Galata port on the day when the plaintiff claimed to have fallen captive. Whether there was a list of passengers that had Antoni’s name on it, or the witnesses at least knew that the ship in question had been attacked on its way to Galata, are not mentioned. Despite the absence of direct evidence relating the plaintiff to the French ship in question, however, the judge still ruled in his favor.

While it is possible that the specific information Antoni provided about the ship and the overlap between his statement and witness testimonies regarding the ship’s boarding point, route, final destination, and temporal details were convincing enough, some crucial legal details need to be mentioned. First, as stated above, Islamic law considers people whose slave status cannot be clearly proven as legally free, and in the current case, the Muslim owner did not provide any evidence for Antoni’s slave status. Also, Antoni mentions that he had obtained aman from the Ottoman state. While the Ottoman state theoretically guaranteed Antoni’s safety by granting him this aman, his enslavement was also against the capitulations

---

48 GŞS 175: 15a/1.
the Ottomans granted to the French nation. Therefore, the judge might have wanted to avoid a potential diplomatic problem which could have had adverse implications for the judge’s career in case of the Ottoman government’s detection of negligence on his part. The fact that Antoni found a way to come to the court signals that he could also reach out to the French diplomatic cadres in Istanbul or could even petition the Sultan. One can again mention the importance of identity here. In a sense, while his French identity and müste’min status did not matter on the sea for the people who enslaved him, it helped him to claim his freedom once he somehow had access to the Ottoman legal apparatus. Probably his owner’s identity helped Antoni to reclaim his freedom, as it would have been more difficult if the owner had been a high-ranking Ottoman officer instead of a ship captain. In other words, while ship captains on the high seas had relatively easier access to captives and slaves, their status on land was not always powerful enough to keep them.

The borderland dynamics and fluidity of identities that the Mediterranean possessed created an environment that proved to be risky for all involved parties regardless of their religious, political, and socioeconomic statuses and identities. The mechanisms of macro-diplomacy were not of much use to them in reconstructing their free identity, and in most cases, it even worked against them because of the workforce need of the imperial galley. For this reason, it was diplomacy from below that created an opportunity for release. In most cases, the only people benefitting from release from captivity were the captives and their families, and the well-paid intermediaries. Once individuals were captured, there were no qualities that would easily set them apart from the crowd of captives. In the absence of distinguishing components of identity, such as being a state official or having an affiliation with an Ottoman pasha, they were identified based on their physical qualities. In other words, their identities were reduced to their bodies and physical features, resulting in their being labeled as useful or useless and more valuable or less valuable.

The line between freedom and captivity was thin and depended not on how individuals defined themselves but rather on how others viewed and identified them. These highly subjective and non-institutionalized patterns of identification could result in enslavement or captivity even by the members of one’s own community or state. While these types of incidents could occur by accident, they could very well have been on purpose, through the machinations of people taking advantage of the system’s vulnerability. An Ottoman non-Muslim subject named Yanaki was caught by an Ottoman pasha on his way to Crete in a
French ship; assuming he was Venetian, the captain sent him to Istanbul, where he was put in the arsenal prison. The court register belonging to the year 1696 includes three records related to Yanaki’s case. It seems that Yanaki first petitioned the sultan and explained the misunderstanding regarding his identity, arguing he was not a Venetian infidel but a simple, harmless, tax-paying non-Muslim Ottoman subject. From the second record, we understand that his demand was taken into consideration and an imperial order was sent to the Galata court asking the judge to investigate Yanaki’s situation and legal identity. Upon this order, the court carried out a detailed investigation, appealing to the testimony of Ottoman officers and military personnel from Crete, and it became clear that Yanaki was a non-Muslim Ottoman subject who served as a clerk in the Ottoman military during the Kandiye campaign and was a harmless ordinary person. Like Antoni’s case, Yanaki’s imprisonment points to the vulnerability of mobile early modern subjects in the absence of effective identity mechanisms. It should be stated, however, that both Antoni and Yanaki were lucky enough to have had their voices heard by the authorities in order to negotiate and reclaim their identities and their freedom.

7) Absence of State: Micro-Diplomacy and Redemption of ‘Minor’ Captives

These cases provide evidence to make some assessments regarding the functioning and parameters of early modern diplomacy. The most striking aspect of these cases is the relative absence of the state as a party in these contracts, except for acting as a notary office recording the contract for possible future claims of the involved parties. It is a well-known practice that in premodern warfare war captives were commonly exchanged between the states; some sources that will later be discussed show the presence of this practice during the late seventeenth century. However, the high number of the cases in which relatives or friends of the captives intervened for them, reached out to the foreigners, and formed contracts without the state’s involvement suggests the individuality and personal nature of diplomacy in the region, and that it was the norm for the intermediaries to serve as alternative conflict resolution parties. In other words, it is obvious that interstate diplomacy failed to bring justice to hundreds of ordinary people, thus creating a gap in the

49 GSS 160: 67a/1.
system which would be filled by interdependent intermediaries. In fact, the failure of the state’s ability to be the main actor carrying out ransoming had to do with corsair activities that were beyond the state’s ability to control and could only be solved by recourse to the ransom system rather than state to state negotiation.

The Ottoman state’s involvement in captivity cases, or the lack thereof, can be explained with reference to two things: the limits of the early modern state’s power and the state’s resultant priorities. The sea as a space had its own dynamic that most of the time undermined the traditional methods employed by states within their respective realms. Complicated further by extremely diverse people and institutions and their conflicting agendas and interests, most attempts to create an overarching and functioning diplomatic system failed. All members of these risky yet profitable zones, especially the states with their relatively more organized and systematic benefits, were aware of the conflicting interests and the resultant security vacuum.  

States employed all possible diplomatic and military means to operate within the Mediterranean with maximum profit and minimum loss. White rightfully argues that “characterizing the Ottomans’ inability to prevent piracy and patrol effectively simply as a matter of complicity or weakness is an entirely inadequate explanation, given the vast territory involved and the extreme financial difficulties and external military threats they faced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.”

It is true that as a highly complex phenomenon, no single criterion would be fair to employ to argue for an inability on the Ottomans’ part. In fact, the Ottoman state took extensive security precautions to protect its military and commercial interests as well as its subjects. However, it should be stated that these precautions were taken according to the state’s priorities. The state’s attitude towards captivity and ransoming reflects its priorities and power limits in this regard. Captivity and ransoming cases from court registers as well as the registers of important affairs point to the fact that the state mobilized extensive

---

50 It should be stated that the idea of the state here is mostly limited to the core ruling groups sharing more or less similar interests and agendas, regulating and organizing trade, enjoying the right of decision-making with regard to making war and peace, and administering diplomatic affairs and correspondence. In this respect, it does not ignore the fact that state actors could have personal interests and ideas that did not match with those of the particular state they were affiliated with. For a discussion on this issue, see Goffman, Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 111-24; Isom-Verhaaren, “Shifting Identities”.

means to protect and to save Ottomans of higher socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, the Ottoman empire did not have a specific institution dealing with the redemption of slaves. The Habsburgs, French, British, and Dutch created such institutions, having varying degrees of efficiency. As Pal Fodor points out, the sultan’s court provided assistance only to the so called “major captives” or to those with influential relatives or acquaintances. The situation had severe implications for ‘minor captives’ as the existing legal and diplomatic mechanisms were often utilized for redemption of major captives. Major captives’ existence, freedom, and missions mattered more to the states than those of minor captives. Like their lives within the domains of their countries, their loss of freedom most of the time went unnoticed by the authorities especially in individual cases. Their travels were much less fully documented, their safety on the way was not provided beyond general and obviously insufficient measures, and their identities could be erased more easily. As such, the redemption of ‘minor captives’ was handled through diplomacy from below, through a fragile yet sophisticated network of ransoming composed of European intermediaries, Christian corsairs, Muslim and non-Muslim ship captains, and Muslim judges.

8) Conclusion

As a borderland and a center of diplomacy, Galata brought together diverse individuals whose paths would otherwise have most probably never crossed with each other. For Ottoman subjects, Galata in general and the Galata court in particular was Istanbul’s door to the Mediterranean, through which they could indirectly travel to different parts of the Mediterranean to help their close kin or friends through purchasing intermediary Europeans’ mobility. In doing so, they also presented examples of alternative conflict resolution by utilizing diplomacy from below for which Galata was a perfectly situated locus. Unable to

---

52 It should be mentioned that the existence of such institutions does not necessarily mean immediate and effective official redemption campaigns. As Weiss and Heinsen-Roach show both in the case of France and the Dutch, the redemption institutions’ activities were contextual, and they operated with low efficiency when these countries had to direct their sources and attentions to other problems conceived to be more serious than the fate of poor ordinary captives from the state’s standpoint. See Weiss, Captives and Corsairs; Heinsen-Roach ‘The Reluctant State’.

53 Fodor, ‘Maltese Pirates’, 230. For more information on this issue, see Vatin, ‘Note sur l’attitude des sultans ottomans’.
mobilize the state’s resources, Ottoman subjects relied on non-official, individual diplomatic solutions by appealing to micro-diplomacy services offered by the Europeans in Galata. The European intermediaries offered an unofficial and informal alternative to the existing institutional and state-owned mechanisms, without rejecting or clashing with the formal structures but rather exhibiting a selective and flexible use of the legal and diplomatic tools embedded in them. Intermediaries and diplomacy from below functioned in a way to identify these otherwise undistinguishable minor captives. In this way, the state’s relative institutional absence in the redemption of minor captives, these captives’ less well-documented journeys and unremarkable resumes, and the intermediaries’ ability to identify them and reconstruct their identities from captivity to freedom came together to form a Mediterranean system of diplomacy from below.

Like any type of relation between/among human groups, contacts between Ottomans and Europeans cannot be reduced to a single facet such as conflict or cooperation. The issue of ransoming is a prime example of this, as it shows clearly how conflict and cooperation were not diametrically opposed notions but provoked each other and coexisted. In other words, they were symbiotic. As shown in this paper, ransoming in itself is an act of cooperation regardless of the economic aspect and the profits that the intermediary Europeans earned from it: The ransoming system established a contract between two parties with the hope of setting someone free at the end. Current literature overemphasizes religious identity as the prime motor of the relations between Ottomans and foreigners. In the cases of ransoming analyzed in this paper, Christian intermediaries save Muslim captives from Christian captors, thereby pointing to non-religious aspects of these interactions.