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Part I

White Slavery

1

How Many Slaves?

*January the 16[th]. day, in the year before nominated [1631]; I arrived in [Algiers,] that Citie fatal to all Christians, and the butchery of mankind ... my condolation is for the losse of many Christians, taken from their parents and countries, of all sorts and sexes. Some in Infancy, both by Land and by Sea, being forced to abuses (most incorrigible flagitions) not onely so, but bereaft of Christian Religion, and means of grace and repentence. How many thousands of the Nazarian nations have beene and are continually lost by that monster, what rationall creature can be ignorant of?*¹

The question that Francis Knight asked here – “How many thousands?” – was no doubt a heartfelt one: he himself had been enslaved in Algiers and on the Algerian galleys for seven years and had seen his share of suffering. It also provides a good indication that, for the sailors and merchants of his day, enslavement was not something that white Europeans did to other peoples, to black Africans in particular. Even the English, though remote from Barbary and themselves already among the more aggressive slave runners in the 1630s, were enslaved by Muslim corsairs operating out of Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco, and in numbers that were not inconsiderable. During these years, when the English share of the Atlantic slave trade still averaged barely 1,000 Africans annually, the Algerian and Salé rovers may have been enslaving almost as many British subjects every year from the scores of ships they were taking: by 1640, upwards of 3,000 British were enslaved in Algiers alone (and another 1,500 or so in Tunis), “undergoing divers and most insufferable oppressions.”² Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, while the Barbary corsairs ranged freely around

the Mediterranean, these pirates also sailed by the dozen up the Channel and even into the Thames estuary, plundering local shipping and coastal towns, such that, as the minutes of Parliament put it, “The fishermen are afraid to put to sea, and we are forced to keep continual watches on all our coasts.”³ Though the raids on the British Isles themselves may have dropped off by the later 1600s, the capture of British ships continued. The Algerians were said to have taken no fewer than 353 British ships between 1672 and 1682 – which would mean they were still picking up between 290 and 430 new British slaves every year.⁴

However much they may have preyed on the British, the Barbary corsairs were far more of a threat to those closer to their home shores: Flemish, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians were all hauled off into slavery at a much greater rate throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet it is striking that we have only the vaguest idea of the overall magnitude of the slave traffic in white Europeans, the more so because it was taking place at the same time as the Atlantic slave trade at which so much serious scholarship has been directed. Indeed, well over a generation ago, Philip Curtin recognized that having a reliable reckoning of how many Africans were enslaved was an essential foundation for the entire field of slave studies in the Americas. With his *The Atlantic Slave Trade: a Census*, Curtin laid out the initial calculations that have contextualized debate on the topic ever since and have provided the basis for subsequent detailing of precisely which and how many Africans were taken on the Middle Passage.⁵ By contrast, although it has been over fifty years since Fernand Braudel first highlighted the place of piracy and the slave trade in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean social economy, there has still been no broad, analogous census of Mediterranean slaving.⁶ Instead, scholars have generally restricted themselves to deep, focused studies, often based on single runs of archival sources. In consequence they have often detailed only a particular slave type, nationality, condition, or time frame, rather than the entire trade.⁷ Such case studies have been vital for illuminating the dynamics of Mediterranean slavery, but they have contributed only tangentially to our understanding of the true extent and global impact of this phenomenon. Indeed, by approaching it in this piecemeal fashion, they have contributed to an already widespread conviction that Barbary slaving was nothing like the massive and systematic Atlantic phenomenon, as detailed by Curtin, Paul Lovejoy, and many others, but was rather a somewhat peripheral sideline of the business of corsair piracy – something that happened to at most a few scores of

thousands of unfortunate individuals from various Christian nations during the three centuries between 1500 and 1800.⁸

It may be the supposition that Mediterranean-based slaving was a minor activity that explains why so few scholars have even speculated about how to estimate the extent of the traffic. Braudel as much as anyone may have helped to downplay the long-term economic and social relevance of Mediterranean slavery, even as he was drawing attention to it. Evidently unable to decide between the two options that he himself advanced – that the Mediterranean was “a sea teeming with pirates who dealt savage blows” and that “the wicked role played by Moslem pirates in general and the Barbary corsairs in particular has been much exaggerated” – the master of the *Annales* sought to prune down the phenomenon to its core aspect, ship-on-ship piracy, as conducted by the corsairs of Algiers between 1560 and 1620. Coming up with what even he allowed were some “extremely hypothetical estimates” of corsair predation, Braudel concluded that “these figures are not spectacular,” a position taken by many students of the Mediterranean who have followed him.⁹ Some recent scholars have moreover sought to minimize the impact of Barbary slaving in another way, by observing that the depredations Muslim corsairs inflicted on the Christian world, whatever they were, were more than matched by their Christian counterparts, who operated out of Malta, Livorno, and even Portsmouth, and were as likely to prey on neutral Europeans as on Barbary shipping.¹⁰ Others have taken the position that the Europeans carried off to Barbary and the Levant were not slaves at all, but rather prisoners of war, who could expect to regain their freedom through ransom or exchange after a short confinement as captives.¹¹

While both arguments have a certain validity, neither, as this study will attempt to show, succeeds in comprehending the extent of white slaving activities in this era or the impact it had on Europeans at the time. Suffice it to say, for the moment at least, that, although most modern scholarship has tended to minimize the scope of corsair piracy, those Europeans who lived during these centuries took the threat to their freedom and lives a good deal more seriously. Diplomatic reports, popular broadsheets, and simple word of mouth circulated throughout Europe, telling and retelling of Christians taken by the hundreds and thousands on the high seas or during coastal sorties, and hauled off in chains to a living death of hard labor in Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, or Tripoli. One could (as some have) dismiss all this as “corsair hysteria” which gripped much of Europe during these centuries, a general panic fueled by a combination of fear and

fantasy. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to turn up some hard figures that back up this sense of general disquiet. The corsairs captured Christian ships in enormous numbers, for example, and this was a matter of sufficient importance to merchants and insurers to generate much suggestive data. One reads in a variety of contemporary sources, for example, that between November 1593 and August 1594, the Tunisian corsairs brought in around 28 prizes with 1,722 captives; that between 1628 and 1634 the Algerians captured 80 merchant vessels from the French alone (taking 986 captives in the process), while between 1628 and 1641 they took 131 “ships and barks” from the English, totalling 2,555 “of his Majesty’s subjects;” that the rovers of Tripoli, although running one of the smaller slaving operations, succeeded in bringing in 75 Christian ships with 1,085 captives between 1677 and 1685.¹²

Such accounts are, by their nature, hugely incomplete: for the most part we have no prize or slave registers in the cities of Barbary, beyond sporadic consular records.¹³ Other accounts list the number of ships taken in a specific period, but omit a count of the captives. Yet these too are suggestive of some very large numbers: Britain’s Royal Navy admitted losing 466 English and Scottish ships to Algerian corsairs between 1606 and 1609; the Trinitarian father Pierre Dan claimed that these same rovers seized 936 vessels from France, Holland, Germany, England, and Spain between 1613 and 1621; while John Morgan wrote, “I have by me a List, printed in London in 1682,” that inventoried 160 “Ships and Vessels belonging to Subjects of these [British] Realms,” which the Algerians had taken or destroyed between July 1677 and October 1680.¹⁴

If even as few as ten men were captured with each vessel (the average rate appears to be 8–12, with many crews escaping in small boats), the corsairs were enslaving tens of thousands of men at sea. Their slave raids on land could prove even more productive, however, or at least more spectacular (see Table 1, p. xiv). Some of their coastal slaving expeditions entered into legend among those living on the north Mediterranean shores, as almost annual events of terror and pillage: the 7,000 captives that the Algerians took in the Bay of Naples in 1544, for example; the 6,000 snapped up when they sacked Vieste in Calabria in 1554; the 4,000 men, women, and children seized in Granada in 1566 (after which they said it was “raining Christians in Algiers”). The take shrank somewhat in the seventeenth century, in part because the Imperial Turkish fleet was no longer participating, but also because many coastal dwellers had simply packed up and fled. Still, the Barbary

rovers kept coming ashore, sometimes by the thousands, in raids like those that captured 1,200 men and women in Madeira in 1617; almost 400 in Iceland in 1627; and 700 in Calabria in 1636, another 1,000 there in 1639, and yet another 4,000 in 1644; in 1640, dispatches to London told how “those roguish Turkish pirates” had snatched 60 men, women, and children from the Cornish coast, near Penzance; in the spring of 1641, Algerian pirates seized the packet *John Filmer* just hours after it had set off from Youghal, in Ireland, on its way to England, enslaving the 120 passengers on board and “putting all the men in irons.”¹⁵

Impressive as these expeditions may have been – and they were the events most likely to go into the records – it is safe to assume that for each spectacular attack there were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of much smaller sorties, played out by a dozen corsairs in a tartan or felucca against a handful of poor fishermen caught too far out at sea or a couple of village women snapped up while working in the fields.¹⁶ Thomas Baker, Britain’s consul in Tripoli in the 1680s, called such activities “Christian stealing,” which gives a good impression of the level on which many of these cut-rate corsairs operated, especially by the later 1600s.¹⁷ Such minor thuggery may not have made the diplomatic reports, yet it was these small as much as the great predations “which doe much offend the Christians, in taking their ships, Tartanes, and Satties, and other small vessels, making all the Christians that they take slaves.”¹⁸ Relentless and almost unstoppable, petty piracy probably cost Christendom more in slaves and booty over the long run than all the spectacular coups taken together. Braudel, characteristically, summed up this balance of attrition neatly and evocatively:

Besides the great predators, lesser scavengers prowled the seas.... These were humble men with humble ambitions: to capture a fisherman perhaps or rob a granary, kidnap a few harvesters.... Such minor carnivores did not always inflict the least damage, nor amass the smallest fortunes in the end.¹⁹

While the Dutch diplomat Thomas Hees was negotiating a treaty with the Pasha of Algiers in the winter of 1685–86, he noted just this sort of a steady trickle of prizes in his diary: Portuguese caravels, Dutch fluyts, Genoese and English brigs – eleven vessels with over 300 fresh slaves all captured and brought in over just four weeks, during what was the corsairing off-season.²⁰ The Sicilian archives also provide good evidence about these small-scale land raids: the hundreds of ransom

requests sent to Palermo by Sicilian slaves and their relatives indicate that the island was attacked at least 136 times between 1570 and 1606, sometimes in sorties that penetrated 10 or even 20 miles inland. Yet only two or three of these raids seemed important enough at the time to merit a mention in contemporary chronicles of the island's history; the rest come to light at all only because they figured in the private tragedy recounted by some unlucky petitioner seeking ransom.²¹ Moreover, in the little stories these slaves told, they often alluded to others taken with them – like the day laborer, seized from a monastery near Bari in 1678, “along with eighteen other persons;” or the worker taken that same year near Otranto together with five others. These anonymous fellow fishermen or villagers, who never appeared in the official records beyond these fleeting references, ended up uncounted among the many victims of corsair slaving.²²

For those who had to deal with the Barbary regencies, these states seemed to be the “flail of the Christian world ... the terror of Europe ... the pinnacle of cruelty in all its forms and the asylum of impiety.” Charges like these may strike the modern reader as no more than rhetorical flourishes and to an extent, of course, they were, but some observers backed up their claims with equally serious figures.²³ Emanuel d'Aranda, a Flemish gentleman-soldier who was enslaved in Algiers in the 1640s, called that city the place “where the miseries of Slavery have consum'd the lives of six hundred thousand Christians, since the year 1536, at which time *Cheredin Barberossa* brought it under his own power.”²⁴ And if Algiers was generally the most active, it was by no means the only city in the Maghreb that flourished on the business of enslaving Europeans: towns from Salé to Tripoli, the whole length of Barbary, all took their share in the trade, leading d'Aranda's contemporary, Pierre Dan, to conclude that, for the years 1530 to 1640, “it would not be stretching the truth to say that they have put a million [Christians] in chains.”²⁵

Even when compared to the atrocities of the Atlantic slave trade, which shipped some 10–12 million black Africans as slaves to the Americas over four centuries, these claims about what a hundred years of Mediterranean slaving accomplished do not dwindle into insignificance. Nor is this to deny or trivialize the well-documented Christian enslavement of Moors and Turks which was going on at the same time. Certainly, the Spanish, Tuscans, and Maltese were all eager participants in the enslavement of their Muslim foes, largely to work them as galley slaves. Among Christian states, however, the practice was never as pervasive or as massive as in Barbary and died out sooner,

as most European nations switched from galleys to sail and from slaves to convicts in those galleys they did retain.²⁶ There were in any case far fewer Islamic merchant ships on which to prey in the western Mediterranean, and, among Europeans, only the Spanish ever seem to have tried mounting slave raids into Muslim territories. Despite some attempts to label the two forms of Mediterranean slavery as pernicious mirror images, most students of the period still have to agree that, at least after 1571, corsair slaving was “a prevalently Muslim phenomenon.”²⁷

Nevertheless, if Dan and d’Aranda were right, and Barbary corsair slaving was indeed significant, it may be necessary to rethink our present-day understanding of what slavery itself meant to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans. Not only does enslavement turn out to have been a very real possibility for anyone who traveled or lived in the Mediterranean, but it was also likely to be religion or ethnicity, not race, that determined who would capture and enslave whom. The problem, of course, is, how much faith can be placed in such estimates? Neither Dan nor d’Aranda supplied much rationale for his figures, and there is little documentation that directly supports them – certainly nothing like the sustained runs of shipping records and censuses that have been available to Curtin and those who followed him. North African sources on corsair slaving activities turn out to be very thin – “cruelly deficient” and “almost nonexistent for the period before 1736,” according to two modern-day scholars – while those in Europe are scattered widely in national and local archives or various religious orders and confraternities.²⁸ What material there is turns out to be more anecdotal than serial by nature and, although often highly suggestive, these sources by no means allow one to total with any hope of accuracy all those enslaved by the Barbary corsairs, in piratical attacks of all sorts and sizes.

Nevertheless, the problem can still be tackled, though more obliquely. Many Europeans besides Dan and d’Aranda offered estimates for Mediterranean slave populations for the period between the late sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, though they mostly did so for specific Barbary Coast cities rather than for the entire Maghreb. Such counts are fairly numerous (there are over 50 complete and dozens of partial estimates for Algiers alone), even if many were arrived at in such mysterious ways as to be of rather uncertain value (see Table 2, p. xviii). The record they provide also has its gaps: the estimates for Tunis and Tripoli are somewhat patchier than those for Algiers – about 25 for each city during these centuries – while for many smaller port

and inland towns, there may be only one or two counts for the whole period (see Table 3, p. xxi).²⁹ A further problem is that between 1500 and 1578 there are essentially no slave figures at all. This is not such a problem for Tunis and Tripoli, which were variably under European control for much of that time, but a significant loss for Algiers, whose corsairs carried out some spectacular slave raids between 1518 and 1560, under the leadership of Kheir-ed-din Barbarossa and Turgut Re'is. Often these plundering campaigns were in reality full-scale naval expeditions, resulting in pitched battles that might bring home thousands of captives at a time, taken from Christian fleets and from the coasts of Valencia and Granada, the Balearics, Campania, Calabria, and Sicily. So many prisoners flooded into the slave market of Algiers on occasion that, as the saying had it, one could "swap a Christian for an onion."³⁰

In any case, even those estimates we do possess have been treated with suspicion by many present-day historians. Such scholars have tended to dismiss the larger, rounder slave counts, like many of those from Algiers and Tunis, as the guesswork of untrained, Eurocentric dilettantes.³¹ Certainly the figures can offer some wild variations: we find in just one six-year period, between 1681 and 1687, slave population counts for Algiers that vary from 5,000 ("or a few more") to 17,000, 30,000–40,000, and then back down to 10,000.³² Norman Bennett has expressed doubts about figures made by the slaves themselves, as perhaps reflecting the "natural exaggeration of men who had been deprived of their freedom," but suspicion has especially fallen on estimates provided by the Trinitarians and Mercedarians.³³ These priests of the redemptive orders, who were so important in ransoming Christian slaves in Barbary, were accused even in their heyday of "spread[ing] about a thousand Fables, in order to enhance the *Merit* of those services they do the Public, in passing over to *Barbary* to redeem Captives."³⁴ There is no doubt some truth to the misgiving – occasionally voiced even by some of those same orders – that these ransoming fathers had a vested interest in exaggerating their slave counts, as a means of instilling a sense of urgency in and thus opening the purses of their pious contributors.³⁵

It should, however, be remembered that not all of those who tallied up slave populations in Barbary had a reason to exaggerate: far from it. Estimates survive that by their very nature needed to be as reliable as possible: they were provided by resident consuls or the merchant agents who were periodically commissioned by their home state to find out just how many of their fellow citizens were being held as slaves in a given city. This might be carried out as a preliminary step for a peace

treaty or for a state ransoming venture, and to get such information, the French and the English relied on their consuls. Most of the small Italian states, on the other hand – the Sicilians, for example, the Venetians, or the Papacy – had to entrust the task to their own magistracies or quasi-governmental confraternities, which might commission a merchant on the spot. These estimates – in effect government reports, which were more or less official in nature – were usually restricted to a specific nationality in a particular town.³⁶ Occasionally, however, the agents might offer a more sweeping view of both the individual Barbary regencies and all the slaves there. François Lanfreducci and Jean Othon Bosio produced such a survey for the knights of Malta in 1587, as did the dragoman and merchant Gianbattista Salvago for Venice in 1625; another Venetian, the ex-slave, Antonio Tedaldi Barbarella, submitted a shorter but also detailed report to the Venetian Senate in 1682, breaking down his total slave count by nationality.³⁷ Such estimates are unfortunately not as common as those from missionary and redemptive fathers or the ex-slaves, but what matters most is that they are not significantly out of line with them either, differing by 10–20 percent at most. In this regard, although the government reports are too patchy to provide a complete survey of slave populations, they do give greater credibility to the much more numerous efforts of the religious and secular “non-professionals.”³⁸

One should not in any case underestimate how very difficult it must have been to make an accurate slave count in Barbary during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially when dealing with the many slaves who belonged to private masters. Even modern-day census takers would find it challenging to come up with precise tallies of these thousands of individuals, many of whom lacked any form of written identification or even a last name; thousands were moreover regularly hired out to work in other towns or sold to other masters – like the eighteenth-century Venetian shipbuilder (one of many such on a ransoming list) who was said to have been “taken by the Tripolitans, sold to the Tunisians, then to the Algerians.”³⁹ Others were routinely sent by their masters to labor in one of the many small farm plots that surrounded the city, thus keeping them out of sight of contemporary observers. The only way to count them seemed to be to calculate how many of the plots – known by the slaves as *masseries* or *giardini*; called *fahs* by the Algerians – there were and then multiply by what appeared to be the appropriate number of slaves per plot. Jean-Baptiste Gramaye claimed to have done as well as anyone at this, saying he had taken a look “at the account books of the Pasha,” thus allowing him to come

up with a precise total of 14,698 of such *masseries*; others, from the time of Diego de Haëdo in the 1580s into the early 1700s, reported that the plots numbered between 10,000 and 18,000.⁴⁰

Once he had arrived at such a number, however, an estimator could be completely at sea when it came to choosing his multiplying factor, which was in fact anyone's guess. As the missionary Giovanni di S. Bonaventura put it, in somewhat contorted form: "in each *Giardino* there are two or four or even six Christians, or at least one."⁴¹ Counts reached by this approach, which the historian Michel Fontenay has rather dryly termed *passablement impressionniste*, were both impressively large and hopelessly vague: the implication was that there were anywhere between 20,000 and 60,000 slaves engaged in just this one type of labor, a result that seems to have struck most of those who used this method as more suggestive than concrete.⁴²

If the estimators found slaves belonging to private individuals hard to count, they were on somewhat safer ground when it came to dealing with those known as "public slaves" in the Barbary regencies. These were the chattels of the state, for the most part owned by either the local ruler or the governing council, called the *divan*. Typically, they worked as galley slaves or in construction gangs in the city. At the end of each day these men were locked up in one of the local *bagni* (or *bagnos*) – the "baths," as the barracks-like slave prisons were known. Each morning they were tallied by their keeper, known as the guardian *bagno*, so that they could be accounted for and allocated to work sites in town or to the departing galleys.⁴³ Since, at least by 1700, each *bagno* also had a Catholic chapel, the priests who served there might also produce a count of those men who had taken Easter communion. When would-be estimators had access to lists like these, they could produce fairly secure counts of these public slaves at one moment in time. In consequence, there are some relatively hard figures available. We find, for instance, that 4,000 Christians were held in the sixteen *bagnos* of Tunis in 1664; that in 1696, "the Christians in the four *bagni* [of Algiers] do not exceed in all the number of 1600;" that twenty years later there were "upwards of 2,000" slaves kept in the *Bagno Beyliç* alone in that city, and so on.⁴⁴ The counts could also be constructed more specifically, depending on the interests of the observer (or his readers). The French consuls in Tunis and Algiers, for example, were as assiduous in reporting the number of Frenchmen held in the *bagnos* there as were Rome's missionaries in sending back tallies of practicing Catholics.⁴⁵ The specificity of these counts has sometimes caused problems for modern-day scholars, who have not always recognized that

the missionaries who sent back counts of those they called “Christian slaves” might in fact have been referring only to “Catholic slaves.” Their estimates, which have been taken as complete slave counts, were only partial tallies of those in the bagnos, leaving out an often not inconsiderable population of “schismatics and heretics” – that is, Orthodox and Protestant slaves – producing a much lower count as a result.⁴⁶

For contemporary estimators, the figures for the bagnos seem to have formed the core of many a global slave count. Dan, for one, underscored that of his estimated 25,000 Christian captives in Algiers, “more than two or three thousand are ordinarily locked up in the Bagnes, or Prisons of the City,” but there are many other examples. The slave priest Jerónimo Gracián, for instance, calculated in the early 1590s there were 1,600 Christian slaves in Tunis, of whom around 600 were held in the bagnos. Likewise Father Niccolò da Sciò, prefect of the missionary church in Tripoli, noted in 1701 that when masses were sung in the chapels of the local bagnos, the 500 slaves held there were joined by “three hundred and more [slaves] of private owners.”⁴⁷

On the other hand, slave counts in the bagnos had to be made with care, simply because the number of these “public slaves” could fluctuate sharply, from year to year or even month to month.⁴⁸ Disease and redemptions, as we shall see, could cause significant, short-term reductions, but numbers in the bagnos could also fall or rise abruptly when the galleys set out or returned from the *corso*, bringing with them their thousands of slave oarsmen.⁴⁹ By the same token, though probably more confusing to the estimators, large blocs of slaves forever came and went with arriving or departing viceroys or other imperial officers, who customarily traveled with considerable servile retinues. It was also difficult to keep track of all the various *deys*, pashas, and corsair captains (*re'is*) who regularly moved slaves from city to city, as they gave, sold, or rented whole squads of captives to one another.⁵⁰

Keeping these caveats in mind, it is possible to assemble from these various estimates a general overview that both compares the slave populations of the various Barbary regencies and charts how they changed over time. In Algiers, for example, counts fluctuated from 20,000 to 40,000 Christian slaves between 1580 and 1680; thus it would be reasonable, if not somewhat conservative, to set a running average for the city at 25,000.⁵¹ After the 1680s, though, we find a fairly sharp drop: reports coming from Algiers for the most part told of many fewer slaves in the city, usually between 2,000 and 10,000. Contemporaries pointed to both diplomatic and structural causes. Some noted that

more determined reprisals by Europe's great powers had persuaded the Barbary pashas to think twice about giving their *re'is* free reign to plunder and take slaves. Others observed that these were also the years when a general move in the Mediterranean from rowed galleys to sailing vessels was reducing much of the demand for galley slaves, thus decreasing corsair incentives to hunt specifically for new *galleotti*.⁵² Yet there still remained considerable profit to be made in slaving for the sake of ransom, such that both the corsairs and the pashas stubbornly resisted European efforts to suppress their slave-taking activities altogether.⁵³ Although some reports had the slave population in Algiers as low as 500 by the 1790s, the numbers escalated again during the Napoleonic Wars, when the general disorders in the Mediterranean and the advent of American ships on the scene made slaving attractive and profitable once more. Only with the reestablishment of European peace, backed by a strong British naval presence in the Mediterranean, did corsair slaving collapse, so that when the French captured Algiers in 1830, they found only 122 slaves in the bagno.⁵⁴

Slave demographics elsewhere in the Maghreb followed a similar pattern, although always on a smaller scale, since no town in Barbary had invested quite as much in slaving as Algiers.⁵⁵ Much more populous overall, seventeenth-century Tunis typically had only around a quarter to a third as many slaves as Algiers, perhaps not so much a sign that the Tunisian corsairs felt any great aversion to slaving in itself – they regularly pillaged the coasts and shipping of southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia for captives – but rather that there was less need for slave labor in Tunis, which had little industry and only moderate agricultural activity.⁵⁶ Other Barbary Coast ports, generally poor and underpopulated, were in an altogether different league.⁵⁷ Tripoli, the largest and a particular adversary of the Venetians, was never reported to have had more than 2,500 Christian slaves; 1,500 seems more typical during the seventeenth century. A handful of slaves might typically also be found in many of the provincial ports subject to these regency capitals, usually for work about the port or in shipbuilding. “Eight or ten” turn up in the Tripolitan port of Susa, 200 or 300 in the Tunisian towns of Porto Farina and Biserte; a score or fewer in the Algerian port of Bône and in Constantine, and so on.⁵⁸

Although all these slave counts fluctuated in the short term, there are enough and they are consistent enough over the long run to produce a workable total for the slave populations in Barbary for the century 1580–1680 – “The Time I take to be,” John Morgan later commented, “when those Corsairs were in their *Zenith*.”⁵⁹ Even when

keeping to the lower estimates – as scholars have customarily done when dealing with slavery in the Maghreb – the averages soon add up: around 27,000 in Algiers and its dependencies, 6,000 in Tunis, and perhaps 2,000 in Tripoli and the smaller centers combined. The resulting 35,000 is very near the figure that Pierre Dan came up with in 1634:

As to the slaves of both sexes that are in Barbary today, there are a quantity of them from all the Christian nations, such as France, Italy, Spain, England, Germany, Flanders, Holland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Russia, and so forth. The number of these poor captives reaches about thirty-six thousand, according to the enumeration that I have carried out on the spot and to the records that have been furnished and sent to me by the Christian Consuls who live in the Corsair Cities.⁶⁰

The figure of 35,000 that we have arrived at here can be taken as an averaged-out white slave count for Barbary, roughly how many captives were held at any given time between 1580 and 1680. It does not, however, say anything (or little) about the total number of slaves taken by the corsairs over this period. To accomplish this, given the lack of any comprehensive registers of captives, it is necessary to turn the question around and work in terms of what might be called the demand side of the Mediterranean slave traffic. Since, despite regional fluctuations, the average Christian slave population in the Barbary regencies seems to have stayed fairly close to 35,000 during this century, one can ask how many slaves the corsairs would have needed to capture to maintain this number. It is possible to approach the problem this way because of an important aspect of white slavery in Barbary, one that sharply distinguished it from its black African counterpart in the Americas: slaves in the Maghreb were at least 90 percent men and were rigorously denied access to local or slave women.⁶¹ It can therefore be assumed that they were incapable of reproducing themselves, and as such, whatever attrition their numbers may have suffered would have necessarily had to have been made up through new captures.⁶² By going over the various factors that produced population decline among these slaves and estimating the extent of their impact, we can hope to arrive at a figure for compensatory captures, one which, if necessarily derivative, is still likely to be more informative and complete than any attempted direct tally of captured slaves.

A given slave population might decline in any number of ways, but the most obvious was that slaves died. This the slaves in Barbary did for the same depressing reasons as did slaves in the New World or anywhere else: from abuse, disease, overwork, lack of food, and despair. As a Neapolitan captive wrote home from Tunis: "we are mistreated, beaten with sticks, starved, and called faithless dogs, [such] that I would willingly die and God alone knows what will happen."⁶³ The mass of "public slaves," the workhorses of the regency cities, were treated with particular brutality and neglect. During their time ashore they were herded together every evening into the often overcrowded and filthy bagnos and given only moldy black bread "that the dogs themselves would not eat," together with whatever they could scrounge or steal; on occasion they would even have to pay for their drinking water.⁶⁴ Their work ashore typically consisted of laboring on large-scale public works, in particular, quarrying and dragging boulders to repair the city walls or the harbor mole (which, in Algiers, was constantly falling apart). When rowing the galleys at sea, half-naked and exposed to the sun, they were not infrequently left so desperately short of drinking water that they drank sea water or died on their benches; never allowed to lie down to sleep, many of them had fallen into "continuall extasies" before their voyage was over.⁶⁵

So-called private slaves might be much better treated, even coddled in their masters' household.⁶⁶ A few lived very well indeed, even running businesses and owning slaves of their own, but more typically a private slave was either put to work on his master's *masserie* or set to selling water about town, required to turn over to his master a certain sum every week, on pain of being beaten.⁶⁷ Just as ill-fed, poorly clothed, and roughly treated as any galley slave, many of these men too died in captivity. Michel Fontenay has shown that the 2,450 Christian slaves brought into Tripoli between 1668 and 1678 suffered what he has termed a "normal" mortality rate of around 20 percent per year.⁶⁸

Clearly, though, what was "normal" could vary hugely depending on circumstances. Slaves who had been sailors or fishermen were typically used to hard physical labor and short rations, and their survival rate seems to have been higher: of the 989 French seamen brought to Algiers between 1628 and 1634, 119, or 12 percent, died.⁶⁹ On the other hand, slaves taken in corsair raids on coastal villages in Italy or Spain were often the weaker members of society: women with children or the aged, who had not managed to outrun the plunderers. They died at a higher rate: of the 450 or so villagers taken in a raid on the

Venetian outpost of Perasto in 1624, around a third had perished within a year.⁷⁰ Still less able to withstand the rigors of life and hard labor in North Africa were those seized and brought to Barbary from the North: the nearly 400 Icelanders captured in an Algerian raid of 1627 were reduced to only 70 survivors eight years later; of around 237 Irish captives taken in a raid of 1631, only two or three were ever ransomed and returned home.⁷¹

Nevertheless, considering that the great majority of those enslaved by the corsairs were reasonably hearty and able to adapt to both the hard work and climate in Barbary, it might still be reasonable to assume a “normal” death rate among slaves of 15 percent rather than Fontenay’s 20 percent. Higher rates may well have prevailed among newcomers, still reeling from what Fontenay called “the effect of psychological shock,” but once slaves had settled in, many proved to be surprisingly resilient.⁷² Particularly hardy in this regard were those enslaved when the Tunisians seized Tabarca in 1741: the Tabarcans (families for the most part of Genoese background who had settled on the island for the coral fishing) had numbered 900 or so at the time of their capture and were down to 635 three years later, equal to an average loss of barely 10 percent per year, with over a third of these deaths occurring in the first six months of slavery. Since many Tabarcan families were left intact within the captured community, their natural reproduction eventually brought this population decline to a halt at about this point and even produced a slight rebound.⁷³

Even those who otherwise adjusted to the mistreatment and meager rations that typified the lot of Barbary slaves were never safe from the Coast’s most notorious killer – the plague. Fontenay’s mortality figures for Tripoli indicate that twice as many slaves died in the plague outbreak that struck the city in 1675 as in the rest of the decade; if he had counted these deaths from plague among his “normal” deaths, the mortality rate among Christians in Tripoli between 1668 and 1678 would have risen from 20 percent to an alarming 46 percent. The plague was so common in North Africa in these years that it is, in fact, difficult to place it outside the normal demographics of Barbary Coast slavery. There were at least 21 significant occurrences in one or more of the major cities of the Maghreb in the seventeenth century and twelve more in the eighteenth. Algiers itself was afflicted at least twice a decade between 1647 and 1699, and by all indications the disease swept freely and with numbing regularity along the whole North African coast.⁷⁴ It was not the least impeded by local authorities who,

according to bitter (and often soon-to-be-dead) Christian observers, “did not avail themselves of either precaution or prevention, and they deal with those [who arrive] suspected or infected with the plague as they do with those who are healthy ...”⁷⁵ Some Europeans believed that the Muslims in general thought that any attempt to avoid the plague through quarantine was pointless resistance to the Will of God. True or not, the cities of North Africa were especially hard hit by the disease.⁷⁶ Even in the more moderate outbreaks, some 10 percent of a city’s population would perish, while a so-called “Great Plague,” known as the *Konia*, might easily carry off a third of a town’s inhabitants: 30,000–50,000 died in Algiers in 1620–21, 1654–57, 1665, 1691, and 1740–42; an estimated 30,000 in Tunis in 1622, 1644, and 1787–88.⁷⁷

Malnourished and overcrowded as they generally were, coming from lands where both the disease itself and acquired immunity to it were becoming increasingly rare, Christian slaves died at the same or greater rate than the free population. In 1663, the head of the Christian mission in Tunis wrote that, having buried “a good six hundred plague-ridden Christians with [my] own hands,” he himself contracted the disease but managed to recover his health “against every hope”; in 1676, the padre resident in Tunis asked for more priests to care for the sick, “who every Day are dying like Flies”; in 1691, the head of mission of Algiers reported that eight months of plague had killed 40,000 Turks and Moors in the city, as well as “a little more than a thousand of my Christian sons.”⁷⁸ Rarely would the disease run its course – through the galleys, the bagnos, and the *masseries* outside the city – without killing 20–30 percent of the local slave population. When plague broke out in Algiers’ overcrowded slave pens in 1662, some said that it carried off 10,000 (others claimed 20,000) of the city’s 30,000 captives; in 1699, it cut the already reduced slave count in that city by a further quarter; in 1675, half the 750 slaves in Tripoli died, about the same proportion that had perished there during the plague of 1584.⁷⁹ Averaged out, the plagues that struck the cities along the Barbary Coast around twice a decade in the seventeenth century would have conservatively added at least 2 percent per year to a posited “normal” slave death rate of 15 percent. Although plague was rarer in Barbary during the eighteenth century, its effect on those unlucky enough to be enslaved there when it did strike remained devastating. Of the 130 American seamen enslaved by the Algerians between 1785 and 1793, for example, 36 (28 percent) died in captivity there, almost all of them during outbreaks of “that fatal and tremendous disorder” in 1788 and 1793.⁸⁰

At around 17 percent, death was the greatest if by no means the only form of attrition in slave populations. Some slaves escaped – by stealing a boat, stowing away on board a friendly European merchant ship, or (with much more difficulty) evading local Berber tribesmen and fleeing overland.⁸¹ Some scholars have claimed that escapes were easy and common, but there seems little beyond anecdotes to back up such assertions and certainly no reports from missionaries or consuls that even as many as 1 percent (that is, 300) of the slaves in Algiers ever managed to flee in a single year.⁸² Norman Bennett was probably closer to the truth when he claimed that “such action affected a very limited number of captives, and most were doomed to live in the hope of a distant ransom.”⁸³

Any individual slave’s hope of being ransomed may have been as distant as Bennett claimed, but ransoming did play a significant part in reducing slave populations overall. It was also probably the best documented form of such attrition, since both the European states that began to mount “general redemptions” as early as the 1530s and the ransoming orders of the Trinitarians and the Mercedarians, which often acted on their behalf, routinely printed lists of the slaves they bought out and brought back. Sometimes these might run to a thousand or more men, women, and children, all of them delineated by name and age, often with their occupation and point of origin as well; some lists also featured clerical and military captives.⁸⁴ The Spanish were especially good at such large-scale undertakings, perhaps having learned the business through prisoner-of-war exchanges during the 1500s. Their efforts were in any case buoyed by enthusiastic state support and donations raised throughout Iberia and Latin America, allowing the Spanish Trinitarians alone to carry out no fewer than 72 redemptions in 77 years during the 1600s, liberating 15,573 slaves in the process, or an average of 220 slaves per trip.⁸⁵

Such efforts certainly had an impact on slave populations. Indeed, by the end of the seventeenth century Rome’s vicar in Algiers noted that one reason there were only 2,800 slaves left in the city was that “some [slaves] are being ransomed every day, and the recent charity [that is, the redemption] has taken away many of them.”⁸⁶ Still, even with all their combined efforts (and sometimes competition), there is no sign that the Trinitarians and the Mercedarians, on the average, year-in-year-out, redeemed more than around 600 slaves annually – barely 2 percent of those enslaved during the boom years of white slaving in Barbary, from 1580 to 1680. Moreover, other European powers – England, Holland, and such Italian states as Rome and Venice – generally chose,

for reasons of religion or politics, not to avail themselves of the ransoming expertise of the Trinitarians and Mercedarians. Without the redemptive fathers' negotiating skills, their agents could easily be hoodwinked or cheated by Muslim slave owners, often returning with only a few of the captives they had come to ransom, and sometimes having paid much more than they had intended.⁸⁷ Faced with such embarrassments, these Protestant and minor Catholic states might ignore or avoid the whole difficult and expensive business for as long as possible, sometimes letting decades elapse between ransoming expeditions and leaving many slaves to lament, as a group of Piedmontese did in 1786, that they had been "completely abandoned by their government."⁸⁸ Although the ransoming activities on behalf of the dozen or more states besides Spain and France whose subjects were enslaved in Barbary have not yet been studied extensively, the available evidence – redemption lists, references to redemptions in narrative sources, and so forth – makes it plain that these nations were only minor contributors to slave attrition through ransoming, generally adding not more than a few hundred annually to the number brought back by the redemptive orders.⁸⁹

Some modern scholars have concluded that these ransoming efforts were far more effective than that: Jean Dams, for one, estimates that the Trinitarians ransomed more than 100,000 captives, though not all in Barbary.⁹⁰ Examining Mercedarian redemption lists from the 1660s and 1670s, Claude Larquié concluded that the great majority of the slaves mentioned were ransomed to freedom in under five years; he has taken this as a sign of the effectiveness of the redemptive orders, at least when it came to freeing Spanish slaves.⁹¹ Such an interpretation, as we shall see, is open to question; for the moment, it is enough to keep in mind what might seem the otherwise obvious point that these redemption lists do indeed provide only the names of those slaves who were actually ransomed. Such men and women no doubt were the most readily identifiable among slaves – those in particular who had been requested (and partially paid for) by their families or home towns; not surprisingly, their time in slavery was often destined to be fairly short. Those many slaves who died in their first year of captivity, on the other hand, like those thousands who fell into the admittedly very wide cracks of the redemption effort – sold into the sultan's Imperial Fleet, for example, or traded to new masters in the Levant – not surprisingly fail to appear on any redemption list, quite simply because they never were ransomed, or at least not until decades later.⁹² The identification, tracking down, and eventual ransoming of slaves

certainly improved over the course of the eighteenth century, even as the Muslim slave owners themselves, becoming increasingly interested in investing in human chattel for the sake of ransom rather than labor, sought to encourage the redemptive orders in their efforts. Until that time, however, it seems to have been far more likely that slaves in Barbary would perish before they could be freed – which is just what some 3,000 “poor seamen captive in Algiers” reminded the British government, in a petition they sent to Parliament in 1640.⁹³

At best, it seems that ransoming efforts and escapes taken together would not have added more than another 3–4 percent to the 17 percent attrition rate caused by the death of slaves in Barbary. On top of this, however, must also (and finally) be added those slaves who reduced the captive population because they had renounced their Christianity and embraced Islam. The numbers of these so-called renegades were considerable: Dan estimated that there were 9,500 in Algiers alone (about an eighth of the free population), and a total of around 14,000 in all of Barbary – something on the order of two-fifths of the number of slaves he calculated there in the 1630s.⁹⁴ It was a truism among virtually all those who wrote of European captivity in Barbary that many slaves were forced to convert, if not by the direct demand of their masters, then by their inability to withstand the harshness of their treatment or the despair of their situation. As the 3,000 British seamen who petitioned Parliament from Algiers in 1640 put it:

withal suffering much hunger, with many blows on our bare bodies with which their cruelty many (not being able to undergo) have been forced to turn to their Mahomotest sect and devilish paganism.⁹⁵

Such was often the excuse offered by many a slave who had renounced his religion and then, one way or another, managed to get out of Barbary. It should be noted, however, that most of those who converted remained slaves, at least for a time after their conversion: “freed from the Oar, tho’ not from his Patron’s Service,” as Morgan put it, since a renegade generally escaped only such truly onerous slave tasks as rowing in the galleys or working at heavy construction.⁹⁶ Of course, it was precisely for this sort of work that replacements had to be found, if the slave societies in Barbary were to keep going, since every slave that converted to Islam was one less available to drive the ships that brought in new captives.

The extent to which these renegades might have reduced the captive population in Barbary is not easily calculated, however, given that some (probably significant) percentage of these apostates had never been slaves at all, but had come to Barbary voluntarily, looking for a new life and taking up a new religion along the way. The history of the Maghreb is full of such characters, sometimes whole shiploads of them coming to North Africa together to seek their fortunes. They were disaffected soldiers or sailors, peasants oppressed by feudal lords, or perhaps merchants looking for advantage.⁹⁷ Even so, the majority of renegades had probably started out as slaves at some point, especially in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, before enough missionaries were on hand to dissuade mass abjurings that could sweep through newly captured groups such as soldiers (the Spanish were especially known for this) or peasants taken in land raids.⁹⁸ Even after the missionaries had shown up in force, the trend continued: between 1609 and 1619, for example, of 8,000 slaves taken by the Algerians, 1,925 adults and around 300 children, or about 28 percent, had “turned Turk;” Dan reported that 149 (16 percent) of the 986 French captives brought to Algiers between 1628 and 1634 went renegade; in 1687, the apostolic vicar Michel Montmasson claimed that, of the 10,000 slaves then in Algiers, 14 percent had “made themselves muslims in despair.”⁹⁹

Despite the alarmist claims from gloomy clerics like Father Alfonso Dominici that fully half the Christian slaves were converting, it is unlikely that apostasy caused anything like that sort of attrition among the slave populations in Barbary.¹⁰⁰ The Muslim masters themselves were usually opposed to opportunistic conversions: for certain categories of slaves, it is true, owners might be quite willing – even insistent – to allow a conversion, but they were well aware that this greatly reduced a slave’s resale value.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the missionaries did apparently dissuade many from abjuring, and by the later 1600s they evidently kept the overall move to Islam – after the first rush of conversions among newly captured slaves – down to a fairly low, if steady erosion of the captive population. This may have been a loss lamented by the mission fathers as “a knife in the heart,” but it is still doubtful that such abjurings depleted slave ranks by much more than 1,000 each year – at most perhaps 4 percent for all of Barbary.¹⁰² In terms of percentages, this would fit fairly well with the claim of the Portuguese Friar Jaono dos Sanctos, that annually in Algiers in the 1620s, “above nine hundred become Mahumetan apostates besides about fifty boys yearly circumcised against their wills.”¹⁰³ Something

like 1,000 new apostates for all of Barbary during the century 1580–1680 would in any case have been necessary to keep renegade populations constantly replenished, replacing those who died every year.¹⁰⁴

Putting all these forms of slave decline together yields a combined attrition rate of 24–25 percent: that portion of the slave population in Barbary that would have had to be replaced each year if levels were to remain as stable as they apparently were, between 1580 and 1680. Such a rate, given the average captive population of around 35,000 during these years, would translate into roughly 8,500 new slaves needed annually – a figure that, over the course of the century, falls a little short of Dan’s “million slaves they have put in chains,” but not by much. Indeed, if we consider the entire 250 years over which corsair slaving was a significant factor in the Mediterranean, the total number of slaves soon exceeds a million. Thus, for the following century, 1680–1780, assuming that attrition rates remained about the same even as slave populations in Barbary shrank to about a fifth of their former size, corsairs would have needed to take another 175,000 captives to maintain the dwindling Christian slave presence in the regencies.¹⁰⁵ For the sixteenth century the situation is more complex, since both Tunis and Tripoli were under European control for much of the fifty years before 1580. Still, the Algerian corsairs appear to have amply made up for the absence of their brethren. From 1530, when Kheir-ed-din Barbarossa solidified his power there, until the culminating decade of 1560–70, which Braudel termed “the first brilliant age of Algiers,” the city’s *ra’is* plundered the coasts of Italy and Spain almost unopposed, repeatedly filling their galleys almost to the foundering point with Christian captives.¹⁰⁶ Diego de Haëdo estimated that there were 25,000 slaves in Algiers in 1579, and, considering how many slaves were pouring into the city in the decades before that, such a figure is very likely a valid minimum for much of the half-century 1530–80. Assuming that the attrition rate among slaves in the sixteenth century was no lower than in the seventeenth (deaths by plague may have been less, but in recompense there were a number of large-scale abjurations among captive Christians) the Algerian *ra’is* probably brought in as many as 300,000 European slaves in these fifty years.¹⁰⁷

The result, then, is that between 1530 and 1780 there were almost certainly a million and quite possibly as many as a million and a quarter white, European Christians enslaved by the Muslims of the Barbary Coast. Such an estimate is only as good as the figures on which it is based, of course, and it could never be claimed that those collected and examined here would measure up to the much more formidable

shipping tallies available for calculating the volume of the Atlantic slave trade. But setting a number – or in any case a range – on the Barbary Coast trade at least makes it possible to put this particular arena of slaving activity into the more general historiographical debate on the nature and extent of slave trafficking, a debate that, as Paul Lovejoy has commented, is “far from a quibble over numbers.”¹⁰⁸

In fact, even a tentative slave count in Barbary inevitably begs a host of new questions. To begin with, the estimates arrived at here make it clear that for most of the first two centuries of the modern era, nearly as many Europeans were taken forcibly to Barbary and worked or sold as slaves as were West Africans hauled off to labor on plantations in the Americas. In the sixteenth century especially, during which time the Atlantic slave runners still averaged only around 3,200 Africans annually, the corsairs of Algiers – and later Tunis and Tripoli – were regularly snatching that many or more white captives on a single raiding voyage to Sicily, the Balearics, or Valencia.¹⁰⁹ Hardest hit in these escalating raids were the sailors, merchants, and coastal villagers of Italy and Greece and of Mediterranean Spain and France. Testimony abounds of the near-paralysis of commercial shipping and the desolation of many coastal lands, which was so severe in some areas that the corsairs themselves scarcely bothered to raid there:

Everyone ... could see with their own eyes the desolation of the Spanish, French, and Italian coasts, thanks to the pertinacious infestation of these pirates: the wretched beaches, the abandoned islands, the shacks [reduced to] ashes, the fishermen in flight, and the vessels of the Barbarian rovers loitering about on the sea.¹¹⁰

Since these attacks were for the most part limited to merchant shipping and the fairly narrow coastal zones of states that were, comparatively speaking, both wealthy and populous, the economic and social damage they caused might strike some as having been little more than visual and fleeting. Certainly their cumulative devastation fell far short of that produced by the slaving wars that were even then beginning to ravage the interior of West Africa; nor did they provoke anything like the net population decline that would later afflict the African states.¹¹¹ When the political will existed, the Spanish and French monarchies, as well as many of the smaller Italian states, could afford to give their citizens at least some protection and bring back some of them from slavery. Clearly those African kingdoms caught up in the Atlantic slave trade had no analogous opportunities to send ransoming parties –

much less punitive expeditions – to the Americas in order to free their people.¹¹² Yet just what such continual efforts cost the Europeans – in terms of personal wealth, but also in such public expenditures as charitable spending, coastal fortifications, and naval squadrons – is still surprisingly unclear. Even for the most robust economies of the era, such regular outlays and losses could not have been lightly borne: Pierre Dan estimated that between 1605 and 1634 the Algerians took over 600 ships, worth “more than twenty million [livres];” the 80 French merchant ships they captured between 1628 and 1635 were valued at 4,752,000 livres; likewise, ransoming 1,006 slaves from Algiers in 1768 cost the French Trinitarians 3,500,000 livres.¹¹³ What paying out such sums over the course of several centuries meant to the states involved – in terms of lost investment capital, frustrated development projects, or abandoned human settlements – has yet to be fully explored.¹¹⁴

On the African side of the Mediterranean the slave trade also left profound traces, even if not as marked as that produced by the Atlantic slave trade in the Americas and primarily in racial and cultural terms. Even though the breeding activities of male slaves were tightly, even ferociously controlled, the many female European captives who were taken sexually by their masters and the thousands of immigrant renegades all brought a great deal of European blood into local gene pools. Moreover, others of European origin long enjoyed prominence in these outlaw societies, especially in Algiers. The 20,000 or more janissaries who formed the core of Turkish power in that city were by definition all born of Balkan parents; their bastard children from slave or Moorish women – the *couloglis* – were so numerous as to constitute their own social caste in many of the regencies. There was also an elite and highly influential stratum of renegades throughout the century between 1580 to 1680, again particularly in Algiers. Lists of the corsairing *ra'is* from this period make it clear that more than half of these pirate captains were of European origin, men who came to hold considerable economic sway in cities that were dependent on piracy for their well-being.¹¹⁵ Their wealth and power made many of them dominant figures in the local culture; the slipshod (though often ferocious) Islam they practiced and the bastardized *lingua franca* they spoke to their fellow citizens had an enduring impact on the unique creole communities that developed and flourished for several centuries in the Maghreb.

By the late 1700s visitors were noting how “the inhabitants of Algiers have a rather white complexion,” an observation that more recent scholars have confirmed.¹¹⁶ Once an almost equal amalgam of

European slaves, janissaries, renegades, Moors, Berbers, and Jews, Algiers might indeed be offered as the region's best example of a creole society in the 1600s and 1700s. Yet after flourishing for centuries, this complex dynamic eventually failed, submerged by the advent of colonialism and then independence, evaporating before the steady inflow of surrounding, indigenous cultures and peoples arriving from the hinterland.¹¹⁷

Three centuries of a slave culture thus appear to have left only faint traces on the Barbary ports. Today, what remains of their mixed-race societies is an amalgam of Moorish, Berber, and sub-Saharan peoples, but little recalls the many thousands of Europeans – Latins, Germans, English, Flemish, Irish, Greeks, Albanians, and Slavs – who spent decades and often ended their lives in these towns. There is nothing like the tangible genetic presence of black Africans in the Americas, nor the cultural and racial heritage of the Chinese who were once brought to the American west coast as contract laborers, nor of Indians who spread throughout the British Empire. Nor have these slaves left behind much in the way of physical remnants: except in Morocco, one searches in vain for the markets where these slaves were once sold and for the prisons in which they were incarcerated. Indeed, what scant cultural contribution European slaves might have made to these societies was obliterated, first by a century of (predominantly French) colonial presence, then by nearly fifty years of self-rule throughout the Maghreb. All that remains are the products of slave labor: the palaces, fortifications, streets, and harbor works they built, “vilely compelled to drag wagons, carry most immense cannon, very heavy stones, and other similar burdens under which some, for the great effort, often died.”¹¹⁸ Yet even these monuments to Barbary's special world of opulence and cruelty have for the most part been torn down or buried by more recent expansions and improvements. The Other Slavery, in other words, has also become the invisible slavery: an institution that, having survived for over three centuries to a greater or lesser degree, has now vanished, almost without a trace.

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