

COSIMO I DE' MEDICI e i “pirati” del Mediterraneo

Strategie di difesa marittima
del Granducato di Toscana

a cura di
Carolina Megale e Marco Paperini





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Corsairing and Enslavement in Grand Ducal Tuscany

Tamar Herzig

This essay focuses on the enslaving activities that went hand in hand with the naval and military endeavors of the Knights of Santo Stefano in the early modern era. Such activities were justified as an inevitable aspect of the wars between Christian and Muslim powers in the Mediterranean. As argued in this essay, though, their victims were not just the men who were directly involved in armed conflicts. They also included numerous women, little girls and boys, and men of non-Muslim origins—notably West Africans, but also Jews—some of whom were re-enslaved for the second or third time. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these human spoils of the corsairing warfare were forcibly transported to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, where they served social functions that had little to do with defense against the “Turkish” menace.

Il presente saggio analizza le attività di schiavitù che andavano di pari passo con le imprese navali e militari dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano agli inizi dell'età moderna. Tali azioni erano considerate una conseguenza inevitabile della guerra nel Mediterraneo tra la potenza cristiana e quella musulmana. Tuttavia, come evidenzia questo contributo, le vittime non furono solo gli uomini direttamente coinvolti nei conflitti armati. Tra queste vi erano anche numerose donne, bambine e bambini, e uomini di origine non musulmana – in particolare africani occidentali, ma anche ebrei – alcuni dei quali furono ridotti in schiavitù per la seconda o terza volta. Tra la fine del XVI e il XVII secolo, queste prede umane della guerra corsara furono deportate forzatamente nel Granducato di Toscana, dove assolsero a funzioni sociali che avevano ben poco a che fare con la difesa contro la minaccia “turca”.

This volume, based on the papers delivered in a stimulating conference held in November 2024, is dedicated to Cosimo I de' Medici (r. 1537–1574) and the maritime defensive strategies of Grand Ducal Tuscany. The following essay, while dealing with the Tuscan fleet, assumes a somewhat different

focus, by concentrating on the enslaving activities that went hand in hand with the naval and military endeavors of the Knights of Santo Stefano. Indeed, as Salvatore Bono, Giovanna Fiume, and others have observed, in the early modern Mediterranean corsairing and slavery were inseparably linked¹.

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¹ S. BONO, *Corsari nel Mediterraneo: Cristiani e musulmani fra guerra, schiavitù e commercio*, Milano 1993; S. BONO, *Schiavi. Una storia mediterranea (XVI–XIX secolo)*, Bologna 2016; *Le commerce des captifs: Les intermédiaires dans l'échange et le*

Slavery, it should be noted, was one of the defining features of the premodern Mediterranean basin². Within the broader Mediterranean setting, historians have pointed to the persistence of human bondage in the Italian peninsula and islands from the Roman era until the nineteenth century³. Tuscan participation in slaving became particularly marked in the sixteenth century, following the consolidation of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, and the adoption of slave-hunting corsairing as instruments in the ensuing Christian-Muslim conflict. Located midway between these two major powers and closely associated with Spain, Italian port cities consequently came to play important roles in the religiously-justified slaving wars of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries⁴. The maritime commercial hub of Livorno, a newly founded city in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, stands

out as the epitome of Italian involvement in transregional slavery during this period⁵.

The Dialectics of Freedom in a Free Port City

Initially a minor port village situated in the malaria-infested coastline of the Ligurian Sea, Livorno was acquired by the Florentine republic in 1421. A century later, in 1518–1533, the Medici rulers of Florence completed the construction of a castle that dominated Livorno's natural port. In the following decades, as the Medici regime consolidated its control over Tuscany, it turned to developing Livorno in the hope of solving the problem caused by the silting of Pisa's harbor which had, until then, served as Tuscany's chief port. Cosimo I de' Medici, the first Grand Duke of Tuscany, already envisioned the expansion of the town and harbor, but his son and heir Francesco I (r.

rachat des prisonniers en méditerranée, XVe–XVIIIe siècle, ed. W. KAISER, École française de Rome, Rome 2008; G. FIUME, *Schiavitù mediterranea: Corsari, rinnegati e santi di età moderna*, Milano 2009; G. WEISS, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2011.

² Y. ROTMAN, *Forms of Slavery*, in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, ed. P. Horden, S. Kinoshita, W. Malden 2014, pp. 263–278. See also D. HERSHENZON, *Towards a Connected History of Bondage in the Mediterranean: Recent Trends in the Field*, «History Compass», 15, (2017), pp. 1–13, and, for the early modern era, R. DAVIS, *The Geography of Slaving in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1500–1800*, «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», 37, 1, (2007), pp. 57–74.

³ S.A. EPSTEIN, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY 2001; G. BONAZZA, *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850*, Springer 2019. For the presence of enslaved domestic servants from Africa in Italian lands in the late nineteenth century see E.M. TROUTT POWELL, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2012, pp. 185–206.

⁴ R. DAVIS, *Slave Redemption in Venice, 1585–1797*, in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797*, ed. J.J. Martin, D. Romano, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, pp. 454–487.

⁵ M. GREENE, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2010, pp. 80–87. C. SANTUS, *Il 'turco' a Livorno. Incontri con l'Islam nella Toscana del Seicento*, Milano 2019, pp. 28–52.

1574–1587) was the one who implemented the project of turning Livorno into the first planned port city in Europe. Designed according to the principles of Renaissance architecture by Bernardo Buontalenti (1536–1608), the first stone of the new Tuscan city was laid in 1577⁶.

The significant investment in the harbor's infrastructure formed part of the Medici's plans to expand Tuscan mercantile activities. The regime was eager to enlarge Livorno's population and in particular, to attract merchants whose funds and international networks would boost Tuscan trade. For this purpose, in 1591 Francesco's brother and successor Ferdinando I de' Medici (r. 1587–1609), who was subsequently considered the city's veritable founder, issued a charter inviting merchants "of every nation" to settle in Livorno. The decree was promulgated again, in a modified form, in 1593. The two *Costituzioni Livornine*, better known as *Livornine*, offered notable incentives to foreigners who decided to settle in a frontier town surrounded by insalubrious marshes. The *Livornine* safeguarded immigrants to Livorno from excessive taxation, granted them freedom of religious practice, promised protection

from prosecution by the Roman Inquisition, and forbade the use of violence against members of religious minorities⁷.

In addition to luring Sephardi Jews and *conversos*, the Medici's welcoming policy toward different ethnoreligious groups attracted Orthodox Greeks, Armenians, and Protestant immigrants from England and the Low Countries, as well as French Huguenots, to Livorno. As a result, its population grew from a mere 500 in 1590 to more than 3,000 by the first years of the seventeenth century. The Medici's promotion of a religiously pluralistic city, which comprised diverse 'nations,' turned Livorno into a leading early modern European free port⁸. Recent studies have underscored the limits of tolerance in the regulation of daily life in the city, emphasizing its containment within a clearly defined Catholic reformation framework. According to Francesca Trivellato, Livorno's cosmopolitanism was a communal one; although its population was exceptionally diverse, Livornese society remained highly segregated. The collective legal status conferred on the different 'nations' integrated their members into the fabric of Livornese economy, but culturally and socially it set them apart from one

⁶ C. TAZZARA, *The Free Port of Livorno and the Transformation of the Mediterranean World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, pp. 20–44; *Livorno 1606–1806: luogo di incontro tra popoli e culture*, ed. A. Prosperi, Torino 2009.

⁷ A. MILANO, *La Costituzione Livornina del 1593*, «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel», ser. 3, 34:7, (July 1968), pp. 394–410; B.D. COOPERMAN, *Trade and Settlement: The Establishment of the Jewish Communities in Leghorn and Pisa (1591–1626)*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1976, pp. 124–335, 388–390; L. FRATTARELLI FISCHER, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto: Ebrei a Pisa e Livorno (secoli XVI–XVIII)*, Torino 2008, pp. 30–56; *La Livornina: convivenza religiosa e commercio internazionale a Livorno (secc. XVI–XIV)*, ed. L. Felici, Roma 2024.

⁸ TAZZARA, *The Free Port of Livorno*, pp. 49–77; GREENE, *Catholic Pirates*, pp. 84–86. In the early modern era, a 'free port' offered considerable benefits and exemptions in comparison to other ports (*ibid.*, p. 248, n. 23).

another, and from the majority of Tuscany's Catholic population⁹. As the seventeenth century progressed, the conversionary pressure exerted on non-Catholics increased – reaching its peak during the reign of Cosimo III (r. 1670–1723) – although the Medici Grand Dukes generally sought to contain the Roman Inquisition's activity in Livorno, and never revoked the *Livornine*¹⁰.

The *Livornine* was also extended to “Turks and Moors”, as well as to “Persians”, but only a few Muslims voluntarily opted to relocate to Tuscany¹¹. Livorno's Muslim community was composed almost exclusively of enslaved individuals, captured on board of Ottoman ships or during sacks in the coasts of the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa by the military Order of Santo Stefano. In the early seventeenth century, enslaved Muslims constituted more than eight percent of

Livorno's overall population.

During the winter months, when they were not forced to pull oar in the galleys, enslaved men were housed overnight in prisonlike conditions at the slave *Bagno*. This architectural structure, completed in 1605 and modelled on slave prisons in North Africa and Istanbul, would remain the largest and most active slave prison in the Italian peninsula throughout the early modern era¹². Thus, seventeenth-century Livorno became famous not only as Europe's leading free port, but also for the first slave prison to be constructed in continental Christian Europe¹³.

The Medici Grand Dukes granted various incentives to Protestant Dutch and English corsairs who were based in Livorno, whose most lucrative gains stemmed from human trafficking¹⁴. The *Livornine* similarly promised Jewish settlers

⁹ F. TRIVELLATO, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2009, pp. 51–52, 71–76.

¹⁰ L. FRATTARELLI FISCHER *Percorsi di conversione di ebrei nella Livorno di fine Seicento*, «Nuovi Studi Livornesi», 13, (2006), pp. 139–171; L. FRATTARELLI FISCHER, S. VILLANI, ‘People of Every Mixture’: Immigration, Tolerance and Religious Conflicts in Early Modern Livorno, in *Immigration and Emigration in Historical Perspective*, ed. A.K. Isaacs, Pisa 2007, pp. 93–103.

¹¹ On the few Muslim merchants who were involved in slave ransoming deals in Livorno see *Traffici e schiavi fra Livorno e Algeria nella prima decade del ‘600*, «Bollettino Storico Pisano», 51, (1982), pp. 67–104; B. POMARA SAVERINO, *Rifugiati. I moriscos e l'Italia*, Firenze University Press, Florence 2017, pp. 257–259.

¹² SANTUS, *Il ‘turco’ a Livorno*, pp. 13–26, 34, 42; TAZZARA, *The Free Port of Livorno*, pp. 52–53; M. ROSEN, *Pietro Tacca's Quattro Mori and the Conditions of Slavery in Early Seicento Tuscany*, «The Art Bulletin», 97:1, (2015), pp. 34–57.

¹³ L. FRATTARELLI FISCHER, *Il bagno delle galere in ‘terra cristiana’. Schiavi a Livorno fra Cinque e Seicento*, «Nuovi Studi Livornesi», 8, (2000), pp. 69–94; S. NADALO, *Negotiating Slavery in a Tolerant Frontier: Livorno's Turkish Bagno (1547–1747)*, «Mediaevalia», 32, (2011), pp. 275–324. On the slave prisons established in Hospitaller Malta, whose construction preceded the completion of Livorno's *Bagno*, see A. BROGINI, *Des frontières au sein d'une ville-frontière? Les non-catholiques à Malte à l'époque moderne (XVI^e–XVII^e)*, «Cahiers de la Méditerranée», 72, (2006), pp. 1–14.

¹⁴ F. ANGIOLINI, *Slaves and Slavery in Early Modern Tuscany (1500–1700)*, «Italian History and Culture», 3, (1997),

in the city the right to sell, purchase, and own enslaved individuals who were not baptized Christians¹⁵. Thanks to the privileges accorded to foreign merchants, the elimination of customs, and the liberal treatment of goods, the new city of Livorno contributed significantly to the evolution of free trade. Yet its success stemmed in part from the exploitation of non-free humans, forced migration, and the political economy of ransoming captives. In other words, in Livorno freedom and its negation were two sides of the same coin.

The Enslavement of Muslim Men

The Order of Santo Stefano, which Cosimo I founded in 1561, played a significant role not only in securing free trade in Livorno, but also in supplying unfree laborers to this port city. Cosimo I established this military order for the explicit aim of protecting Tuscan mercantile and naval interests from Muslim powers – and especially for preventing Ottoman hegemony in the Mediterranean Sea. Both Cosimo I and his successors enthusiastically encouraged the order's corsairing and ensuing enslavement initiatives, which were justified as key elements in the confrontations between Christianity and Islam. This propaganda

had its best-known visual expression in the monumental sculpture of *I Quattro Mori* (the Four Moors), which was originally placed in Livorno's harbor and was meant to be seen by anyone who reached the Tuscan city by water.

The sculptural group comprises a marble statue of Ferdinando de' Medici, the city's founding father, subjugating four chained slaves, cast in bronze. The figures of the slaves display the features of contemporary Muslim men of Anatolian background ('Turks') and Maghribi origins ('Moors'). The work was initiated by Giovanni Bandini, who sculpted Ferdinando's effigy in the 1590s, and was completed by Pietro Tacca, who cast the bronze figures in the early 1620s¹⁶.

Originally meant to serve as a powerful symbol of Medici absolutism and of Livorno's prominent position in the Mediterranean slave trade, the monument of *I Quattro Mori* nowadays strikes viewers in its original portrayal of ethnically diverse individuals and in its emphatic depiction of enslaved men¹⁷. Considered a property of the Grand Dukes, Muslim men made up the majority of the enslaved population in Livorno, supplying forced labor as rowers in the Tuscan fleet and in construction projects dependent on the Medici state,

pp. 67–86; TAZZARA, *The Free Port of Livorno*, p. 51.

¹⁵ R. TOAFF, *Schiavitù e schiavi nella Nazione Ebraica di Livorno nel Sei e Settecento*, «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel», ser. 3, 51:1, (1985), pp. 82–95; SALVADORINI, *Traffici e schiavi fra Livorno e Algeria*.

¹⁶ A. BROOK, *Pietro Tacca a Livorno: il Monumento a Ferdinando I de' Medici*, Livorno 2008; GREENE, *Catholic Pirates*, pp. 82–92; NADALO, *Negotiating Slavery*, pp. 284–287.

¹⁷ ROSEN, *Pietro Tacca's Quattro Mori*, pp. 34–57. See also F. POLESE, *I Quattro Mori: storia e leggenda*, Livorno 1999.

such as the arsenal in Pisa, which was built at the behest of Cosimo I. Housed together at the slave Bagno with hundreds of fellow Muslims, many of whom were of similar ethnic background and spoke the same language, both the Maghribi 'Moors' and the Anatolian 'Turks' were able to maintain a sense of religious and cultural identity.

Unlike victims of the Atlantic slave trade and the enslaved sub-Saharan Africans who were forcibly transported to Europe, Muslims captured by European powers in North Africa or the Eastern Mediterranean could also retain claims on their coreligionists to facilitate their eventual redemption. Medicean authorities relied on educated slaves and formerly enslaved converts to negotiate the ransom of Muslims who belonged to the state with relatives and patrons in their home countries¹⁸. As pawns in the military and political struggle between Muslim and Christian powers, enslaved Muslims could also hope to be freed in a prisoners' exchange with Catholics. While only a small portion ever actually

succeeded in regaining their freedom through either swapping or the more likely ransom, the awareness and pursuit of these possibilities nonetheless influenced the slavery experience of many others¹⁹.

Although the galley slavery of Muslim men in the service of the Medici Grand Dukes was the dominant form of human bondage in early modern Tuscany, it was not the only one. Quite a few enslaved persons in the Grand Duchy were privately owned. These included enslaved individuals who were given by the Medici rulers as gifts, as well as those who were purchased from the state by local residents, who either kept them or profited from their resale²⁰. Whereas quite a few of the privately-held enslaved persons in Tuscany were male adults, many of them were women and children of both sexes.

Since sculptural monuments in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe were generally meant to broadcast the humiliating military defeat of religious enemies by Catholic powers, they usually did not portray enslaved women, girls, or boys, only grown-

¹⁸ SALVADORINI, *Traffici e schiavi fra Livorno e Algeria*, pp. 75–78, 84, 94, 98–99, 102; SANTUS, *Il 'turco' a Livorno*, pp. 27–52; ANGIOLINI, *Slaves and Slavery*, pp. 67–86.

¹⁹ FONTENAY, *Esclaves et/ou captifs*; D. HERSHENZON, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2018, pp. 68–69; HERSHENZON, *Towards a Connected History*, pp. 3, 6.

²⁰ V. SALVADORINI, *Traffici con i paesi islamici e schiavi a Livorno nel XVII secolo: problemi e suggestioni*, in *Livorno e il Mediterraneo nell'età Medicea*, Atti del Convegno, Livorno 1978, pp. 206–255; TOAFF, *Schiavitù e schiavi*, p. 87; C. GALASSO, *Alle origini di una comunità: ebrei ed ebrei a Livorno nel Seicento*, Firenze 2002, pp. 141–145; SANTUS, *Il 'turco' a Livorno*, p. 41; G. CALAFAT, *Jurisdictional Pluralism in a Litigious Sea (1590–1630): Hard Cases, Multi-Sited Trials and Legal Enforcement between North Africa and Italy*, «Past and Present», Supplement 14, (2019), pp. 142–178; G. CALAFAT, C. SANTUS, *Les avatars du 'Turc': Esclaves et commerçants musulmans à Livourne (1600–1750)*, in *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe: Une intégration invisible*, ed. J. Dakhli, B. Vincent, Paris 2011, pp. 489–490.

up men²¹. With the notable exception of the *Fontana dei Mori* (Fountain of the Moors), inspired by Tacca's sculpture and executed by Sergio Venturi and Pompeo Castiglia in Marino (Lazio) in 1632–1642 – which includes the figures of two chained women – such monuments usually featured solely the masculine bodies of African or Asian men²². The girls and women who were captured by the Knights of Santo Stefano and forcibly transported to Livorno were depicted only in a handful of paintings and drawings²³. These visual sources, like the more robust documentary evidence pertaining to female enslavement in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, hitherto remain largely untapped²⁴.

The Enslavement of Muslim and Jewish Women and Children

Although the Knights of Santo Stefano

were interested mainly in enslaving men – the pirates, rowers, soldiers, and merchants whom they captured during their expeditions – they regularly also caught women and children, who were traveling on board vessels carrying enemy flags, or seized during coastal raids. After the knights' most successful incursion, on the Maghrebi town of Bône (Annaba, east of Algiers) in 1607, they reported that 1500 individuals were captured, "including men and women, young and old" people (fig. 1)²⁵. In that same year, eighteen Muslims were enslaved during the Tuscan raid near the Tunisian stronghold of Biserta; two of them were adult men, six were girls, nine were boys and one was a pregnant woman, who gave birth during the corsairs' voyage back to Livorno²⁶. Four years later, Tuscan forces seized forty-eight slaves, a group comprising of "men, and women, and male

²¹ M. CAFFIERO, *Gli schiavi del papa: conversioni e libertà dei musulmani a Roma in età moderna*, Brescia 2022, pp. 75–84.

²² S.F. OSTROW, *Pietro Tacca and his Quattro Mori: The Beauty and Identity of the Slaves*, «Artibus et Historiae», 71, (2015), pp. 168–169; N. MATAR, *Mediterranean Captivity through Arab Eyes, 1517–1798*, Leiden 2021, pp. 229–251.

²³ J.M. MASSING, *The Iconography of Slavery in the Seventeenth Century*, in *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem*, ed. E. McGrath, J.M. Massing, Warburg Institute, London and Turin, 2012, pp. 87–88; SANTUS, *Il 'turco' a Livorno*, p. 113; K. POOLE-JONES, *The Medici, Maritime Empire, and the Enduring Legacy of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, in *Florence in the Early Modern World: New Perspectives*, ed. N.S. Baker, B.J. Maxson, New York 2020, pp. 170, 177; C.M. SICCA, *Da schiavi sulle galere a cortigiani di basso servizio: 'Giovani di barbare nazioni' nella Toscana medicea*, in *Le rappresentazioni dei neri nell'età moderna: temi e questioni metodologiche*, ed. C. Savettieri, Roma 2022, pp. 56–57, 69.

²⁴ T. HERZIG, *Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence: A Multiple Perpetrator Rape in Seventeenth-Century Livorno*, «American Historical Review», 127:1, (March 2022), pp. 94–122; EAD., *Enslavement, Religion, and Cultural Commemoration in Livorno*, «Religions», 14:5, (May 2023), pp. 1–13.

²⁵ «Relatione della presa di Bona in Barberia fatta per comandamento del Ser.mo G. D. di Toscana in nome del Ser.mo Principe suo p.mogenito dalle galere della Religione di S. Stefano il dì 18 settembre 1607 sotto il comando di Silvio Piccolomini Gran Contestabile di detta Religione», published in G. GUARNIERI, *I Cavalieri di Santo Stefano nella storia della Marina Italiana (1562–1859)*, Pisa 1960, p. 322 «ascesero tutti gli schiavi tra uomini e donne, piccoli e grandi al numero di 1500».

²⁶ S. BONO, *Schiavi musulmani nell'Italia moderna: Galeotti, vu' cumpra', domestici*, Perugia 1999, pp. 59–60.

1. Volterrano, *Fasti medicei, Cosimo II riceve i vincitori dell'impresa di Bona*, 1637–46, Villa medicea della Petraia, Firenze.



and female children”, from the Greek island of Euboea (Negroponte)²⁷.

On August 19th, 1610, the Grand Ducal fleet captured 479 “men, women, and

children” in their assault on Bischeri, a fortress-town located eighty miles west of Algiers²⁸. These enslaved individuals included a group of fourteen Jews from Tetouan and about eighty *moriscos* – forcibly baptized Muslims who were exiled from Spain toward the end of 1609. The *moriscos*, most of whom were women and children, were captured by the Knights of Santo Stefano near the shores of North Africa not long after their expulsion, and were then brought back to Europe. Once they arrived in Livorno, the enslaved *moriscos* and their children were put up for sale²⁹. Eight months later, though, fifteen of the *moriscos* remained unsold and continued to languish in Livorno’s slave prison³⁰.

As for the Jews from Tetouan, the Bagno’s officially appointed physician (*medico fiscale*), Bernardetto Buonromei (d. c.1617), attempted to extort exorbitant fees for their ransom from the affluent Jewish community in Livorno, but to no avail. Buonromei then resolved to assign the enslaved Jewish women to the men’s quarters at the Bagno,

²⁷ «Nota delle prede fatte l’anno 1611 da sei galere della Sacra Relig.ne di S. Stefano sotto la carica del Cav.r Iacopo Inghirami Ammirag.o», published in GUARNIERI, *I Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, p. 461: «A dì 7 d.o [Maggio] all’isola di Negroponte stiavi no. 48 frà huomini, e donne, e ragazzi maschi, e femine presi in terra à un Casale detto Disto».

²⁸ «Nota delle prede fatte quest’anno 1610 dalle Galere della Sacra Religione di S. Stefano sotto la comandita di Iacopo Inghirami Ammiraglio di esse» published in GUARNIERI, *I Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, p. 460: «A dì 19 del sud.o mese [d’Agosto] la mattina si predò la terra di Bischeri à Ponente d’Algieri 90 miglia, si fece stiavi fra huo.i donne e fig.i n. 479».

²⁹ C. SANTUS, *Moreschi in Toscana: progetti e tentativi di insediamento tra Livorno e la Maremma (1610–1614)*, «Quaderni storici», 144, a. XLVIII, no. 3, (December 2013), pp. 754–756; SANTUS, *Il ‘turco’ a Livorno*, 96–108; POMARA SAVERINO, *Rifugiati*, pp. 72–73, 100–104, 284–288.

³⁰ «Nota di tutti li stiavi e stiaive spagnole morescate, che sono di presente nel Bagno di S.A.S. questo dì 27 d’aprile 1611» list attached to Alessandro Siriga’s letter of April 22, 1611 to Lorenzo Usimbardi, the Grand Duke’s secretary (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, no. 1308, unfoliated).

where they were raped by a multitude of enslaved Muslims and Catholic convicts who were housed in the slave prison³¹. The leaders of the Livornese Jewish community protested the horrific assault, noting: «of these poor women who had been raped and dishonored, one lost her mind, and overcome by desperation threw her daughter from the window, and the girl's life is in danger, and she wanted to do the same to the baby who is nursing at her breast, had she not been impeded³²».

This account reveals the scope of the non-military dimensions of Tuscan corsairing. The Jewish mother from Tetouan and her two young children were clearly not enslaved because the Knights of Santo Stefano perceived them to be a military danger or, indeed, any potential threat to Tuscan mercantile or political interests. Rather, Tuscan forces captured them, together with eleven other Jews, as they were trying to flee Tetouan. Already devastated by a series of plague outbreaks and food shortages, economic conditions in this Northern Moroccan city deteriorated

even further in mid-1610, when its governor, Ahmad Al-Naqsis (d. 1622), rebelled against Morocco's Sultan, Muley al-Shaykh (d. 1613)³³. In a desperate attempt to escape economic crisis and political instability, the fourteen impoverished Jews from Tetouan boarded a vessel heading to Tunis, but were captured before reaching their destination. The primary motivation for enslaving the Tetouanese Jews was an economic one; namely, trying to profit from their ransom. When this did not prove as successful as the Tuscan *medico fiscale* had hoped, he subjected the Jewish women and children to such cruel tortures that it led one of the enslaved mothers to try and kill her children, to protect them from brutal abuse under slavery³⁴.

Similar attempts by mothers – who were aware of the physical and mental torments awaiting the human prey captured by Tuscan slavers – are also reported later in the seventeenth century, during the War of Morea (1684-1699). One case of attempted infanticide aimed at preventing a child's enslavement reportedly occurred

³¹ HERZIG, *Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence*.

³² Archivio di Stato di Livorno, Governatore e Auditore, filza 2602, vol. 1, fol. 418^r (damaged document), reproduced in R. TOAFF, *La 'Cassa per il Riscatto degli Schiavi' del Granduca nella Livorno del Seicento*, «Studi Livornesi», no. 1, (1986), p. 52: «[una] di quelle povere donne state violate e disonorate, è uscita di senno e vinta dalla disperazione ha gettato una figliuola per la finestra la quale è in pericolo di vita et una creatura che si trova al petto voleva fare il simile, se non che fu impedita».

³³ See A.Y. ODDI, *El gobierno de Tetuán por la familia Al-Naqsis (1597-1673)*, Tétouan 1955, pp. 8–11; B. ROSENBERGER, *Population et crise au Maroc aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles: famines et épidémies*, «Cahiers de la Méditerranée», no. 2, (1977), pp. 137–149; A. BOUNOU, *Los An-Naqsis protagonistas de la situación política en Tetuán en el siglo XVII*, in *El siglo XVII hispanomorroquí*, ed. M. Salhi, Rabat 1997, pp. 159–165; M. GARCÍA-ARENAL, G. WIEGERS, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, pp. 29–31, 55, 60, 76.

³⁴ HERZIG, *Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence*.

during the 1685 sack of Corone (Koroni, a town on the southwest peninsula of the Peloponnese), in which 1336 slaves, consisting mostly of women and children, were seized³⁵. Recounting the unfolding of this naval campaign, Domenico Gatteschi, a Knight of Santo Stefano, remarked:

A Great number of people were enslaved, mostly women and children; one of these women who, while being led to the ships, because of the great debate that she made, being very close to labor, finally gave birth at the time she was on the way to boarding, and having delivered the baby, as soon as she was able to use her hands she threw her son into the water so that (as she said) he would not become a slave of Christians³⁶.

Gatteschi set the enslaved woman's comportment against the backdrop of the confessional conflict between Christianity and Islam. According to the Tuscan corsair, the unnamed female Muslim from Corone intentionally delayed her boarding. Then, as soon as she delivered her baby, killed him because she refused

to acknowledge the victory of Christian forces, who snatched the town of Corone from the Ottoman Empire. The enslaved woman's deed was, undoubtedly, an act of resistance. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that for her, saving her son from the horrors of slavery was no less significant than affirming her identity as a Muslim believer³⁷.

The Enslavement of Sub-Saharan African Women

The enslavement of children of both sexes alongside women, including pregnant ones, remained common in the later stages of the War of Morea, in which the Tuscan fleet fought, together with its Venetian and Maltese allies, against Ottoman forces³⁸. Yet, many of the individuals that the Catholic corsairs eventually enslaved during the capture of coastal towns and villages in the Eastern Mediterranean were not Muslims, but rather Sub-Saharan Africans who had themselves been enslaved by Ottoman slavers, and sometimes also

³⁵ BONO, *Schiavi: Una storia mediterranea*, pp. 94–95.

³⁶ Domenico Gatteschi, "Breve ragguaglio ho diario del seguito ne 5 viaggi fatti in Levante dalle nostre Galere della Religione di S. Stefano in haiuto dell'Armata Veneta, scritto e notato il tutto giorno per giorno con alcune poche notizie di quei luoghi principali," reproduced in G. BONIFACIO, *Campagne dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano in Levante: 1684–1688*, «Bollettino storico livornese», 2, 1939, pp. 136–137: «Furon fatti gran quantità di schiavi massime di donne e ragazzi; una di queste donne che in esser condotte alle navi vi fu che per il gran dibattimento che fece essendo prossima al partorire finalmente partorì in tempo che andava per imbarcare, e partorito che ebbe subito che potette adoperar le mani scagliò suo figlio in mare perché (come ella disse) non divenisse schiavo de Christiani».

³⁷ A. AGOSTINI, *Guerra e non solo: Le campagne militari in Levante (1684–1688) 'narrate' da alcuni cavalieri toscani*, «Rivista di letteratura storiografica italiana», 5, (2021), p. 152.

³⁸ K.M. SETTON, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia 1991, pp. 271–300.

Jews. The Muslim captives themselves were, in most cases, liberated in exchange for the Christian prisoners taken by Ottoman warriors during the battles³⁹. Hence, in September 1684 Captain Romolo Navarrette reported the outcome of the siege of Prevesa to the Secretary of War in Florence, exclaiming: «[as for] the hostages of both sides, the capitulations stipulated that they [the Muslims] should all, with their families (except for the Moors, who shall remain slaves) be placed on ships and transported to a destination according to their wishes⁴⁰». Two years later, in August 1686, Admiral Cammilo Guido wrote to the Secretary of State in Florence that the truce in Nafplio (Napoli di Romania) included «the same conditions as in Navarino and Modone, though leaving not only the Blacks [neri] but also the Jews [ebrei] enslaved» in the possession of the conquerors⁴¹.

Some of the enslaved Black Africans who were captured during this phase of the War

of Morea arrived in Tuscany in the summer of 1686. On August 27 of that year, the head of Livorno's customs bureau informed the Grand Duke's secretary in Florence:

Six Black female slaves, sent by the lord Lorenzo Gonieri, Vice Commissioner of the galleys of His Most Serene Highness came, and with them two [male] Moors... they are the part that belongs to His Most Serene Highness from the seizing of Old Navarino. This morning... I have not only received the six Black women, but also a little boy that one of them delivered during the expedition, on the 12 of last month... there is another pregnant Black woman, who should not take long [before giving birth]⁴².

Ignazio Fabroni, a Knight of Santo Stefano who left behind an album of drawings from his voyages with the Tuscan fleet in 1664–1687, produced a visual representation of two other Black African women, who were forcibly transported to Tuscany shortly after the six enslaved females from Old Navarino⁴³. Fabroni

³⁹ GUARNIERI, *I Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, pp. 263–264, 419; SETTON, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks*, p. 291.

⁴⁰ «Lettera del Capitano Romolo Navarrette al Segretario di Guerra per informarlo della conquista della Prevesa», reproduced in GUARNIERI, *I Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, p. 399: «... gl'ostaggi da ambi le parti, le capitolazioni sono state queste, che saranno tutti con lo famiglie (colla riserva de Mori, q[ua]lli resteranno schiavi) messi sopra barche, e condotti dove vogliono».

⁴¹ «Lettera dell'Ammiraglio Cammillo Guidi al Segretario di Stato in Firenze per informarlo della capitolazione della Piazzaforte di Napoli di Romania», reproduced in GUARNIERI, *I Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, p. 419: «le medesime conditioni che a quelli di Navarino e Modone, restando però schiavi non solo i neri ma ancora gl'Ebrei».

⁴² Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, no. 2086, letter of August 27, 1686: «sono venute sei schiave negre mandate dal sig[nore] Lorenzo Gonieri, vice commessario delle galere di S.A.S., e queste con due mori... sono la parte aspettante a S.A.S. della presa di Navarino vecchio. Questa mattina... non solo ò ricevuto le sei negre, ma anco un figliolino che una di esse à messo alla luce per viaggio, ne' 12 del mese passato... ci è altra negra gravida che non doverà tardare».

⁴³ This album is analyzed in A. AGOSTINI, *Istantanee dal Seicento. L'album di disegni del cavaliere pistoiese Ignazio*

2. Ignazio Fabroni,
*Album di ricordi di
 viaggi e di navigazioni
 sopra le galere
 toscane dall'anno
 1664 all'anno 1687*,
 Biblioteca Nazionale
 Centrale di Firenze,
 ms Rossi Cassigoli,
 199 c.256.



identified the figures in his manuscript drawing with the following words: «These are a [male] Moor with two [female] Moors from Modone who, as slaves, are the part belonging to His Most Serene Highness⁴⁴». His drawing, however, makes it clear that the three “Moors” in question were of Sub-

Saharan, rather than North African origins (fig. 2).

By the late seventeenth century, Italians increasingly associated the physical traits of people of Sub-Saharan African origins with enslaved status⁴⁵. Thus, although the Africans captured in Old Navarino

Fabroni, Firenze 2017.

⁴⁴ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Conv. Sopp., Rossi Cassigoli, Ms. 199, *Album di ricordi di viaggi e di navigazioni sulle galere toscane dall'anno 1664 al 1687*, unpaginated: «Questi sono un moro con due more di Modone che toccorono stiaie di parte a S.A.S.»

⁴⁵ See G. BOCCADAMO, *A Napoli: 'Mori Negri' fra Cinque e Seicento*, in *Il chiaro e lo scuro: Gli Africani nell'Europa del Rinascimento tra realtà e rappresentazione*, ed. G. Salvatore, Lecce 2021, pp. 143–158; L. DE LUCIA, *The Space between Borno and Palermo: Slavery and Its Boundaries in the Late Medieval Saharan-Mediterranean Region*,

and Modone had most likely converted to Islam following their earlier enslavement by Muslims, the Knights of Santo Stefano distinguished between these 'Blacks' and the Muslims who were natives to the Eastern Mediterranean regions. The latter were all released and allowed to depart from their conquered towns after the cessation of warfare, whereas the former were considered a part of the 'Tuscan corsairs' legitimate booty.

Conclusion

In 1686, then, eight women, one of whom was pregnant while another had recently given birth – as well as three men – who had all been owned as slaves by Muslims in the Peloponnese after being forcibly transported from Sub-Saharan Africa, were recaptured by the Knights of Santo Stefano and brought to Livorno, together with an enslaved baby boy. Initially professing a polytheistic or animist faith, these individuals were considered infidels by Muslims and Christians alike, and members of both religions were allowed to enslave them. When they passed from Muslim to

Christian hands, the eight women and three men all retained their enslaved status, regardless of their conversion to Islam under slavery⁴⁶.

Like the enslaved Jews from Ottoman lands who were captured by Tuscan corsairs in Nafplio, the women and men of African origins were excluded from the exchange agreements between Muslim and Christian powers. Although enslaved Jews fared worse than Muslims, enslaved women from Sub-Saharan Africa could not even await the prospects of being redeemed from captivity – a hope that their Jewish and Muslim counterparts could theoretically entertain. Yet while enslaved Muslim and Jewish women could be eligible for ransom, we know that, in practice, women of both groups had less of a chance to eventually return to their home countries than did their male counterparts⁴⁷.

The suffering of the enslaved females, whom the Knights of Santo Stefano brought to Tuscany, differed from that of enslaved men in significant ways. Not subject to the physical hardships of rowing in the Tuscan fleet, which led to the untimely death of many enslaved men, bondswomen

in *Rethinking Medieval Margins and Marginality*, ed. A. Zimo, T. Vann Sprecher, K. Reyerson, D. Blumenthal, London 2020, pp. 11–26; DE LUCIA, *The Exceptional History of a Black Saint in Sixteenth-Century Palermo. And Why It Matters*, «Transition», 132, (2021), pp. 54–67.

⁴⁶ Recent studies have called attention to the relevance of race for understanding enslavement in early modern Tuscany: G. FIUME, *Lo schiavo, il re e il cardinale. L'iconografia secentesca di Benedetto il Moro (1524–1589)*, «Quaderni storici», nuova serie, 41, no. 121:1, (April 2006), pp. 165–208; E. WILBOURNE, *Voice, Slavery, and Race in Seventeenth-Century Florence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2023; K. LOWE, *Provenance and Possession: Acquisitions from the Portuguese Empire in Renaissance Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2024. See also EPSTEIN, *Speaking of Slavery*.

⁴⁷ See HERZIG, *Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence*.

often endured sexual exploitation and the ensuing dangers of pregnancy and childbirth⁴⁸. According to canon law, the children born to enslaved non-Christian women were baptized as Catholics, regardless of their mother's consent⁴⁹. Fear of being separated from their baptized children, combined with their isolation within private households, close interaction with their owners, and lack of contact with other coreligionists rendered domestic slave women particularly susceptible to conversionary pressure⁵⁰.

When we think about the many important achievements of the strategies of maritime defense of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, then, we should also bear in mind

that slaving formed an integral part of the maritime pursuits of the Knights of Santo Stefano. These enslaving activities were justified as an inevitable aspect of the wars between Christian and Muslim powers in the Mediterranean, yet their victims were not just the men who were directly involved in armed conflicts. They also included numerous women, little girls and boys, and men of non-Muslim origins, some of whom were re-enslaved for the second or third time. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these human spoils of the corsairing warfare were forcibly transported to Tuscany, where they served social functions that had little to do with defense against the "Turkish" menace.

⁴⁸ SANTUS, *Il 'turco' a Livorno*, pp. 48, 101–113; ANGIOLINI, *Slaves and Slavery*, pp. 73–81.

⁴⁹ I. POUTRIN, *La captation de l'enfant de converti. L'évolution des normes canoniques à la lumière de l'antijudaïsme des XVIe–XVIIIe siècles*, «Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine», 62, (2015), pp. 52–59; J. SCHIEL, *Slaves' Religious Choice in Renaissance Venice: Applying Insights from Missionary Narratives to Slave Baptism Records*, «Archivio veneto», 146, (2015), pp. 36–37; EPSTEIN, *Speaking of Slavery*, p. 95.

⁵⁰ CALAFAT, SANTUS, *Les avatars du 'Turc'*, p. 490. On the conditions expediting the conversion of enslaved women in the seventeenth century, see B. BENNASSAR, *Conversions, esclavage et commerce des femmes dans les péninsules ibérique, italienne ou balkanique aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, «Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica», 2, 1996, pp. 101–109; K. SIEBENHUNER, *Conversion, Mobility and the Roman Inquisition in Italy around 1600*, «Past and Present», 200, (2008), pp. 5–35.

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