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Why Did Everything Go Wrong? Some Notes on Hispano-Algerian Diplomatic Misunderstanding from a Study of a Letter of Beylerbeyi Hasan Pasha (1545-51)

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Abstract: *The Spanish Monarchy became used to negotiating with Algerians in the final decades of the fifteenth centuries, when the Catholic Monarchs began reaching commercial and political agreements with many North African harbours. However, once the Ghazi corsairs from the Levant —Oruç and Hayreddin Barbarossa— conquered Algiers in the late 1510s, Spanish relationships with this harbour completely changed. From that moment on, Algiers tuned into an Ottoman possession subordinated to the House of Osman, posing a real threat to the Spanish Habsburgs' Mediterranean estates. Although the Spanish Monarchy sent several military expeditions to recover Algiers, none of these attempts was successful. At the same time, Spaniards also considered diplomacy as a useful means of maintaining a channel of communication with Algerians open. Hence, this article focuses on the first half of the sixteenth century and aims to explore the evolution of Spanish diplomacy with Ottoman Algiers to find out why these inter-policy contacts did not achieve the purposes hoped for by the government of the Spanish Monarchy. For that reason, after defining the diplomatic model deployed to negotiate with the Algerians and its goals, I shall explore how the Spanish Monarchy regarded the Ottoman governors of Algiers by studying a letter that beylerbeyi Hasan Pasha sent to the Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria in the summer of 1548. This letter, which is conserved in the* Archivo General de Simancas, *presents us with a great opportunity to note that the socio-political consideration granted by the Spaniards to their North African interlocutors had considerable influence on the results of diplomatic missions conducted in Algiers.*
Keywords: *Early Modern Diplomacy; Translation; Knowledge, Mediterranean; Ottoman Algiers; Spanish Monarchy.*
الملخص: يركز هذا المقال على دراسة تطور المفاوضات الدبلوماسية الإسبانية مع مدينة الجزائر ضمن النصف الأول من القرن السادس عشر، ويهدف أيضا إلى معرفة أسباب عدم الوصول لتحقيق الاتصالات والعلاقات ضمن سياسة مشتركة التي كانت

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تأملها حكومة المملكة الإسبانية. من أجل هذا سنتطرق لدراسة وتعريف النموذج الدبلوماسي المنتشر آنذاك للتفاوض مع الجزائريين. كما سنحدد أهدافه من خلال عرض نظرة نظام المملكة الإسبانية لحكام مدينة الجزائر من خلال وثيقة محفوظة في الأرشيف العام بسيمانكاس، وهي عبارة عن رسالة بعثها الحاكم حسن باشا إلى أندريا دوريا صائفة 1548. تعرض هذه الرسالة الإعتبارات الاجتماعية والسياسية التي عرضها الإسبان من أجل التفاوض مع من تحاوروا معهم من شمال إفريقيا والتي كانت لها تأثير جلي على نتائج العديد من البعثات الدبلوماسية التي أجريت في مدينة الجزائر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البحر الأبيض المتوسط، الترجمة، الجزائر العثمانية، المملكة الإسبانية، المعرفة، الدبلوماسية الحديثة.

1. Introduction

The Spanish Monarchy became used to negotiating with Algerians in the final decades of the fifteenth centuries, when the Catholic Monarchs began reaching commercial and political agreements with many North African harbours. However, once the Ghazi corsairs from the Levant — Oruç and Hayreddin Barbarossa — conquered Algiers in the late 1510s, Spanish relationships with this harbour completely changed. In fact, from that moment on, Algiers tuned into an Ottoman possession subordinated to the House of Osman, posing a real threat to the Spanish Habsburgs' Mediterranean estates. Although the Spanish Monarchy sent several military expeditions to recover Algiers, none of these attempts was successful; in fact, the problem grew worse when Hayreddin Barbarossa, ruler of Algiers and, from the early 1530s, Ottoman Grand Admiral, increased his corsair activity against the Christian coast. Opening a dialogue with the Algerians authorities, therefore, became essential to preserve the geostrategic interests of the Spanish Monarchy in the Western Mediterranean, even if the threat posed by Muslim piracy could not be completely cancelled.

This article focuses on the first half of the sixteenth century and aims to explore the evolution of Spanish diplomatic relationships with the city of Algiers to find out why these inter-policy contacts did not achieve the purposes hoped for by the government of the Spanish Monarchy. For that reason, after defining the diplomatic model deployed to negotiate with the Algerians and its goals, I shall explore how the Spanish Monarchy regarded the governors of Algiers by studying a letter that beylerbeyi Hasan Pasha sent to the Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria in the summer of 1548. This letter, which is conserved in the Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), presents us with a great opportunity to note that the socio-political consideration granted by the Spaniards to their North African interlocutors had considerable influence on the results of diplomatic missions conducted in Algiers.

2. Spanish Diplomatic Model with Ottoman Governors of Algiers

After the death of King Ferdinand II of Aragon (1516), the Western Mediterranean changed its status and passed from a space where regional powers competed among themselves to the setting for a clash of empires. The Ottoman expansion towards the Western Mediterranean with the collaboration of the Muslim corsairs and the French Monarchy led to an intensification of the Spanish diplomatic negotiations with the Islamic policies to shape several alliances useful to curb the power of the Sultans of Istanbul. For instance, in the North African context, when the Kingdom of Tlemcen was invaded in

1517 by Oruç, the elder brother of Hayreddin Barbarossa, the Berber ruler Muley Mohamum escaped to Oran to ask for military aid. Diego Hernández de Córdoba, Spanish governor of Oran (1510-12; 1516-18), decided to conduct the Muslim chief to the Iberian Peninsula to treat directly with Charles V. In that occasion a new agreement was signed with the final purpose of expelling the Barbarossa's brothers from Algiers. However, while such kind of political alliances with many Maghrebi policies were not able to reduce the impact of the Ottoman expansion in North Africa, the Algerian corsairs' raids on the Iberian and Italian coastlines became ever more a problem to solve. Given that the Spanish Monarchy did not face that matter with a military resolution, Charles V and his ministers chose to use diplomacy with the Ottoman local authorities, as well as with some corsair captains to defend the Western Mediterranean.

The analysis of these relationships reveals that the language used in diplomatic contacts goes from politically to religiously nuanced terms. During the reign of Charles V, following the tradition of the capitulations signed by the Catholic Monarchs with Maghrebi rulers, several feelers were sent to the Ottoman Grand Admiral and ruler of Algiers, Hayreddin Barbarossa, to turn him into a vassal of the Habsburgs and grant him jurisdiction over several North African cities (Algiers, Tunis, and Annaba). In return for this, he was asked for military aid against the Ottomans and the French, and he was also asked to commit to block Muslim corsairs and allow the free movement of merchants between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

At the time, the concept of "friendship" was a cornerstone of both Christian and Islamic diplomacy, a useful notion to bring about peaceful relations. This concept is reflected in the iterative use of the phrase "will be friends of friends and enemies of His Majesty's enemies", which we can find in the long-lasting correspondence between Charles V and Barbarossa. This makes it clear that the aim was not the conquest of Algiers, but to open a channel of communication with its governor to defend the Mediterranean from Muslim piracy and the Ottoman threat. Moreover, the language of friendship used in these negotiations reflects the type of Mediterranean policy chosen by Charles V in the first half of the sixteenth century. Leaving aside brief and irrelevant successes or defeats in the Maghreb (Tunis, 1535; Algiers 1541), the Habsburg Emperor always went for a policy of containment, aimed at protecting the territories he had inherited from the Catholic Monarchs.

As Primitivo Marino claims, Charles V's strategy in North Africa was anything but aggressive, being instead characterised by repeated attempts to draw bonds of friendship and vassalage with the most important Maghrebi dynasties (Zayyanid and Hafsid), which were unwilling to bow to Ottoman power. However, the tone of the language used with Islamic policies gradually changed over the central decades of the sixteenth century, owing to two factors. First, the fall to the Ottomans of the main North African presidios (military garrisons) held by the Spanish Monarchy in the 1550s and 1560s demonstrated that the strategy of containment by client powers was not the best way to confront the Sultans of Istanbul in North Africa. Second, the assimilation of many Christian converts to Islam (the so-called renegades) into Algerian politics led the Monarchy to try to win back its former subjects, even though many of them had been appointed to high administrative and military positions in the Ottoman province.

These factors reshaped the way the Spaniards communicated with Algiers; it was no longer a question of converting the city's Ottoman governors into landlord vassals of the Habsburgs, but of enticing them to return to Christianity and surrender Algiers and its hinterland to the Spanish forces. In exchange for that, they would be granted titles of nobility, rents and territories for themselves and their families, along with a series of licences to shelter them from the Spanish Inquisition.

Therefore, since the 1540s, many attempts to communicate with the governors of Algiers involved the use of religious language. In 1544, the instructions given to a Spanish merchant in Oran to negotiate the surrender of Algiers with its general governor, the Sardinian renegade Hadım Hasan, clearly illustrate this change. Since Hasan was originally a Christian, efforts were to be made to bring him back to the true faith, giving him the opportunity to retain his status and wealth, as well as offering him the opportunity to achieve great merit in the eyes of God.

In terms of diplomatic agency and practices, verbal and non-verbal dialogue remained unchanged throughout the century. The operation of a network of commercial relations between the Christian and the Muslim worlds, which progressively crystallised during the Middle Ages, enabled the Spanish Monarchy to take advantage not only of merchants and redeeming friars in Algiers, but also of Christian captives who were still in the city or those who had already been rescued, to obtain information about Algerian politics. Once alerted to the possibility of starting a new round of contacts and negotiations, the Spanish monarchs usually entrusted his officials -viceroys or local authorities in North Africa- with carrying out what is referred to in several sources as the "business of Algiers". Their main tasks were to manage the whole diplomatic operation by choosing the most suitable agents, giving them the possibility of travelling safely to the Maghreb with safe conducts and, finally, informing the Crown of the progress of the "business".

Diplomatic agents sent to the other side of the Mediterranean to negotiate with the governor of Algiers had to be familiar with local culture and policy, as well being in full command of Islamic diplomatic rituals and having a close relationship with the individuals they were to contact. The case of the Franciscan friar Nicolas illustrates well the profile of the perfect diplomatic envoy to Algiers. When he was sent in 1556 to contact the renegade Hasan the Corsican, Salah Rais' successor in the government of the city, the friar demonstrated having excellent knowledge of the local language and a stable network of friends, which included several leading renegades and Ottoman government officials, after fifteen years negotiating the ransoming of captives with the Algerian authorities.

This kind of diplomatic background was essential for the choice of agents to send to the Maghreb. The sources, in fact, underline the importance of choosing "practical" and "intelligent" individuals, the former term emphasising negotiating ability and the latter the agent's potential to exploit his existing local network. The merchant Sebastian de Lacono, an agent sent by the Spanish governor of Oran to Algiers in 1539, was chosen because of his close relationship with the caïd Ali the Sardinian, a rich member of the household of the Algerian governor at the time. The two were in fact fellow countrymen, both being of Sardinian origin. Previous experiences in the Maghreb had given these agents the opportunity to familiarise themselves not only with local influential personalities, but also with local diplomatic customs and habits. For this reason, in addition to several merchants

and redeeming friars, who were experts at negotiation, we often find the use of former captives such as Juan de Angulo, who was chosen in 1543 to win Hadım Hasan over to the Habsburg side, since "he had been a slave in Algiers for the last two years": this had given him the opportunity to observe daily Algerian political life as a slave of one of the city's leading corsairs. In my PhD dissertation, I analysed diplomatic missions between 1530 and 1580 and I was able to identify a series of instances in which the mechanisms of diplomatic dialogue in Algiers, to which the agents had to be accustomed, are explicitly stated. By focusing on the missions undertaken in the central decades of the sixteenth century we can outline four main steps: first, the reception of the Spanish agent at the Algerian harbour by a government messenger, as described by Captain Villafrando, a fellow of the Franciscan Friar during his mission, in his report; second, a short interrogation in front of the members of the local council, as recounted by the Corsican merchant Francisco Gasparo in 1569; third, the gift-giving ceremony, as explained by the cleric Francisco Nuñez in 1573; finally, the private meeting with the governor general and some members of his household, during which the instructions received by the Spanish authorities were put into practice and the agents tried to achieve their diplomatic goals. The last step, which is present in almost all missions analysed between 1530 and 1580, was the most delicate part together with the moment when the agent was interrogated by the members of the local government. When Barbarossa's men in Tunis discovered that the Genoese Luis Presenda, visiting the city in 1534, was not a simple merchant but a spy and agent in charge of conducting secret negotiations with their leader, he was put to death; similarly, some of the agents sent to Algiers were discovered during their missions, but most were not executed like Presenda, but forced to renounce the Christian faith, put-on Turkish dress, and converted to Islam. This happened to the Serbian Vincenzo Segoni in 1541. When he arrived in Algiers and presented himself before the local Ottoman government, he was arrested and forced to convert to Islam, becoming Isa Ferraga.

Nevertheless, none of these attempts succeeded in achieving the Spanish goal: to conquer Algiers using diplomacy instead of military operations. In fact, as Gennaro Varriale has stressed, such secret missions only provided the Spanish Monarchy with some political information about Ottoman Algiers military defences or possible plans of attack. However, the real question is why these missions did not achieve the purposes hoped for by the government of the Spanish Monarchy. To answer this question, it is necessary to explore what kind of perception the Spaniards had of their North African diplomatic interlocutors, but above all to establish on what information were these perceptions based in the first half of the sixteenth century.

3. King or Beylerbeyi? A Problem in Cross-Cultural Diplomatic Translation

It should be noted that, in order not to lose their reputation as "champions of Christianity", the Spanish monarchs decided not to be represented in Islamic courts by permanent ambassadors, but only by temporary agents, most often sent under cover to ransom slaves or to manage strictly economic relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The lack of permanent ambassadors, therefore, forced the Spanish Monarchy to rely on an information-gathering network formed by Jewish spies, Christian slaves, merchants, redeeming friars, and renegades. Despite possessing such a wide range of agents, capable of providing a large volume of information about Ottoman Algiers, the Spanish Monarchy could never fully grasp the complex administrative and political organisation of the city, which was promoted from Ottoman sançak (a district unit) to beylik (an imperial province) in the opening decades of the sixteenth-century.

On the one hand, the cultural distance between Islam and Christianity resulted in news being shaped according to the rhetorical commonplaces with which Spaniards had constructed a given image of the Muslims and their political systems in the Middle Ages; on the other hand, as many enslaved Christians were former soldiers, in most cases their reports often focused exclusively on military defences. Soon, this crystallised in an image of the city as a nest of renegades and pitiless corsairs. The work published by Diego de Haedo in 1612, Topographia e historia general de Argel, aptly illustrates this slanted view of Algiers:

> [Algerian] corsairs are men who live by privateering or full-time robbery at sea. Some of these are Turks by birth and others are Moors, but the vast majority are of renegades from all nations, men with good knowledge of the shores, riverbanks, and coasts of the whole Christian world. […] Sailing out both summer and winter and fearlessly covering all the sea between East and West, they scoff at and attack Christian galleys even while their sailors are eating, playing games, or proclaiming news in Christian ports, killing people here and there as if they were hunting rabbits (D. de Haedo, 1612, p. f. 125r).

However, when the Spaniards decided to start diplomatic contacts with the Algerians, they knew fully well that they were negotiating not with a mere corsair chief, but with the head political authority of Algiers, a ruler that, by acting as the city's "King", was able to control the actions of its inhabitants and curb Muslim corsair expeditions. In fact, the Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria and the Viceroy of Sicily Ferrante Gonzaga, both of whom were entrusted by Charles V with managing negotiations with Barbarossa in the late 1530s, addressed Barbarossa not as a corsair or an Ottoman Grand Admiral, but as the "King of Algiers". In the eyes of the Spaniards, therefore, the "King of Algiers" was considered a true state representative, who held jurisdictional power over his "Kingdom", and, above all, over the pitiless corsairs of Algiers. It was this distorted perception, which reduced Algiers to an allied kingdom of the Osmanli instead of a full Ottoman province that led the Spanish Monarchy to think of dialoguing with the "King of Algiers" as an independent authority and representative of a small corsair state.

Although the expression "King of Algiers" was often used in reports written by agents sent to North Africa, a careful analysis of a document issued by the Algerian chancellery clearly shows the origin of this cross-cultural misunderstanding. The letter that Hasan Pasha sent to the Admiral Andrea Doria in the summer of 1548 was written in Ottoman-Turkish and then translated into Castilian. While in the Ottoman-Turkish version we do not find any reference to Hasan as "King" (indeed, his Ottoman-Turkish seal refers to him as "Hasan Paşa the son of Barbarossa"), this term was used in the

translation; indeed, the alfaqui, who was commissioned to draw up the Castilian version of this document, used the expression "King of Algiers" to refer to Hasan Pasha. This data should be understood as a direct expression of the Spanish will to represent Hasan in an official communication as a powerful and independent stateman. Something similar, in fact, occurs with the letter that Hasan Pasha sent the Viceroy of Valencia the following year.

As this series of letters was exchanged with the aim of upholding the Mediterranean truce signed by the Habsburgs and the Ottomans in 1547 (the Treaty of Edirne), another factor needs to be emphasised. Whereas in the Castilian version, the letters closed by indicating the city of Algiers as "our city of Algiers" ("nra ciudad de Arjel"), in the Ottoman-Turkish version the city was referred to as "Dârü'l-cihâd-I" (the house of war). Thus, if the Castilian translation made by the alfaqui reproduced the Spanish feeling that Algiers was the centre of an autonomous kingdom ruled by Hasan Pasha, the original Ottoman expression emphasised the true role played by the Algerian rulers in the Mediterranean strategy of the Sublime Porte.

These aspects could help us to explain why the Spanish diplomatic missions to Algiers did not yield any useful results, apart from the possibility of extracting some socio-cultural information about their enemy. What the Spaniards thought of as the "King of Algiers" was in fact a beylerbeyi, a general governor appointed by the Sultan with the power to keep the peace in the province, maintain a fleet to support the Ottoman naval expeditions, and, finally, supervise the collection of tributes to be sent later to the imperial treasury. Thus, the Ottoman government in Istanbul did not grant the Algerian beylerbeyi extensive diplomatic powers, but, as Emrah Safa Gürkan's studies show, it was the latter who informally exploited his chances to mediate with the Sublime Porte's political rivals to extract information about their strategic plans in the Mediterranean.

As Bunes Ibarra pointed out in his seminal work on the image of Muslims and North Africa in Early Modern Spain, the Spaniards' imperfect understanding of the Ottoman political system was caused by informants who reported what they saw in the Maghreb according to their own political, social, and cultural mental categories.

Following on from this, it is very likely that the Spanish Monarchy exploited its relative lack of knowledge about the actual administrative status of the Algerians governors to preserve a position of diplomatic superiority over them. Indeed, by considering them as independent authorities in charge of a small state, like the rulers of Tlemcen or Tunis, the Spanish monarchs were able to avoid any factor that could undermine their reputation among Christian powers. Nevertheless, the confusion about the status of Algerian policy remained a constant throughout the early modern times. It was not until the seventeenth century that the political order of Ottoman Algiers was better understood, as pointed out by Diego de Haedo:

> Since among the Turks there is no king other than the Grand Turk, the term pasha, if we must speak correctly, does not mean king but rather governor, as one would call the man who governs Algiers and all the lands subject to him. The usage already among Christians, however, is to call the governor of Algiers, as well as that of Tunis and Tripoli and other places, a king (D. de Haedo, 1612, p. f. 44v).

5. Conclusion

It is not hard to see how an imperfect knowledge about Ottoman political system in North Africa thwarted Spanish diplomatic efforts with the governors of Algiers during the first half of the sixteenth century. In fact, diplomatic negotiations never came to a head because, in contrast to what the Spaniards thought, the governors of Algiers could not act autonomously as the only political representatives of Algiers, but they always had to consider the orders that came from the Sublime Porte, as well as discuss every political move with other Ottoman delegates in the Maghreb. This is also confirmed by the fact that the Algerian governors often included other actors (merchants, renegades, and redeeming friars) in their dialogue with Spanish agents, because they had no power to conclude negotiations by themselves. Even when the offer was to betray the sultan, the Algerian governors always decided to remain as commanders of the Ottoman province, as there was no guarantee that the Spaniards would keep their word.

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