"After being so long Prisoners, they will not return to Slavery in Russia": An Aegean Network of Violence between Empires and Identities

*Will Smiley**

"O kadar esaretten sonra köle olmak için Rusya'ya dönecek halleri yok": İmparatorluklar ve Kimlikler Arasında Ege'de Bir Şiddet Ağı

Öz ■ Bu makalede, 1787-1792 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi'nde iki devlet arasında kalan Rum menşeyli bir grup korsanın hikâyesi, kestirme bir cevap vermenin oldukça güç olduğu "Osmanlı kimdir?" sorusu çerçevesinde ele alınmaktadır. Çalışmada birbiriyle örtüşen Osmanlı, Rus ve İngiliz arşiv kaynaklarından hareketle, bahsedilen vaka birkaç farklı yönden ele alınmaktadır. Öncelikle hikâyenin kahramanları olan Rum korsanların zuhur etmelerinin başlıca nedeni olan Ege Denizi'ndeki şiddet sarmalının tarihsel arkaplanı çizilmektedir. Daha sonra Rum denizcilerin Rus hizmetine girmeleri ve Osmanlı güçleri tarafından ele geçirilişleri anlatılmaktadır. Tutsak edilen sıradan denizcilerin, yeni "işverenleri" olan Ruslar ve hükümranları olan Osmanlılar arasında kaldıkları zaman, kendi çıkarlarını korumak için hangi stratejilerle hareket ettikleri açıklanmaktadır. Tutsaklar ve devletler, canla başla tutsakların hukuki kimliklerini ve tabiiyetlerini tanımlamaya çalışırken, harbin bitmesiyle birlikte denizcilerin salıverilmesine sıra geldiğinde hikâye en ilgi çekici safhasına ulaşacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Şiddet Ağı, Rusya, Rumlar, Kimlik, Savaş Esirleri, Kölelik, Hukuk

In the spring of 1792, the Ottoman and Russian empires made peace, after a war that had been very bloody for both sides, but especially disastrous for the Ottomans. They had lost a number of fortress cities, along with any hope of retaking

* Princeton University.
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the Crimea. As part of the peace, both sides set about returning prisoners taken during the war—this had become traditional following previous Russo-Ottoman conflicts.[1] But as the Sublime Porte released the captives held in the prison of the Istanbul shipyards, a curious incident ensued: a number of captives, mostly Greek-speaking Ottoman Christians captured in Russian service, would not accept release. In what a British diplomat called a "scandalous and unexpected business," they in fact refused to leave the prison, in effect going on strike against the demands of both the Ottoman and Russian states. How did these events come about, and what do they say about what it meant to be "Ottoman" in the eighteenth century?[2]

A fortuitous congruence in Ottoman, Russian, and British archival sources has preserved all three imperial views of this incident, and in each case, the views of the captives themselves sometimes filter through in the official narrative.[3] In telling this story, I hope to explore the complicated nature of "who was an Ottoman" with reference to one particular group of captives whose membership in the Ottoman community was complex, changing—but ultimately decisive in determining their lives and fates.

Greek-speaking, Orthodox Christian Ottoman subjects, as several scholars have recently shown, occupied an unusual position in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mediterranean: they owed political allegiance to the Muslim Ottoman sultan, and yet they had strong religious ties to Christian states.[4] Ottoman Greeks had especially strong ties to the only major Orthodox power in Europe, namely, Russia.

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1 See Will Smiley, "The Rules of War on the Ottoman Frontiers: an Overview of Military Captivity, 1699-1829," in Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev, Maria Baramova, and Vania Racheva, eds., *Empires and Peninsulas: Southeastern Europe between Karlowitz and the Peace of Adrianople*, (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010): 63-72

2 The (British) National Archives, Kew (TNA), Foreign Office collection (FO) 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS.

3 In particular, I draw on the Ottoman Başbakanlık Arşivi (BOA) in Istanbul (the Hatt-ı Hümayun, HAT, Cevdet Bahriye, CBH, and Cevdet Hariciye, CHR collections); the Russian Arkhiv Vneshnei Politikii Rossiiskoi Imperii (AVPRI) in Moscow (particularly the Konstantinopol'skaya Missiya collection, KM); and TNA in Kew, London (particularly the FO, and State Papers, SP, collections). Dates in the footnotes retain the form given in the archival documents, whether Julian/Old Style (OS), Gregorian/New Style (NS), or Islamic/*hicrî* (*h*). Asterisks indicate estimated dates; Islamic dates, in keeping with Ottoman practice, begin with the year and use alphabetical abbreviations for months.

4 See Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mathieu Grenet, "Entangled Allegiances: Ottoman Greeks in Marseille and the Shifting Ethos of Greekness (c. 1790 - c. 1820)," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 36, no. 1 (2012): 56–71; Christine Philliou, "Communities on the

Links between Imperial Russia and Ottoman Christians are fairly well-known, particularly through the lens of Russia's eventual support for Greek independence in the 1820s.[5] In the eighteenth century, many Greeks enlisted in the Russian navy, especially after the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca—which opened the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to Russian shipping, while simultaneously allowing Greek settlements in Russia's new Black Sea coastal domains.[6] These settlements, along with recruitment in the Aegean islands, soon provided large numbers of Greek-speaking sailors for the Russian merchant and military fleets, worrying Ottoman officials—who believed the Russians so ignorant of navigation that their Black Sea commerce could not prosper without foreign help.[7] Indeed, in mid-1787, on the eve of war, the Ottomans complained to British envoy Sir Robert Ainslie that "Subjects of this [the Ottoman] Empire who are induced to emigrate…already compose the major Part of the Mariners employed in the Russian Navy."[8] This service, in light of the later Greek War of Independence, is often put in the context of pan-Orthodox solidarity, and of nationalist struggles against the Porte.[9] But this probably did not motivate all Greek sailors; the international market in military labor was at its height in the eighteenth century, and few anywhere in Europe expressed moral qualms about mercenarism.[10]

Verge: Unraveling the Phanariot Ascendancy in Ottoman Governance," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 151–181.

5 See for example Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991).

6 See Roger P. Bartlett, *Human Capital: The Settlement of Foreigners in Russia, 1762-1804* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979); Vasiles A. Kardases, *Diaspora Merchants in the Black Sea: The Greeks in Southern Russia, 1775-1861* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2001); Nicholas C. J. Pappas, *Greeks in Russian Military Service in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1991).

7 TNA, SP 97/51 #5, 4 March 1775 NS.

8 TNA, FO 78/8 #15, 25 July 1787 NS. The Russian recruitment of Ottoman subjects continued into the early nineteenth century, to the Porte's displeasure (Kahraman Şakul, "An Ottoman Global Moment: War of Second Coalition in the Levant" (PhD diss., Georgetown, 2009), 428).

9 For example, Pappas, *Greeks*.

10 See Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1994); Deborah Avant, "From Mercenary to Citizen Armies: Explaining Change in the Practice of War," *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 41-72; Daniel Krebs, "Approaching the Enemy: German Captives in the American War of Independence, 1776-1783" (PhD diss., Emory, 2007), 191; for a rare contemporary criticism, see Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1987), 9.

Ottoman subjects' service in the military of their state's greatest rival inevitably led to some of them being captured by the Porte's forces. In the early eighteenth century, the Ottoman fleet—whose galleys were driven by slave labor—seems to have been eager to absorb captives of any origin, including Ottoman subjects.[11] By 1787, the Ottoman fleet had largely abandoned galleys in favor of sail-powered vessels, but prisoners in state hands were still kept in the prison (*zindan*) of the imperial shipyards in Istanbul (*Tersane-i Amire*), known to contemporary English-speakers as the "Bagnio"—and this included Ottoman subjects taken in enemy service. In September 1787, when the Russian ship-of-the-line *Maria Magdalena* surrendered in the Bosphorus, there were Ottoman Greeks on board. According to Ainslie, they promptly claimed to have been forced into Russian service, and "engaged with the Turks."[12]

But Ottoman subjects were most prominent not in the regular Russian fleet, but in its privateer forces. In the 1787 War, unlike the previous Russo-Ottoman conflict, Empress Catherine II's Baltic Sea fleet did not deploy into the eastern Mediterranean. But she filled the gap by commissioning privateers to raid Ottoman shipping; they sailed from Adriatic ports under the Russian flag and under the supervision of a Russian officer based at Trieste.[13] Many of the crewmen were Greek speakers, from either Ottoman or Venetian territories; British Ambassador to Istanbul Robert Ainslie called them "a compound of Ruffians and Pirates collected from Morea and the Venetian Islands. Among the most famous commanders was Lambro Katsonis, an experienced corsair.[14] Katsonis switched back and forth between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" raiding, continuing to fight, as an outright pirate, after the Russian state disavowed him in June 1792.[15] Lambro and his followers resembled the "networks of violence" which Tolga Esmer has explored elsewhere in this volume.[16] Where Esmer's networks were sometime intertwined

11 Smiley, "Peace," 169-170.

12 TNA, FO 78/8 #22, October 10 1787 NS. For the story of the *Maria Magdalena* and her crew, see Smiley, "Peace," Chapters 4 and 5.

13 BOA, HAT 210/11316, estimated 1205 *h*; HAT, 1400/56389, est. 1205 *h*; Baycar, *Müntehabât*, 644.

14 BOA, CHR 9101, 10 Safer 1203 *h*; TNA, FO 78/8 #11, 25 March 1788 NS; FO 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS; FO 78/13 #13, 29 May 1792 NS; John K. Vasdravellis, *Klephts, Armatoles and Pirates in Macedonia during the Rule of the Turks* (Thessaloniki: Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1975), 90; Adnan Baycar, ed., *Osmanlı Rus İlişkileri Tarihi: Ahmet Câvid Bey'in Müntehabâtı* (Istanbul: Yeditepe, 2004), 644; Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), 269.

15 TNA, FO 78/13 #15, 9 June 1792 NS.

16 See Tolga Uğur Esmer, "A Culture of Rebellion: Networks of Violence and Competing Discourses of Justice in the Ottoman Empire, 1790-1808" (PhD diss., Chicago, 2009),

with the Ottoman state, Katsonis's corsairs were tied to Russia—but, as will be seen, they were willing to use, and to repudiate, links with both empires.

The regular Ottoman fleet was largely occupied in the Black Sea, so to protect the Aegean, the Porte turned to its own naval irregulars: the North African regencies, well-known to Americans as the "Barbary pirates." The captured corsairs (*korsan*) who were consigned to the Bagnio were a mixed group, according to Ottoman archival records, including Maltese, Corsicans, Venetian Greeks, and Ottoman Greeks from around the Aegean.[17] This was traditional; the Ottoman fleet had long imprisoned captured corsairs, and employed them as galley rowers.[18] This changed after Sultan Selim III (r. 1789-1807) ascended to the throne in 1789. In November 1790, a North African squadron commanded by the Algerian Saidi 'Ali returned to Istanbul with seven or eight captured corsair vessels—and perhaps 600 captives, including, according to Ainslie, Albanians, Dalmatians, Sicilians, Maltese, Venetian and Ottoman Greeks, and subjects of "other Nations of Europe.[19] Ainslie expected that these captives would be consigned to row in the galleys, while Saidi 'Ali's men had already claimed some as their private property[20]—but Selim had other ideas. He inspected the Algerian and Tunisian ships anchored in the Bosphorus and Golden Horn, and dashed off an order which survives in the Ottoman archives: "All the *reaya* [Ottoman Christian] captives who are collected in the Algerian ships are to be killed in suitable places in the Bosphorus and in Istanbul and Galata and in other places. Let none remain. There are reportedly more than 40. All are to be killed."[21] Over the next three days, Greek captives were hanged from ships' yardarms, and in front of Greek churches in Istanbul.[22] But there was doubt about some captives, who apparently claimed to be Russian or Venetian subjects. In response to a question from the Imperial Council (*Divan-ı Hümayun*), Selim made a life-and-death decision based on such lines of subjecthood: "The ones who are *reaya* are to be killed," he commanded. "Let the others remain."[23]

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and " The Confessions of an Ottoman 'Irregular:' Self-Representation and Ottoman Interpretive Communities in the Nineteenth Century," in the current volume.

17 BOA, CBH 6275, 10 Recep 1204 *h*; HAT 211/11478, 18 Şevval 1205 *h*; HAT 1389/55311, est. 1204 *h*; HAT 1397/56083, est. 1204 *h*; HAT 1402/56639 4 Cemaziyelahir 1206 *h*.

18 See Smiley, "Peace," 25.

19 TNA, FO 78/11 #33 8 November 1790 NS; Adnan Baycar, *Hadîka-i Vekāyî* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1998), 152–153.

20 Baycar, *Hadîka*, 155–156.

21 BOA, HAT 1387/55144, est. 1203 *h*.

22 Baycar, *Hadîka*, 154–156.

23 The following is from BOA, HAT 209/11182, est. 1204 *h*.

This came as a surprise to Selim's own Imperial Council, as well as to captured corsairs. Selim's new policy made it it advantageous for captured Ottoman subjects to assert Venetian or Russian subjecthood in order to survive—and the debates around Greek-speaking captives' identities over the next two years suggest that they may have done so.[24] By the end of the war, according to Russian records, there were 169 captured privateers in the Arsenal[25]--and Ottoman archival documents show that the Porte believed at least 58 of these to be Ottoman subjects.[26]

The Ottomans investigated this matter because, as the war ended, captives' subjecthoods once again became important. The Treaty of Jassy, signed in January 1792, followed Russo-Ottoman tradition in mandating that all captives on both sides would be released, without ransom.[27] The Council soon realized that this would include any captured Ottoman subjects who had survived execution by claiming Russian or Venetian subjecthood. Upon investigation, the Council prepared a list showing that there were 58 such captives in the Bagnio, hailing from Ottoman lands around the Aegean, who had been captured at various times between November 1787 and 1791.[28] The Council probably feared that if these captives were returned to the Russians, their nautical skills would aid Catherine II's efforts to build up her Black Sea fleet. But there was still time to act, as the Russian Chargé d'Affaires would not arrive in Istanbul and retrieve the prisoners until spring. So, in mid-January, the Council recommended to Selim that these 58 captives should be set free and allowed to return to their homes, which "would necessarily please all of the *reaya*."[29]

Selim recognized that all 58 of these men were alive in spite of his orders—the Council believed they were Ottoman subjects, and yet they had not been executed after their capture. After reading the list, he reproved the Council for its negligence, or perhaps for its mercy, in dealing with the captives: "Look, when these infidels were taken as corsairs, I said 'let them be executed.'"[30]

Selim's anger deepened when he received a recommendation from the Fleet Dragoman (*Donanma Tercümanı*), who was himself an Ottoman Greek.[31] The Dragoman

24 See Smiley, "Peace," 176-180.

25 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1, *d*1055 *l*131, 7 April 1792 OS.

26 BOA, HAT 1402/56639, 4 Cemaziyelahir 1206 *h*.

27 See Smiley, "The Rules of War," 63-72.

28 BOA, HAT 1402/56639, 4 Cemaziyelahir 1206 *h*.

29 BOA, HAT 1387/55087, est. 1203 *h*.

30 The next two paragraphs are based on BOA, HAT 1386/55004, est. 1205 *h*.

31 For the Fleet Dragoman's importance, see Philliou, "Communities," 155–156.

noted that the Sicilian Ambassador, acting as a liaison for the Russian diplomats who had not yet arrived in Istanbul, would soon reimburse the Porte for the Russian captives' subsistence costs. He suggested that the Ottomans delay releasing the Greeks until this money had been paid—if they were not present when the reimbursement was paid, the Russians might reduce their payment accordingly. Selim was less concerned about saving money, than about saving face: replying to the Dragoman, he declared that the captives could not be both Russians and Ottomans. They could either be released, or they could receive subsistence funds from the Russian government, but not both.

The outcome of the subsistence reimbursement issue is unclear, but Selim agreed to the Greeks' release in early February. Perhaps in an effort to make clear to the captives that they were solely and unambiguously *Ottoman*, and no longer Russian or Venetian, Selim and the Council demanded that several high-ranking officials formally notify the Greek prisoners of their impending release. The Fleet Dragoman was to go to the Bagnio, along with his superior, the Kapudan Pasha (Ottoman grand admiral), and Christian community leaders (*kocabaşı*s). With the exception of the Kapudan Pasha, Küçük Hüseyin, all of these state officials were Greek-speaking Christians, in a sense welcoming their co-religionists back into the ranks of loyal Ottoman *reaya*—but at the same time, they warned the captives against future infractions. The Porte commanded that the prisoners be told their release was contingent upon the surety of guarantors, and that any further corsairing would be punished with death.[32]

One might think that the captives, after months or years of captivity and labor, would welcome a chance to return to their homes, and would disavow, honestly or not, any intention of further violence against the Porte. But they did not. Instead, Küçük Hüseyin reported to Selim, they refused to leave the Bagnio. In his view, the prisoners had been seduced (*iğfal*) by the Russian officers, who argued that captives taken under the Russian flag, could only be *released* under that flag—into Russian custody. But the Greeks were not mere puppets of their Russian officers—they also told Küçük Hüseyin that they feared if they returned home, the Ottoman state would track them down individually, and punish them, in spite of the guarantees it had offered. They declared, therefore, that they would leave only by the word of the Russian ambassador to Istanbul. Küçük Hüseyin—or more likely, the Fleet Dragoman—tried in vain to convince the Greek captives that if they were released into Russian custody, they would be sent to Russian territory, rather than being allowed to return to their homes.[33]

32 BOA, HAT 1402/56578, est. 1206 *h*; HAT 1402/56614, est. 1206 *h*; HAT 1402/56641, 19 Cemaziyelahir 1206 *h*.

33 BOA, HAT 1402/56614, est. 1206 *h*.

This bizarre scene of Ottoman officials bargaining with their own disloyal subjects to persuade them to declare themselves Ottoman, and to accept release from the sultan's own prisoner-of-war detention facility in order to return home, was not the end of the story. The captives had already turned down one imperial deal, but a few months later, they would turn down another. As the war ended. Lambro's Katsonis continued to raid Ottoman and neutral shipping in the Aegean, creating an odd paradox: Ottoman-Russian peace ensured the release of Lambro captured crewmen, but the Russians refused to disavow Lambro's own continued hostilities until June 1792.[34] In the meantime, in April 1792, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires, Aleksandr Khvostov, arrived in Istanbul, and put into motion a plan to send all of the Russian captives in the Bagnio—including the Greeks—across the Black Sea to New Russia.[35] Three ships were readied to carry them, at Ottoman expense. Just as the Ottoman state had warned the captives, release into Russian custody would mean separating them from their families, from their homes, and from Lambro's forces in the Aegean. Both the Greeks and their native Russian-subject colleagues also had financial concerns: many enlisted men had worked for the Ottomans during their captivity, and they now believed they were owed back wages.[36] Many of the privateer officers, meanwhile, had taken out loans to support themselves while in captivity, and they hoped to be reimbursed 200 piasters each by the Russian state.[37]

The captives, realizing this, now put forward a proposal of their own. By now, as higher-ranking officers had removed to the European quarter of Beyoğlu, the ranking Russian leader in the Bagnio was *Michman* Spyridon DeGalleto—an officer in the regular Russian fleet, but most likely a Venetian Greek from the Ionian islands. He reported to Khvostov in late April that several of the corsair officers had approached him with a letter asking to return to the Aegean to serve with Lambro.[38] A few days later, on 7 May, eight other officers and 98 enlisted men signed a similar letter. Addressing the letter to Catherine II, they lamented that they had been reduced to a slavery worse "than death itself," failing in their struggles in the

34 TNA, FO 78/13 #15, 9 June 1792 NS.

35 BOA, CBH 10802, 7 Şevval 1206 *h*; CHR 611, 18 Ramazan 1206 *h*; CHR 7582, 7 Ramazan 1206 *h*; BOA, Divan-ı Hümayun Düvel-i Ecnebiye Kalemi Dosyaları collection 65/36, 16 Ramazan 1206 *h*; TNA, FO 78/13 #10, 25 April 1792 NS; BOA, Divan-ı Hümayun Düvel-i Ecnebiye Kalemi Defterleri collection (DVEd) 86/4 #389 p. 45-46, Ramazan 1206 *h*. The Russians had also done this after the 1768 War; see Smiley, "Peace," 72–74.

36 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*24*r*-24*v*, 23 April 1792 OS; TNA, FO 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS. For captives' work in the Arsenal, see Smiley, "Peace," 137–138.

37 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *fi*4*r*, 14 April 1792 OS.

38 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*14*r*, 14 April 1792 OS. DeGalleto wrote his reports in Russian. I thank Evangelos Katafylis for his insights on De Galleto's possible origin.

name of Orthodoxy, the empress, and freedom from Turkish oppression. They proclaimed the advantages of being sent to the Aegean to rejoin Lambro, though they also claimed they would go to New Russia if Catherine demanded it.[39] Here, unlike in their negotiations with the Ottoman state, the Greek captives did not communicate in Greek—though the signatories had Greek names, and DeGalleto most likely also spoke Greek, they wrote the letter in French.

This letter's survival in the Russian Foreign Ministry archives shows that it was, at some point, sent to St. Petersburg, but there is no indication that Khvostov or his superiors ever seriously considered the Greeks' proposal. Even before the letter was written, at least a few captives had become so frustrated that they completely reversed their appeals to Orthodox solidarity. Aside from questions of subjecthood, they recognized, there was another definition of identity which might determine their fate—religion. Previous Russo-Ottoman treaty and customary law had established that captives who converted to Islam would not be returned,[40] and the Greeks may have known about this. Ainslie, the British Ambassador, reported to London on April 25 that "a great number" of Greek captives "changed their Religion in order to remain here ... [and their] example would have been followed by many others had it not been prevented by secret orders from the Porte."[41] In spite of these "secret orders," Ottoman documents suggest that at least a few were approved.[42] One is tempted to speculate that these few, once they returned to the Aegean, might have simply returned to their families, and to practicing Orthodox Christianity, with none the wiser about their clever trick.

For most, however, conversion to Islam was not a viable option, whether because of the Porte's policy or because of their own views of conversion. Some simply fled from the Arsenal, likely being absorbed into Istanbul Greek communities.[43] For others, the answer was simpler, and more recognizable to modern observers: they went on strike.

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39 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*48*r*-49*v*, 26 April 1792 OS.

40 See Will Smiley, "The Meanings of Conversion: Treaty Law, State Knowledge, and Religious Identity among Russian Captives in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *The International History Review* 34:3 (2012): 559-580.

41 TNA, FO 78/13 #10, 25 April 1792 NS.

42 BOA, Cevdet Maliye collection 720, 20 Şevval 1206 *h*; BOA, Maliyeden Müdevver collection 10418 p. 29, 20 Şevval 1206 *h*. These documents, for the traditional purchase of Muslim clothing for the converts, date to early June, but the conversions likely happened earlier. Some of the converts are explicitly listed as prisoners in the Arsenal; and one, as a sailor.

43 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*51*r*-52*r*, 27 April 1792 OS.

On 8 May, DeGalleto reported, "all the captives together" came to him, and declared that they had heard, "both from the Turks and from those of other nations" that the Porte was to pay them 25 piasters each when they left. If this were not provided, they told him, they would "make great resistance" to being sent out of the Bagnio.[44] This strike involved, according to Ainslie, 120 Greeks—probably including the 58 Ottoman subjects identified by the Porte earlier (aside from those who had escaped or converted to Islam), along with others whom the Council had believed were truly Russian or Venetian subjects. The strikers seem to have recognized that it was in *both* states' interests for them to leave the Bagnio—so now, just as they had turned down the Porte's offer three months earlier, they turned down the Russians'. They emphasized different grievances to each state: Ainslie reported that, "[t]o the Turks they declared that after being so long Prisoners they will not return to Slavery in Russia, and to M. de Guastoff [Khvostov] they pretended that a large Sum is due to them by the Turks for arrears of Work in the Arsenal[.]"[45]

Just as the Ottoman officials had a few months earlier, DeGaletto tried to convince the captives that, if they were released into his state's custody, they would be better off—in particular, he promised the Russians would pursue the prisoners' financial claims against the Porte. But, again as they had been in February, the captives remained unconvinced. In Ainslie's words, they felt "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush."[46] Indeed, they went further than this, accusing Khvostov and their officers of having received their money from the Porte, but withholding it. Native-born Russian subjects, just as much as Greek corsairs, believed they were owed arrears for their work, and by mid-May they joined the strike.[47]

Thus, Selim and the Council found themselves in the same dilemma as in February: they wanted the Greek corsairs to leave the Bagnio, but the captives refused. The Porte had probably refrained from using force in February because this would have pushed the Greeks into the Russians' arms, and because that state might have retaliated against Ottoman prisoners. But now, Khvostov—perhaps stung by the prisoners' accusations of personal corruption—deliberately removed that bar. He "disclaimed whatever interference in behalf of the Greeks," and this,

44 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*53*r*-54*v*, 23 April 1792 OS.

45 TNA, FO 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS.

46 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*54*r*-54*v*, 23 April 1792 OS; TNA, FO 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS. This paragraph is based on the latter source; the AVPRI file contains no reports between 4 and 12 May NS, suggesting that communications at the height of the dispute were conducted verbally.

47 TNA, FO 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS.

according to Ainslie, frightened them enough that, "sensible of their danger, [they] then embarked" for New Russia.[48]

And yet, this was still not the end of the matter. The "native Russians" (as Ainslie called them) who had joined the strike were less fearful, perhaps trusting that their closer ties to the Russian state would keep them safe from Ottoman retaliation—so they "persevered" in the strike.[49] This, finally, convinced Selim to meet at least some of the strikers' demands. He agreed to give the enlisted prisoners nine piasters each; the privateer officers had already agreed to accept a collective payment of 2,500 piasters. Thus, the Ottomans eventually found themselves paying their captured subjects to agree to go and strengthen the Russian fleet, an outcome neither the captives nor the Porte had desired. And still, even as the ships departed on 28 May, several more Greeks fled.[50]

Although I have referred to these men, for simplicity, as "Greeks," that was of course the one term which they never used to describe themselves, and which had no legal meaning, in any of their dealings with either state.[51] At various times, some of the captives had proclaimed themselves Christians, Muslims, Venetians, Russians, and (indirectly, through conversion and claims of treatment) Ottomans. Selim and the Council, too, had asserted the captives' Ottoman subjecthood (using the word *reaya*) in seeking to execute them, and then again as a reason for releasing them. Russian diplomats had first claimed the captives as Russians, and therefore eligible for release only into their custody; and then they had disclaimed protection over them, in effect putting them once again under Ottoman jurisdiction—but only to encourage the captives to accept release and transportation as Russians.

This incident revealed that for captives and states alike, the question of "who was an Ottoman" was complex and contested, but was also a matter of life and death, and of freedom and captivity.[52] In the decades leading up to the Greeks'

48 TNA, FO 78/13 #12, 25 May 1792 NS.

49 Ibid.

50 AVPRI, KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*65*r*-65*v*, 15 May 1792 OS; KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*67*r*-67*v*, 16 May 1792 OS; KM *f*90 *o*1 *d*1055 *l*70*r*-75*r*, 17 May 1792 OS; TNA, FO 78/13 #13, 29 May 1792 NS.

51 Molly Greene has noted this ambiguity in the seventeenth century: "Though they were everywhere, the Greeks were also nowhere. They moved throughout the eastern Mediterranean as Venetian or Ottoman subjects" (*Pirates*, 51).

52 In this sense, bonds of subjecthood resembled the importance which Lauren Benton has seen in Atlantic World for corsairs' "ties to particular sovereigns," which were "both vitally important and a matter of interpretation" ("Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and

captivity, Russo-Ottoman treaty and customary law had placed an increasing emphasis both on subjecthood and on legalized, politicized definitions of religious identity, demanding that certain captives, based on their identity, be released when peace was made.[53] This was, arguably, a period of transition, between fluid early modern identities and more rigid modern identities, in which both the legal and the symbolic meaning of identity were open to a variety of definitions. Being "an Ottoman" could be a matter of birth, of religion, or of language; it could be a matter of law, strictly governing life and death or freedom and captivity; or it could be a matter of symbolism, making or breaking bonds of loyalty between subjects and their sovereign. These Greek captives, caught in the middle, proved quite adept at shifting their claimed identities as the situation demanded, but both the Ottoman and Russian states were equally capable of using their own claims, as well as coercion, to pursue their interests.

"After being so long Prisoners, they will not return to Slavery in Russia": An Aegean Network of Violence between Empires and Identities

Abstract ■ This article tells the story of one group of Greek-speaking privateers caught between the Ottoman and Russian empires during a protracted war between those two states in the late eighteenth century (1787-1792). The work uses the incident to explore the complex question of "who was an Ottoman," and the vital effects the answer could have on the lives and livelihoods of those who negotiated their way between these two Black Sea imperial rivals. Drawing on a convenient overlap in Ottoman, Russian, and British archival sources, the article approaches this story from multiple viewpoints, first explaining the context of Aegean maritime violence from which this particular group of corsairs emerged. It then discusses their enlistment in Russian service, their capture by Ottoman forces, and the subsequent attempts of rank-and-file sailors to maneuver between the demands of their Russian employers and their Ottoman captors and rulers, all the while trying to assert their own interests. As captives and governments alike wrestled with the complex question of defining legal identity and imperial loyalty, the story became most interesting when it came time to release the captives at the close of the war in 1792.

Keywords: Network of Violence, Russia, Ottoman Greeks, Identity, Prisoners of War, Slavery, Law

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the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (2005), 713).

53 See Smiley, "Meanings of Conversion"; Will Smiley, "Let *Whose* People Go? Subjecthood, Sovereignty, Liberation, and Legalism in Eighteenth-Century Russo-Ottoman Relations," *Turkish Historical Review* 3 (2012): 196-228.

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