

DOI:10.54240/2318-014-001-017

**The Ransom Value of European Women Captives
from Algiers 1640-1800**

أثمان افتداء النساء النصرانيات من الجزائر 1640-1800

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Submission date: 01/12/2023 Revision date:07/01/2024 Acceptance date: 29/04/2024.

Abstract: this study reviews the ransom prices of European female captives in Algeria during the Ottoman Era, based on European sources. The results indicate that this subject has not received sufficient attention in Arab academic curricula. Even foreign studies have not shown significant interest in the situation of Christian female captives in North Africa, except for a few limited research efforts, such as a study by a Tunisian researcher published in French about "the situation of female captives in Tunisia in the late 18th century," and a study by the Moroccan researcher Khalid Bekkaoui on "female captives in North Africa..." in English.

This deficiency is attributed to the sensitive nature of the "woman" topic in modern Christian and Islamic societies, where writing about this subject has long been considered taboo and could lead to serious consequences for the lives of early authors. Therefore, through this study, we will attempt to shed light on the ransom prices of female captives and expand the scope of writing on the subject in a way that helps researchers and students understand the situation of European women in Algeria during the Modern Era.

Keywords: Algiers, Europe, Women, Captivity, Slavery, Price, Ransom, Modern Era.

Summary in Arabic:

الملخص: تستعرض هذه الدراسة أثمان فدية "المرأة الأسيرة الأوروبية في الجزائر خلال العهد العثماني"، وذلك بالاستناد إلى مصادر أوروبية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن هذا الموضوع لم يلقَ الاهتمام الكافي في المناهج الجامعية العربية، حتى أن الدراسات الأجنبية لم تولي اهتمامًا كبيرًا لوضع المرأة المسيحية الأسيرة في شمال إفريقيا، باستثناء بعض الأبحاث المحدودة، مثل: الدراسة التي أنجزتها إحدى الباحثات التونسيات التي نشرت باللغة الفرنسية حول "وضع المرأة الأسيرة في تونس أواخر القرن 18م"، وكذلك دراسة الباحث المغربي خالد البقاوي "النساء الأسيرات في شمال إفريقيا..." باللغة الإنجليزية.

يُعزى هذا النقص إلى الطبيعة الحساسة لموضوع "المرأة" في المجتمع المسيحي والإسلامي الحديث، فلطالما اعتبرت الكتابة في هذا المجال طابوها قد يؤدي إلى عواقب خطيرة على حياة المؤلفين الأوائل. ولهذا سنحاول من خلال هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على أثمان فدية النساء الأسيرات وتوسيع دائرة الكتابة في الموضوع بشكل يساعد الباحثين والطلبة على فهم وضعية المرأة الأوروبية عامة في الجزائر خلال الفترة الحديثة. الكلمات المفتاحية: الجزائر، أوروبا، النساء، ثمن الفدية، الافتداء، العهد العثماني.

Introduction: The current paper analyzes the state of European captive women in Algeria, delving into a study of their numerical representation and an examination of the costs associated with their redemption. The primary objective is to illuminate diverse facets of the history and dynamics describing the captivity within the Algerian context. Emphasis is directed towards meticulous enumeration and understanding of the composition of these captive populations, alongside an exploration of the temporal variations in ransom valuations. Furthermore, the paper highlights the employment of varied methodologies as viable instruments for elucidating these historical frameworks, such as tables and pie charts, thereby affording a more profound insight into the phenomenon of captivity in Algeria.

1- The reason behind the increase in ransoms for female captives: the

value of women's ransoms remained high during the Ottoman era due to religious and social considerations. If we examine the historical records, we find that "women" in Christian and Islamic societies were associated with sanctity and identity. Therefore, the ransom of women was of great importance to Islamic and Christian communities, leading the church and authorities to intervene swiftly to protect them. Some historians say, "The esteemed women were those who had not been subjected to rape."¹

The increased value of women can be attributed to the fact that most women who were taken captive along with their companions came from privileged social classes. They were either the wives of senior officers, merchants, or daughters of influential figures in power. Maria Martin was the wife of an officer in the Levant Company, Miss Burk was the daughter of the Irish ambassador's wife in Spain, and Miss Maria Ter Mettlen was the wife of a Dutch captain; Elizabeth Marsh, the daughter of a prominent ship owner in the English authority, was captured on her way to London to join her fiancé. Mary Valnet, an Italian, was captured on her way to her husband, Henry Valnet, a wealthy French merchant with the East India Company.² Elizabeth Bradley was taken captive along with her husband, Captain James Bradley.³ Thus, Ellen Friedman confirms that the captive's status was fundamental in determining their ransom value.⁴ Meanwhile, Martínez de Torres explains that the high ransom value specifically applied to women, children, officers, and the

1- See: Maria Ter Meetelen. (1748). *Miraculous and Remarkable Events of Twelve Years Slavery ,of a Woman ,Called Maria ter Meetelen ,Resident of Medemblik*. Hoorn : Jacob Duyn's widow.

2- See: Mary Velnet. (1806). *An Affecting History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Velnet an Italian Lady, Who Was Seven Years a Slave in Tripoli, Three of which She Was Confined in a Dungeon,Loaded with Irons; and Four Times Put to the Most Cruel Tortures Ever Invented by Man. Written by Herself*. Boston: William Crane.

3- Eliza Bradley. (1820). *An Authentic Narrative of the Shipwreck and Sufferings of Mrs, the Wife of Captain James Bradley of Liverpool, Commander of the Ship Sally, which Was Wrecked on the Coast of Barbary, in June 1818 ... Written by Herself*. Boston: James Walden.

4- Ellen G. Friedman. (1980). "Cristian Captives at "Hard Labor" in Algiers, 16th-18th Centuries", *The International Journal of Aferican Historical Studies*, Vol.13, N.04, p.623.

bureaucratic class. He also informs us that the ransom for artisans, farmers, and fishermen is low and varies according to supply and demand.¹

The ransom operations were mainly organized based on the affiliation to the church or the state, except for individual ransoms that often occurred through intermediaries, where the religious or geographical affiliation of the captive did not matter. It was challenging for the church or the authority to secure the release of a person who did not belong to the same religious denomination or state. For example, in 1720, during a ransom operation with a Catholic religious affiliation, "Three captives belonging to the Dey were released: a Frenchman, his son, and a surgeon. Dey requested their assistance in releasing a Dutch captive as part of the deal. They objected to the decision, stating that the Dutch captive was a Lutheran (Protestant) and did not belong to Their country. However, the Dey insisted that he did not care about his association, and that the Dutch captive was a Christian; he must be released, along with the other three, in exchange for \$5,000."²

From the above, it can be concluded that the Dey showed little concern for the religious differences of European captives or for the European ransom organizations affiliated with European countries. What mattered in the issue was securing a satisfactory ransom from these organizations, which represented economic revenue for the Algerian state.

2- Edmund Cason in Algiers to ransom English captives -1646: the English Parliament sent Sir Edmund Cason to Algiers to ransom English captives. The first occurred in 1645 when his ship sank, and the second arose in 1646. In his comment on the operation, Cason affirmed: "Most of the local inhabitants tend to keep their slaves [captives] rather than

1- Daniel Bernardo. (2011). Early Modern Spain and the Creation of the Mediterranean: Captivity, Commerce, and Knowledge, University of Michigan: A Thesis for The degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History), p152.

2- Eliakim Littell, Robert S. 1854. Littell, Littell's Living Age. T.42, T.H. Carter & Company, p.64

redeeming them, which has caused their prices to rise. Many women and children cost around 50 pounds per head and can be sold for 100 pounds. There are also ship captains, carpenters, sailmakers, barrel makers, doctors, and others whose value is considered high, reaching up to 320 pounds."¹

The Price was not a fundamental determinant of women's freedom. Many Women refused to return to their homeland, "especially if they had children from their captors."² Women were more likely to obtain freedom than men because a portion of the ransom money was allocated to liberate children, women, clergy, and soldiers. Overall, women held a higher monetary value than men, and young girls were more valuable than adults. Olufur informed us that his captor paid 60 Daler to purchase him, while others ransomed for 100, 200, or even 400 Daler. Some individuals were ransomed for amounts ranging from 150 to 30 Daler. Many Captives from foreign countries (non-Danish) were ransomed for sums between 50, 60, or 70 Daler.³

"Casson was able, in 1646, as mentioned earlier, to liberate 244 English prisoners found in Algeria. At the end of his work, titled 'A Relation of the whole proceedings concerning the Redemption of the Captives in Algiers and Tunis...' published in 1647, he included a list of the names of the liberated captives along with the price in dollars and 'doubloons.' The list included the names of women, and to provide the reader with precise details, we have attached the table below and included the list of women mentioned by Casson."⁴

1 Eliakim Littell, Robert S. Littell, op.cit, p.64.

2 Felicity Nussbaum. 2006. *The Global Eighteenth Century*. London: JHU Press, p.140.

3 Egilsson, Ólafur. (2016). *The Travels of Reverend Olafur Egilsson*. CUA Press, p.114.

4- EDMOND CASON. (1647). *A RELATION Of the whole proceedings concerning the Redemption of the CAPTIVES in ARGIER and TUNIS. With the Translates and Copies of the Letters from the Bashaw, Duana, Mufty, Caddee, and Shoudes, unto both the Honourable Houses of PARLIAMENT. As also the Letters from EDMOND CASON Esq; Agent for the Parliament there, to the Honourable, the Committee for the Navie. Together with a List of the Captives names redeemed, and the prizes they cost there in the Market*. LONDON: Printed by F. L. for Laurence Blaikelock, p.18-24.

Chart 01: “The Redeeming Price of Women Captives during Cason's journey to Algiers (1646)”

Captive Names	Dollars	Dobles
Ralph Ellet of London.	250	054
Ellen Hawkins of Baltamore.	400	086
Elizabeth Score of London.	550	120
Ursula Corlion of Falmouth.	500	107½
Abel Hearne of London.	535	115¾
Richard Jackson of Dartmouth.	430	092¾
Elizabeth Escot of Yahall.	405	087¼
Joane Bradbrook of Baltamore.	700	150
Sarah Leeds of Chatham.	750	160
Alice Hayes of Edenborough.	1100	258½
Sarah Ripley of London.	800	172
Elizabeth Mancor of Dundee in Scotland.		200
Valentine Weymouth of Ipswich.	700	150
Mary Weymouth, and her two children, James and Iohn.	1000	215
Katherine Ockley of London.	600	129
Bridget Randall and her son of London.	1050	225¾
Elizabeth Alwin of London.	1655	356¾
Anna Fen of		310
Mary Bruster of Yahall	1392	300
Anna VVright of Yahall.	1000	215
Elizabeth Wright of Yahall.	1000	215
Katherine Wright.	750	160¾

The highest amount in the list presented by Casson belonged to Elizabeth Alwin, where the value of her sale reached 356 dollars.

However, the high prices were not exclusive to women, As some men exceeded the amount of 300 dollars, like the captive John Reynolds (Waymouth), who was redeemed for 312 dollars. ¹Thus, he would be the most expensive man ransom on the list.²

The Following Table Introduces the names of children and their ages when they were ransomed from Algiers.

Chart 02: “The Redeeming Price of European Children from Algiers”

Crown	Age	Child
252	06	Diego Hernandez (born in Algiers)
346	11	Joseph Rodriguez (Cadiz)
357	14	Pedro Genovarti (Mallorca)
409	15	Joseph de la Barrière
357	15	Antonio Genovarti (Mallorca)
199	--	Louisa Benitez (London)
200	--	Maria Rodriguez (Toulouse)

The issue of capturing children was not limited to Algeria alone but was a widespread phenomenon in the Mediterranean region. For example, between May 3, 1661, and May 6, 1662, the Spanish governor of Oran sent to Spain around 107 Muslim slaves, primarily women, children, and infants. Records have shown that most captives transported to Spain and enslaved on land were women and children.³

3. Amounts of the liberated women from Algeria 1637-1830: the following table presents the prices of women liberated from North Africa according to various sources during different periods of the 17th and 18th centuries:

1- EDMOND CASON. op.cit, 18-24.

2- Kenelm Henry Digby. (1848). *Compitum, or the meeting of the ways at the Catholic church*, Dolman, p.39-40.

3- Daniel Hershenzo. (2018). *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain*. University of Pennsylvania Press , p.21.

Chart 03: "The Prices of Ransomed Female Captives from Algiers 1637-1826".

Year	Value
1637	Asta (Iceland): 400 Danish Rigsdaler ¹
1646	Elizabeth Allen (London): £80
1683	90 pieces of eight for the liberation of Elizabeth van Hargelyn
1750-1751	Eight women redeemed for a total of 18,000 shillings, averaging 2,571.40 shillings per person
1778-1782	Individual ransom ranged between 4,200-4,500 livres
1789	Ransom ranged from 300-12,000 livres (special cases)
1818	The English paid \$10,000 for the redemption of two girls
1826	Young girls were sold for \$200

If we examine the lists of redeemed individuals - women in particular - we will notice that liberation encompassed all age groups. However, most were adult women between the ages of 25 and 50.

In a list of 313 redeemed captives in the year 1785, in favor of France, the list included the period of captivity, age, and region.²

Chart 04: "Period of captivity, age, and region 1785"

Captives	Age	Period	Region
F. Mari	46	15	Saint-Sulpice
J. Comolera	28	08	Tillet
A. Belin	29	08	-
B. J. Dodila	29	05	Gommet
M. Bonit	30	10	Saint-Jacques
L. F. D. Bonit	31	05	--

1- "According to Reverend Olufur, the captive Asta is considered the most valuable among those redeemed from the Danes." Egilsson, Ólafur, op.cit, p.191.

2- *Voyage dans les états barbaresques de Maroc, Alger, Tunis et Tripoli; ou Lettres d'un des Captifs qui viennent d'être rachetés, par M.M. les Chanoines réguliers de la Sainte-Trinité, suivies d'une notice sur leur rachat et du catalogue de leurs noms, 1785*

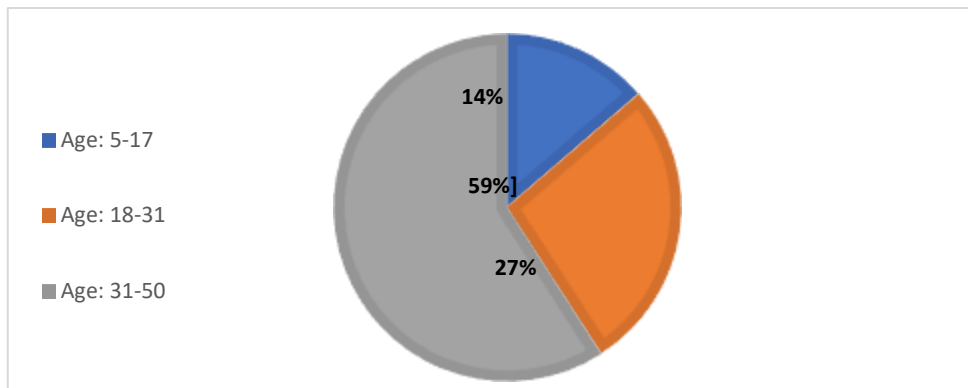
J. Paris	32	11	Saint-Foi- lagrande
B. Molina	32	11	Gratieu
B. Catala	32	07	Troyes
B. Bonit	36	12	Dijon
J. F. Genet	36	04	Rocherblanche
M. Laveriein	39	12	Saint-Vincent
J. Panot	39	12	-
Coli	42	12	Gevinacleon
F. Aurene	40	16	Saint-Samson
L. Debrisa	43	06	Mirouni
F. Boniera	50	09	Saint-Pierre- d'Alba
J. Valat	32	07	Marchais

Women's names were not mentioned in some lists of redemptions due to their small number, as in the redemptions carried out by the Holy Trinity and Mercy organizations. It can also be confirmed that some women who were liberated were not older than 14 years, as was the case with Miss Burk, whose ship was captured off the coast of Jijel, and she was taken as a captive to the mountains of Cuckoo at the age of no more than nine years.¹

For additional clarification, we created a pie chart that illustrates the age of the captive at the time of liberation based on two redemption lists in 1667 and 1720. This chart includes 24 liberated captives from Algeria.

“The age of the liberated female captives [24 captives]”

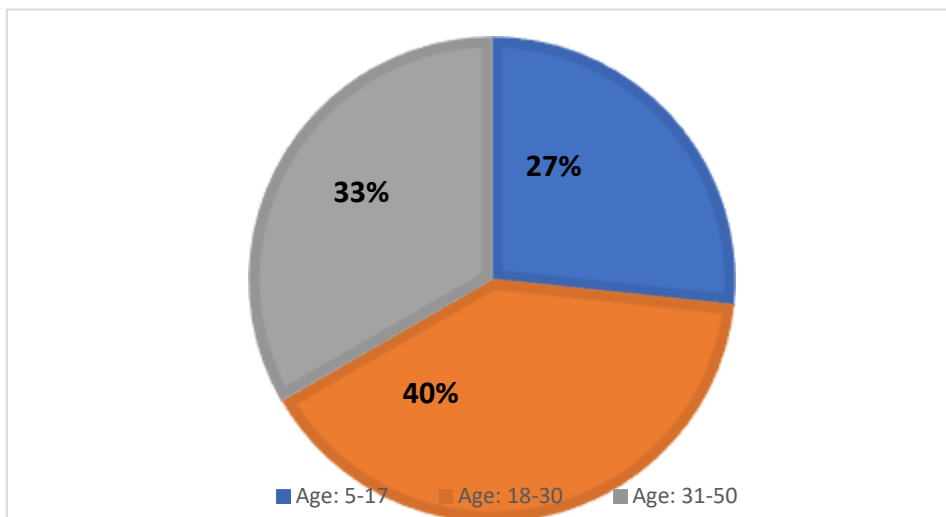
1 Acba. B, op.cit, p.13-23.



Source: *Voyage dans les états barbaresques de Maroc, Alger, Tunis et Tripoli; ou Lettres d'un des Captifs qui viennent d'être rachetés, par M.M. les Chanoines réguliers de la Sainte-Trinité, suivies d'une notice sur leur rachat et du catalogue de leurs noms, 1785.*

Moreover, we will now mention samples of women's ages at the time of their capture, based on the previous two samples and additional samples from various sources, as well as the memoirs of male and female captives.

“The age of the female captive at the moment of her capture.”



Source: (1785), *Voyage dans les états barbaresques de Maroc, Alger, Tunis et Tripoli; ou Lettres d'un des Captifs qui viennent d'être rachetés, par M.M. les Chanoines réguliers de la Sainte-Trinité, suivies d'une notice sur leur rachat et du catalogue de leurs noms*, 1785.

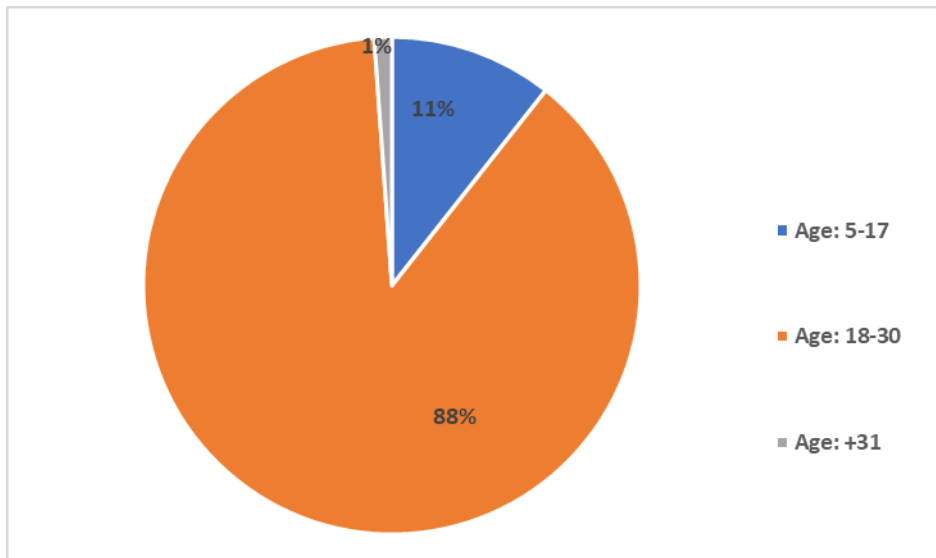
- Jean, B., et al., (1721), *Voyage pour la redemption des captifs aux royaumes d'Alger et de Tunis fait en 1720 par les PP. François Comelin, Philemon de la Motte et Joseph Bernard de l'ordre de la Sainte Trinité, dits Mathurins. Sevestre*,.

It can be observed that most of the redeemed women were between the ages of 18 and 30. Considering the European Catholic perspective, this age range is optimal for the sexual exploitation of captive women. However, HAEDO has a different opinion, stating that the age range is between 18 and 30 more suitable for domestic work, especially considering that Algerian women are not skilled in such tasks.¹

We have created charts based on the lists of ransom for prisoners to determine the age of men at the time of their liberation. The sample included French ransom lists from 1666, 1667, 1720, and 1785, comprising over 435 captives."

"Age of the captive at the time of liberation [French ransom lists]".

1 De Haëdo, D. (1998). *Histoire des rois d'Alger*. Éditions Bouchène.



The male ransom lists have shown that the dominant age for liberation operations is captives over 31. This can be attributed to the fact that the age range between 18-30 is when captives are exploited in various labor activities requiring physical strength. After reaching the age of 40, captives are usually released. The majority of those who were liberated in the third category were over the age of 45.

Conclusion: determining the precise prices for redeeming women during the Modern Era presents a challenge due to the scarcity of detailed historical documentation from that era. Nevertheless, historical accounts suggest that the ransom of women varied significantly based on diverse factors, including the social status of the captives, the geopolitical dynamics, and the economic conditions prevailing during that period.

In both Islamic and Christian societies, women were emblematic of virtue. As a result, ransom operations consistently prioritized women and children, viewing women as a representation of 'honor' for both communities. Evidently, a predominant demographic among the women brought to Algeria comprised individuals from affluent backgrounds or those serving as attendants to their mistresses. Consequently, the ransom amounts for their release were high compared to those for men.

Despite accusations by some European authors that European women may have been subjected to sexual assault, the reality proves that women have maintained their eligibility for marriage within European

bourgeois families.

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