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ENSLAVED LABOUR AND IM/MOBILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE ITALIAN CASE (1752-1885)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to illustrate the tension between mobility and immobility that existed in the slave labour market in the Mediterranean during the 18th and 19th centuries, focusing mainly on the Italian case, but it also considers the issue in a wider European sense. The skin colour, age, physical appearance, and ethnic origin (as described by the sources) of captives, enslaved people and formerly enslaved people affected their mobility before and after the legal abolition of slavery between 1752 and 1885. I will analyse the correlation between the legal end of slavery and the im/mobility of enslaved and ex-enslaved based on the characteristics and qualities assigned to them. The juridical abolitions of slavery in the 19th century did not change this correlation in geographical spaces characterised by accelerating mobility of persons of colour with different juridical statuses. My case studies are based in Florence, Venice, Livorno, Rome and Civitavecchia.

Keywords: Slaves, Im/Mobility, Mediterranean, Labour, Qualities.
JEL Codes: J21, J61, K31.

Introduction

In the 18th and 19th centuries, enslaved individuals were brought to Europe from the Atlantic world as well as the Ottoman Empire. In the Mediterranean basin, state-owned public slaves and privately-owned slaves were

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employed in various types of work.[1] Public slaves worked mainly on galleys, on construction sites, in manufacturing or as soldiers (Bonazza 2019: 118-119). Individuals enslaved in private contexts were usually domestics for nobles and middle-class families, although they could also be employed in agricultural and production activities, or be rented out (Bono 2016: 131, 134). In a broader sense, the question of enslaved labour and mobility in the Mediterranean is fundamental in understanding how mobility was a huge phenomenon even before the transport revolution in 19th-century Europe (Antunes and Blažytė 2021). For this reason, Mediterranean slavery is mentioned under the "Emigration" and "Immigration" sections in the article "The Mobility Transition Revisited, 1500-1900: What the Case of Europe Can Offer to Global History" (Lucassen and Lucassen 2009). The "Emigration" section details how Tatar raiders took enslaved people from Russia, the Baltic and Poland, as well as other enslaved "white" people from South Europe to the Asian part of the Ottoman Empire. "Immigration" highlights the presence of enslaved Muslims, predominantly from northern Africa, in Italy and Europe (*ibid.*: 354, 357).

There are different perspectives from which to view slave mobility in the Mediterranean: mobility due to the ransom of captives; voluntary escape from galleys or work sites; and mobility involving the Mediterranean in connection with the Atlantic or the Indian Ocean (Zappia 2018; Kaiser 2008; Weiss 2011; Tuccillo 2018).

Concerning mobility, regulated mobility in local contexts could also provide means for enslaved people to obtain legal freedom, as we will see in the case of Rome; on the contrary, however, non-regulated mobility, such as in the case of an enslaved person who escaped a galley but was recaptured, could involve the imposition of a condition of perpetual enslavement as a punishment (see the section *Mobility among captive and enslaved people in the Mediterranean: Ransom, escape and global trade*).

Turning to enslaved individuals' immobility, I will investigate immobility in the Houses of Catechumens, religious catholic institutions for the conversion of Muslims and Jews, in Florence, Venice and Rome, and the immobility of the enslaved employed as oarsmen in galleys in Civitavecchia and Livorno to show how in reality these "closed" spaces ('closed' in the sense that they did not allow for freedom of movement either internally or from inside to outside) were fundamental for further slave mobility either socially or spatially. After a period in the House of Catechumens, working and living conditions often improved for enslaved people and they could

[1] I occasionally use the term 'slave' or 'slaves' to refer to individuals or groups while recognising that these people were enslaved by others.

sometimes redeem themselves using money they had earned. Following religious conversion, the State could free enslaved people after a certain period. Private citizens could also redeem them. Increased social mobility was inherent in all these processes. Spatial mobility was a possibility because captives in galleys could be ransomed and returned to their homeland, liberated, or they could escape. In any of these scenarios, the Houses of Catechumens and galleys represented immobility for the period in which enslaved people lived there, after which that immobility transitioned again into mobility (see the section *Enslaved people's immobility in the Houses of Catechumens: Florence, Venice and Rome*).

In the article, I will also examine how the skin colour, age, physical appearance and ethnic origin (as described by the sources) of captives, enslaved people and formerly enslaved people affected their im/mobility before and after the legal abolition of slavery from the second half of the 18th and well into the 19th century. My sources were not produced by enslaved and formerly enslaved people but often their petitions or testimonies were reported by intermediaries, such as catholic intermediaries. I will analyse the correlation between the legal end of slavery and the im/mobility of enslaved and formerly enslaved people based on the characteristics and qualities assigned to them in the period (1762-1885) which reflects the timeframe of sources consulted, while also representing a chronological period before and after the legal abolitions of slavery for the case studies considered.

1. Mobility among captive and enslaved people in the Mediterranean: Ransom, escape and global trade

There have been two main lines of investigation into the study of slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean and in the first half of the 19th century: the study of Mediterranean captivity linked to privateering and the ransom economy (Bono 2019; Kaiser 2008; Weiss 2011); and the study of enslaved people from the Ottoman Empire, Sub-Saharan Africa and the colonial world in the Mediterranean and Europe (Bono 2016; Peabody 1996).

Ransom of captives in the Mediterranean basin, the so called *économie de la rançon*, was an important commercial activity during the Early Modern period (Kaiser 2007). Research on Mediterranean captivity in the context of the racing war and ransom economy has dealt extensively with North Africa. It highlights the dynamism of the phenomenon, first in terms of time, assuming that a captive remained a prisoner for less than five years on average. In the Spanish case, only 2% of captives had to remain in the Maghreb for more than twenty years (Bosco 2018: 57, 58). Such

individuals were called captives of *longue durée*, but they were a minority group in the period 1574-1609 (Tarruel 2013). There are no similar studies concerning captives in European cities however, and the historiography has generally suggested that, post-conversion, the majority of enslaved people became part of their community of arrival in Europe (Bono 2016: 222). There was no marked difference in living and working conditions among enslaved black people and captives who arrived in Italian ports.[2] There was a significant difference, however, in ransom prices and the likelihood of being ransomed. There was no prospect of enslaved black people being ransomed by their parents, and the Barbary States were more interested in ransoming Levantine or "local" enslaved people rather than enslaved black people from Sub-Saharan Africa or the Atlantic world.

For instance, 4 of 54 enslaved people who arrived in Palermo on an Algerian ship in July 1808 were Moorish (*mori*).[3] We can presume that these men were already enslaved on the ship plundered, because they were not documented as having had any maritime role or any other occupation as a free man captured. All 54 were located in the Quartier of prisoners in Palermo. The enslaved people in the Quartier of prisoners received the same financial support as convicts (the so called *servi di pena*), so in terms of living conditions the local convicts and the enslaved experienced identical treatment. This included enslaved Moorish people and non-Moorish Turkish captives.[4] In October 1808 another 62 enslaved Turks arrived in Palermo. Father Paolo and monsignor Castelli, who were in charge of ransom operations, had to exchange the Turks with 28 enslaved Christians. Therefore, we can suppose that the exchange value was around two enslaved Turks for one enslaved Christian. The exchange value of enslaved Moorish individuals was inferior again: two Christians for five Moors.[5] Another document informs us that the Bey of Tunis did not accept the exchange of 18 enslaved Tunisians because they were black rather than Levantine.[6] The fact that the

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[2] In general, in the Italian area and in the European context there is a theoretical distinction between captives and enslaved people, even if in the taxonomy of sources is difficult to find the word captive in the Early Modern period. Captivity is a temporary condition of slavery, from which the slave will be freed by intermediaries, redemption institutions and relatives. On the difference between a captive and a slave see Fontenay 2008: 21-22.

[3] ASP, *Redenzione dei Cattivi*, vol. 298, f. 463.

[4] *Ibid.*, f. 507. In the Mediterranean cases 'moro' is often synonymous with 'black' but it can also mean maghrebins and moriscos. In my article and for this specific case study 'moro' Moorish is a synonym of 'black'. Below, in the cases of the 'Atlantic' slaves Martino and Emanulle, they are defined as 'mori' in the sources, but this is synonymous with 'black'.

[5] *Ibid.*, f. 520.

[6] Levantine slaves were slaves who come from the area of the Eastern Ottoman Empire including Anatolia and the Aegean Islands.

exchange value of an enslaved Moorish person was inferior to that of an enslaved Levantine proves that skin colour was an important element in Mediterranean slave exchange and that from a commercial point of view an enslaved black was merchandise of lower value. The same dynamic is visible in Livorno. In July 1792, 12 *mori* "Moors" arrived in the *Bagno* of Livorno. They were to be exchanged with members of the Corridi family, but this did not happen because of their skin colour. This shows clearly that enslaved black people were not exchangeable, and that money would have to be used instead in such circumstances (Bonazza 2019: 137).

This is interesting in terms of mobility because Levantine captives and non-black slaves from North Africa had a much better chance of returning home than enslaved Moorish people. So, enslaved Moors in galleys lived in a more immobile condition than non-black captives. One of the reasons for this was that enslaved Moorish people were highly unlikely to have family in the Barbary Regencies or another State that might have an interest in ransoming them. Therefore, we may conclude that it was not necessarily skin colour in itself that had an economic impact. Rather, it was symbolic of a geographical origin that affected the possibility of exchange.

Other information on this topic can be found in three articles in the *Antologia* of Vieusseux entitled *Prospetto del commercio di Tripoli d'Africa e delle sue relazioni con quello dell'Italia*.[7] The first article provides important information about the trade in enslaved black people. Published in 1827, it reports that 2500 enslaved black people, *schiavi neri*, were sold or exchanged annually between Tripoli, Tunis, Egypt and the Levante. Few enslaved individuals remained in Tripoli as servants of the Muslim inhabitants. Christians who lived in Tripoli could not buy enslaved blacks. Other interesting information refers to the kinds of enslaved people coming from sub-Saharan Africa to Tripoli, and the prices attached to them: black eunuchs cost between 350 and 400 *sceriffi* (around 650-700 Spanish *pezze forti*); black men from 90 to 100 *pezze forti*; a young boy between 10- and 18-years old 70-80 *pezze*; a child 40-50 *pezze*; black women from 120 to 150 *pezze* according to their beauty, and young girls from 90 to 100 *pezze*. The second article refers to exported goods and, among other goods, to enslaved people. Therefore, still in 1828 slaves were usually included in the tables of exported goods. Finally, the third article – dated 1830 – discusses contracts in Tripoli and export duty on enslaved people (men and women), the so-called '*nigrizia*', that amounted to 40.000 *colonnati* (Bonazza 2019: 79). So, in this case, as

[7] *Antologia* (July, August, September 1827), tomo 27, Firenze Al Gabinetto scientifico e letterario di G.P. Vieusseux, articolo I; *Antologia* (April, May, June 1828), tomo 13, Firenze Al Gabinetto scientifico e letterario di G.P. Vieusseux, articolo II; *Antologia* (January, February, March 1830), tomo 37, Firenze Al Gabinetto scientifico e letterario di G.P. Vieusseux, articolo III.

in the Atlantic world, mobility was also affected by prices and interest in the type of enslaved people on the market, because they were regarded as simple merchandise and were not captives. Eunuchs, women and young girls were in demand, possibly for sexual reasons, and thus were more expensive. In this regard, the definition proposed by Michel Fontenay of the difference between captives and enslaved people seems appropriate. Theoretically, captivity was a temporary condition of slavery, from which the enslaved person could be freed by intermediaries, redemption institutions or relatives. The enslaved individual, on the contrary, was unfree from a juridical point of view for an indefinite period (Fontenay 2008: 21-22). In reality, if we reflect on living and working conditions beyond the economy of ransom and beyond the practice of the purchase, the condition of enslaved people and captives in Italian cities, in a local dimension, was similar. All were treated as slaves.

Later in the 19th century, after the legal abolition of slavery across the Italian States, people on the Cairo slave market were ransomed by missionaries and brought to Italy. It seems that the missionaries preferred cheaper enslaved females, who were often ill, because their objective was "catholic salvation and liberation" rather than labour or sexual exploitation. This was the time of the famous case of Bakhita, who was bought by the consul Callisto Legnani as a slave in Karthoum and whose status was still uncertain when she arrived in Genoa in 1885. Under Italian law, Bakhita was free, but the Michieli for whom she worked as a nurse regarded her as a slave under "African laws". It was only in the House of Catechumens of Venice that Bakhita was properly recognised as legally free (Ghedini 2021). There were other formerly enslaved people in Italian cities such as Michele Amatore (1826-1883), who came from a village in the Nubia mountains. He was enslaved in Kharthoum and was brought to market in Cairo under his original name of Quetto, at which point he was ransomed by Luigi Castagnone, an Italian doctor exiled in Cairo. After the end of his exile, Castagnone brought Quetto to Piedmont where he was well treated. He started a career as a soldier during the Risorgimento wars and was probably ransomed between 1832 and 1838 because he was baptised in 1838 by the bishop of Asti as Michele Amatore Lobetti. In Piedmont, he was known as Quetto *alias* Michele Amatore (Alciati 2011: 37).

In addition to the skin colour, ethnic origin and gender of the enslaved, other important factors that impacted on mobility were age, skills and health status. In Genoa in 1762, 18 enslaved people were considered incapacitated, the majority on age grounds. They were either 63 years old or more, or were blind or asthmatic. Many young, enslaved people were also blind or missing limbs. Dr Pietro Francesco Pizzorni, under orders from deputy of the Republic of Genoa Stefano Lomellini, categorised old

enslaved people as unfit to work in galleys or to attack some minor Christian vessels (Olgiati, Zappia 2018: 129-130; 187-188). In general, it cost 2000 lire annually to keep an enslaved person, and incapacitated enslaved people were unproductive. Thus, Pizzorni recommended they be granted freedom without compensation to their sellers. It was hoped that their return to the Regency of Tunis and Algiers might help to redeem some enslaved Christians.[8] Another source, dated March 9, 1764, contains a supplication from Gerolamo Balbi, whose pre-baptism name was Assona da Tunis, in which he declared himself unfit to serve on galleys due to paralysis. For this reason, he sought to be ransomed.[9]

Another important dynamic concerning the mobility of enslaved people was escape. Many convicts and enslaved people escaped Civitavecchia galleys. In July 1782 three enslaved men, Messana (known as the Tiger), Machmet from Tunis (known as *Busolotto*), and Machmet from Tripoli (known as *Belbello*), who worked on the Capitana galley, escaped. Messana was found and brought back to Civitavecchia, while the others made good their escape. Messana's defence was based on his claim that he was drunk when convinced to join the others in escaping. He was already in a condition of perpetual enslavement – the punishment for enslaved people who attempted escaped in Papal States. In the circumstances, the Government of Civitavecchia took his evidence as true.[10] Other enslaved people on Italian galleys tried to move to other States in pursuit of more promising ransom possibilities. In 1782 fugitive slaves in Livorno moved to France because the latter had different agreements with the Barbary Regencies in place, meaning they were more likely to be ransomed in France than in Tuscany.[11] These cases can be compared with the practice of maritime marronage in the Atlantic. Among others, this involved enslaved people who escaped from Jamaica to freedom in Cuba (Schneider 2021) more generally from one part of the Caribbean to another (Dawson 2021).

The third element concerning the mobility of the enslaved in the Mediterranean area and Europe due to forced slave mobility concerns slaves from the Atlantic colonial world who arrived in Italian cities. The complexity of the circulation of enslaved people, including between the ports of the Atlantic Ocean and the Italian territories, is apparent from documents produced by the Roman Holy Office in the 18th century. Enslaved people from ports in the Antilles and in Brazil reached Italy, in one case via the

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8 ASG, *Archivio Segreto*, n. 292.

9 ASG, *Archivio Segreto*, n. 296.

10 ASR, *Tribunale di Civitavecchia*, n. 666, f. 15.

11 ASL, *Governatore*, n. 896.

Cape of Good Hope. Ship captains, merchants, missionaries and nobles were all mediators in the process. The case of Martino, a Moorish boy (*moro*) born on Saint Thomas Island in the Danish Antilles, with his family origins in Guinea, is instructive. Martino reached Genoa after several changes in his ownership and after traversing various Atlantic ports and the Mediterranean. The archbishop of Genoa, on November 8, 1786, wrote about doubts surrounding the baptism application received by the Roman Holy Office for Martino; in turn, the archbishop referenced the information that Martino communicated to the Genoese priest Nicola Maria Ferri, *penitenziere* of the Metropolitan Church of Genoa.

A young Moor named Martino, who was born in S. Thomas Island in the Antilles, and whose appearance suggests he is now around fifteen-sixteen years old, was nine years old when kidnapped by a French ship captain while bathing. He was then carried to Cape of Good Hope, and sold to a Genoese merchant, Pietro Paciugo, who lived there. After around three-four years serving him and obeying all his orders, he was sold to a Milanese man, named Mr. Puglia. He was a ship captain and shopkeeper in Genoa, who was passing through the Cape of Good Hope. The Moor served his second master both on sea and land, during the first journey, to Genoa, after his purchase, and then in another journey from Genoa to Spain and back. The second seller decided immediately to educate him when they reached Genoa the first time, but then he departed again, and brought the Moor with him, and therefore he lost all his learning. When he came back, he had to restart his lessons. His first master had never offered him an education and never talked to him about religion. After two years, his second owner sold him last March to the Knight of Malta Andrea di Negro, a Genoese patrician, with whom he still lives and who has paid close attention to his education.[12]

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[12] ACDF, *Archivum sancti officii romani* (D.B D.B 9), 2, 1785-1793, fos not numbered. The original source: "Un Giovane Moro, che vien chiamato Martino, nato nell'Isola di S. Tommaso delle Antille ora in età di circa di 15 in 16 anni, come dall'aspetto apparisce, circa i nove anni di sua età mentre si bagnava alla marina fu rubato da un capitano Francese di Nave, e da questo portato al Capo di Buona Speranza, fu venduto a certo Pietro Paciugo Mercante abitante colà, ma di Nazione Genovese col quale dopo essere stato da circa 3 in 4 anni, ed averlo servito in tutto ciò che gli comandava sempre però nel luogo suddetto fu da esso venduto a certo Sig. Puglia capitano di nave ma Negoziante in Genova, dove quantunque Milanese, abita da più e più anni, e fu venduto mentre questo capitano passò dal detto Capo di Buona Speranza. Ha servito questo secondo suo compratore e in Mare, ed in Terra nel viaggio primo, quando fu comprato fino a Genova, ed in un altro viaggio, che da Genova fece in Spagna, da donde ritornò a Genova. Questo secondo compratore, appena fu arrivato in Genova la prima volta si fece subito sollecito di farlo istruire, ma poiché partì poi pel secondo viaggio, ed il Moro volle seco, perdette tutta la ricevuta istruzione, e fu necessario ricominciare a istruirlo dopo il suo ritorno. Dal primo compratore per lo contrario non gli fu mai proposta un'istruzione, ne gli fu mai parlato di religione, e col detto secondo compratore, formatosi da circa 2 anni, è stato venduto nello scorso mese di Marzo al sign. Cavaliere di Malta Andrea di Negro patrizio genovese, e presso del quale vive tuttavia, e dal quale sempre con maggior premura è stato inculcato".

Martino had three older brothers and three younger sisters. He lived close to a Lutheran church, and he asserted that he did not remember if he played only with "coloured" children or with "white" ones, and if they were Christians or not. He said that there was no crucifix inside the church, and that he did not know the name of his brothers and sisters, but he remembered that his father took him to the fields for planting. According to Martino, his father was a free man, paid for his work in Saint Thomas Island. His mother never spoke with him about baptism or the Holy Trinity, but she often mentioned God. It seems that Martino spoke Genoese well. The archbishop of Genoa asked the Holy Office if Martino, after being educated in the Catholic religion, could be baptised. Martino's last enslaver, Andrea di Negro, who educated him in the Catholic religion, was born in Genoa in 1720 and he was son of Agostino Di Negro and Dorotea Lomellini. He was a patrician and a Knight of Malta. There is a contrast between Martino's intercontinental geographical mobility and the "immobility" of Genoa-based enslavers (and one from Milan). Enslavers were rooted locally even while working globally.

Another case involving global movement before eventual arrival in an Italian port was that of a fifteen-year-old Ethiopian, Emanuelle, who came via Rio de Janeiro. In 1752, Emanuelle was brought to the Italian coast by the Capuchin friar Lorenzo da Bologna, before being sent to the court of Prince Leopoldo Langravio d'Hassia Darmstadt in Borgo San Donnino (modern-day Fidenza), a historic district in the Parma region. The boy stated that when he was five years old, in the Brazilian city of Loanda, a priest wet his head, and the Capuchin friar attested in two letters that Emanuelle was baptised by the bishop of Rio de Janeiro, but there was no baptismal register entry to confirm this according to the missionary report in the source (Bonazza 2021: 839-841).[13] In reality, there are baptismal registers in Brazil and they form an important source (Guedes and Ferreira 2020). There were difficulties in accessing them, however, for enslaved people who had relocated to Europe. Prince Leopoldo affirmed that the boy was self-educated in the Catholic religion, and also that he received confirmation in the colonial world. The problem remained, however, that the baptismal proofs and confirmation documents were not accessible in Brazil. No matter how vociferously Prince Leopoldo demanded them, they were not available. Indeed, when enslaved people reached Brazil from Africa, they were baptised hundreds at a time, leaving no documentary traces. The prince had a representative in Rome, the Miloni abbot, who presented the Holy Office with the two letters from the Capuchin missionary, da

[13] The slave probably originated from Luanda rather than Loanda.

Bologna, in lieu of baptismal proofs. Emanuelle's declarations were not considered credible for linguistic reasons and the Holy Office believed that a "black" could not swear oaths. The Holy Office remained unconvinced that Emanuelle had received the sacraments, prompting prince Leopoldo to submit a long petition, which was reported on by monsignor Castelli, the dean of the *Pia Casa dei Catecumeni* in Rome.[14]

These *Dubia* sources, concerning contested or doubted claims of baptism, are interesting because they show not only the movement of enslaved people from Africa to the colonial world but also their movement in reverse, from the colonial world to Africa, and to different parts of Europe such as Spain and the Italian coast. They fully illustrate the global circulation of enslaved people. Information on the biographies of the enslaved and their circulation was fragmentary, reflecting the life patterns of the individuals involved. Missionaries and nobles pieced details together, and sometimes the Holy Office reported the testimony of enslaved people directly, but only if they spoke one of the Italian languages fluently, and it seems that blacks were not permitted to swear testimony in *Dubia* cases. Mobility also involved linguistic barriers and, from the perspective of the Inquisition, cultural differences regarding religious practices and the sacraments imparted to enslaved people in the Atlantic world. Enslaved people from the Mediterranean, including black people, encountered fewer linguistic problems and they were permitted to swear an oath. For instance, a supplication from Mahumet Dradi, "Turc" from Morocco (Caffiero 2011), involved an uncertain case of baptism. "Turc" was probably baptised in Portugal before arriving in Rome. Though a renegade at one point, he did not have any linguistic problems. His supplication was transcribed by a priest, and the Holy Office treated his situation as a standard one.[15] While they refused to recognise his baptism, because they felt he had ulterior motives, skin colour did not seem to be an active issue in his case.

Emanuelle, an enslaved black (*moro*) from the Atlantic, was subject to descriptions and connotations in the sources quite different to those attached to Turkish slaves who could make sworn contributions. The black slave from the colonial world could not swear because it was felt that he did not understand the importance of the oath. Only the missionary's input was valid. To conclude, it is difficult to demonstrate that this was a 'racial' problem but individuals with a combination of black skin and colonial origins were certainly treated differently to Mediterranean 'Moors'.

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14 ACDF, *Archivum sancti officii romani* (D.B D.B 4), 21, 1754-1755, f. 517.

15 *Ibid.*, ff. 452, 455, 457.

The mobility of enslaved people around the Mediterranean and between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean was important after the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and equally important as the Ottoman Empire abolished slavery over various slave trade routes at different times: restrictions were first imposed on Istanbul in 1847 before the Circassian trade was abolished in 1855 and full abolition followed in 1857 (Toledano 1982: 126, 142). The persistence of slavery in Europe until the mid-19th century is well documented (De Almeida Mendes 2016; Sarti 2010; Bonazza 2019: 214). Privateering was normal practice until 1856 (Lo Basso 2002), as was the sale of enslaved people in North Africa until the end of the 19th century (Troutt Powell 2012; Ghedini 2020).

2. Enslaved people's immobility in the Houses of Catechumens: Florence, Venice and Rome

Moving from enslaved people's mobility to immobility, when enslaved people arrived in Italian cities, enslavers often dictated that they be converted and the enslaved themselves sometimes sought conversion as a means to better living and working conditions in their new communities. The conversion of neophytes took place in the House of Catechumens (*Pia Casa dei Catecumeni*), an institution present in several cities: Rome, Venice, Florence, Ferrara, Bologna, Naples and other, smaller cities (Zorattini 2008: 47). The Houses were spaces of immobility because neophytes had to spend a year there preparing to join the Catholic faith. They were mainly Jews and Muslims, and among the Muslims were enslaved individuals. In the Roman House of Catechumens, enslaved people did not work during this period of education. Instead, they received bread, clothes and 13 lire living expenses (Bonazza 2019: 123). Living conditions in the House were quite good and after a year slaves might be presented with opportunities to become soldiers *in Castel Sant'Angelo* or gain other dignified employment. For this reason, slaves on galleys often wanted to be converted. Neophytes learned a trade in the *Pia Casa*: such institutions, beyond their religious and welfare missions, had an economic purpose, namely training workers to serve private individuals or the State, as happened in Rome and Venice.

In this context, I will present cases of immobility in the Houses of Catechumens of Florence, Venice and Rome that returned to mobility, whether social or geographical. Of course, enslaved people also died in the Houses of Catechumens. The problem of im/mobility was linked to conversion practices in the *Pia Casa*. Conversion could be imposed in a coercive condition, or it could be free choice for the enslaved person in a coactive situation (Minchella 2014: 210).

Two late cases in Florence involved a brother and sister who were brought to the House in 1825 to be converted. They were in the charge of the former lieutenant Lorenzo Guidi. The two, Alì and Esise, had been sold in Livorno by a Russian merchant, Michele Inatvitz (Marconcini 2012: 106). The siblings then went to live at the house of Guidi, who had bought them together with a chest of clothes for a total of 280 lire. Alì was 17 and Esise was 20 years old. They were called "African Negroes slaves" and arrived at the *Pia Casa* on September 20, 1825, to be converted after due religious instruction.[16] Their conversion was Guido's choice rather than their own. The case sources reveal two important points. Firstly, Esise died from hepatitis, for which she had not been well treated, and post-mortem she was dissected out of a macabre quasi-scientific curiosity about her black body. Secondly, Alì's ownership was transferred to the marquis Andrea Bourbon del Monte during his time in the *Pia Casa*.[17]

During Esise's illness, presumably because of the likelihood of death, she was baptised on 4 September 1825 as Maria Francesca Fortunati Passerini. She died, presumably due to a complication of the hepatitis, on December 10, 1825. The night prior to Maria Francesca's death, the custodian of the House, Settimio Puliti, called Maissimiliano Rigacci to attend the patient, but Rigacci was not "matriculated" to practice medicine. In addition to questions about his qualifications and the efficacy of his intervention, he performed an illegal autopsy of sorts in which her hair and some skin were removed to be placed on a wooden head. A doctor named Galletti was commissioned to investigate the case, leading to the accusations against the custodian and Rigacci. Settimio Puliti was dismissed from his position.[18]

This story shows how the body of the "Moor" was considered exotic and open to manipulation for reasons of novelty rather than science. The sources reveal much about the attitudes of the House to the siblings as black Africans. For instance, Fr Domenico Corsi, in telling the archbishop of Florence that Alì was ready to receive the baptism, wrote that: "it involved his ability having to overcome the natural torpidity and the contrary habit to exercise the intellect in the study".[19] Alì's new status was evident in his baptismal documentation. He was baptised in August 1826, and his godfather was Amaddio Pingani, a secret representative of the marquis Andrea

16 ASF (Archivio di Stato di Firenze), *Compagnia, poi Magistrato del Bigallo, secondo versamento*, f. 1170, fasc. 6.

17 ASF (Archivio di Stato di Firenze), *Compagnia, poi Magistrato del Bigallo, secondo versamento*, f. 1170, fasc. 5-6.

18 ASF, *Compagnia, poi Magistrato del Bigallo, secondo versamento*, f. 1170, fasc. 5.

19 *Ibid.*, fasc. 6.

Bourbon del Monte. The marquis took Alì to his service. So, Alì's immobility in the *Pia Casa* was transformed into mobility in the direction of the house of the marquis. Esise's stay in the House, however, ended in death. The slave trade continued in Florence until 1837 and was not formally abolished until 1855 (Tuccillo 2018).

The House of Catechumens of Venice provides examples of how immobility could eventually result in social mobility, even when conversion was coerced rather than a free choice. Rome, on the other hand, provides evidence that conversion could be a free choice within a coercive condition. Many children and women, after being converted in the Venetian institution, found family homes. In 1794 a young Moor from "Arab Ethiopia", the nine-year-old Marsal, arrived in the *Pia Casa*. He was enslaved by captain Matteo Raimondo of Rovinj but he was handed over in the name of Marietta Pini, his guardian. Marsal was not able to write when he arrived in Venice, and his new name was Vincenzo Maria Giorgio Pini.[20] After his conversion, Marsal lived with Marietta Pini.

Among the cases of converted enslaved Africans in the 19th century was that of ten-year-old Bachit, a "Moor slave from Arab Ethiopia" who in 1802 was accompanied to the *Pia Casa* by his master, Giovanni Pini Oriundo, a Venetian from Egypt, and Donato Battaglia. Bachit's name became Donato Pini.[21] In 1825 the African "moor" Hassange became Carlo Giuseppe Fortunato.[22] The surname Fortunato points to the fact that Carlo Giuseppe was an abandoned child and took this name rather than that of an enslaver or intermediary who introduced him to the *Pia Casa*. Frequently, Moorish children were adopted by local families. Women with children were to be found in the Houses, and women sometimes gave birth there. Alima was a 20-year-old "moor" woman from Cairo who was described as "savage" and whose parents according to one source were "Africans, more Turks than Idolaters".[23] Alima was purchased in the Cairo market by Giorgio Scheffler, a native of the Tyrol, and arrived in Venice as an enslaved person. In 1823 Alima's son was born in the *Pia Casa*. The midwife wanted to baptise him, and the name imposed on him was Giambattista Rossetti, since he had been accompanied to the baptismal font by a Venetian shopkeeper of that name from the parish of Santa Maria del Rosario.[24] In 1822 Anna from Egypt arrived with her two girls. On June 12, 1824, she was baptised under

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20 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 107. ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 149.

21 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Costituti*, 2, f. 106. ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 148.

22 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 170.

23 ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 166.

24 *Ibid*.

the name Anna Maria Dafour. Previously unmarried, on the day of her baptism she married Antonio Lebolo, a "shopkeeper" from Piedmont, in the Parish of St. Mary of the Rosary.[25] Lebolo could not give up the privilege of membership of the Pious Institute, and Anna Maria's daughters were baptised on the day of their mother's baptism. The four-year-old was given the name Rosa Maria and her godfather was Mr. Bernardino Drovetti, son of the consul general of France in Alexandria, Egypt. The younger child was baptised *sub condicione* as Maria Caterina, because of the declaration that she had already received the baptismal water in Trieste from a priest.[26] African women were frequently married immediately after baptism and in the case that they already had children, the new husband was required to become their adoptive father. Marriage was for the neophyte an important instrument of integration into the new community and a sure means to guarantee a better future for her children. In the case of enslaved women, marriage was clearly forced because the Venetian patricians or merchants either travelled in the other side of the Mediterranean to pick their future brides or selected them during their stay in the House. The legal abolition of slavery in Venice occurred in 1816 (Sarti 2010: 290-291) but cases of im/mobility and conversion continued until 1846,[27] and 1889 if we count the case of Bakhita (Ghedini 2021).

In Rome, captives on galleys often decided to enter the *Pia Casa* because life in galleys was hard due to the nature of the work and the burden of shackled feet as well as sexual abuse and fights between prisoners and enslaved individuals. There were instances of cooperation, including in organizing escape attempts (Lucassen and van Voss 2019: 4), but the atmosphere on galleys was usually one of violence and suspicion. The enslaved on galleys were not generally treated differently on the basis of ethnic origin or skin colour. There is evidence of captives who requested conversion, and when their faith was proved, went to Rome in a small boat. During preparation in the *Pia Casa* captives and enslaved people did not work but they could learn skills to be used in future jobs. After conversion in *Castel Sant'Angelo* they could become soldiers or work in manufacturing, even though baptism did not mean legal freedom (Bonazza 2020). So, baptism often led to greater social mobility and, to a lesser extent, geographical mobility, most enslaved individuals remaining in Rome or the Papal States. Though not juridically free, they were progressively integrated into society, and after a certain period they were able to redeem themselves and

[25] ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 168.

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] ASPV, *Catecumeni, Registri dei Neofiti*, 3, c. 192.

eventually become free. Many petitions prove that enslaved people who were baptised were not free. Among the group of enslaved Turks baptised in the *Castel Sant'Angelo* between 1783 and 1784, Giuseppe Antonio Joannini, a Tunisian, asked for a job at the cove. From his biographical profile we know that he had been enslaved for ten years, eight of them working at the *filarello* in the old city. His petition to obtain freedom was addressed to cardinal Guglielmo Pallotta, who was the general treasurer and prefect of the *Castel Sant'Angelo* (Bonazza 2019: 120).

Having seen how immobility in the Houses of Catechumens could lead to social and occasionally geographical mobility, it seems that the racial factor only entered the equation in the 19th century, as illustrated by the case of Esise in Florence. Sources from the Houses of Rome and Venice reveal in their taxonomy a particular interest in black skin colour but not a disparity of treatment in a racial sense. While in the 18th century the ransom value of a "Moorish" enslaved person of Sub-Saharan origin was lower than that of a Levantine, the evidence on whether they were otherwise discriminated against compared to other captives suggests that things were more complicated. While skin colour affected sale in galleys, as well as mobility it was not a barrier to entry to the *Pia Casa* or to social mobility thereafter. On the contrary, being "Moorish" could be advantageous because time in the *Pia Casa* presented increased opportunities for a better life, as was also the case in other comparable European contexts (Sauer 2021).

Conclusion

Enslaved people's im/mobility in the Mediterranean and the Italian territories was a significant phenomenon, and one with spatial and social dimensions. In terms of spatial mobility among State-enslaved people, blacks in Italian cities were less likely to be ransomed or to return to their home countries than Levantines. One of the reasons for this was that enslaved black people were unlikely to have family in the Barbary Regencies or a State that had an interest in ransoming them. In this sense, skin colour did not have an economic impact in and of itself but it was symbolic of geographical origins and situated in a context affecting the possibility of exchange. The result was greater immobility among blacks used as captives. Mobility for galley workers often depended on escape. There were enslaved men in galleys who tried to move to another State where the possibility of being ransomed was higher. Another form of mobility involved enslaved black people from the Atlantic colonial world, such as Martino and Emanuelle, who were brought to Italian cities. Martino's intercontinental mobility contrasted with the immobility of his Genoese enslavers. Emanuelle, as a

black native of the Atlantic world, was restricted from swearing evidence to the Holy Office. This was a factor in cases of *Dubia* of baptism, and in Emanuelle's case meant that he could not attest to his existing baptism.

Besides skin colour, age, health status and skills all affected mobility. Captives who were unproductive, such as the 18 enslaved people considered incapacitated in Genoa, were permitted to return to their homeland without charge. In the House of Catechumens of Venice, children and women were more likely to be taken in by a family after baptism and to be assimilated into the new community. The Houses of Catechumens of Florence, Venice and Rome were closed spaces and enslaved individuals experienced immobility inside these institutions, but this immobility turned to mobility after their conversion. This new mobility was often a social mobility more so than a geographical one, as State-enslaved people earned money or were employed in works of major importance in that State, and they could petition for their freedom or buy it using their wages. Privately enslaved people enjoyed opportunities for fuller societal integration, and they could be paid or ransomed after a certain period. Increased social mobility was particularly likely for black people enslaved by noble families. In terms of living and working conditions, enslaved people were not treated much differently because of the skin colour or ethnic origin assigned to them. Racial considerations did come into play in the 19th century, however, as demonstrated in the case of Esise and in sources marked by certain connotations about Sub-Saharan Africans. In Venice, after the legal abolition of slavery there, enslaved people continued to experience similar patterns of im/mobility in relation to conversion as during the *ancien régime* and before the abolition. In general, in the Mediterranean, the im/mobility of enslaved people and captives persisted after the British abolition of the slave trade (1808), the Congress of Vienna's abolition of the trade (1814) and also after the abolition of privateering (1856). To conclude, while the numbers involved fell greatly, there was a pronounced element of continuity in patterns of slave and captive im/mobility between the end of the 18th century and the mid 19th century, and even until the end of the 19th century in some cases.

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