

# Gefangeneloskauf im Mittelmeerraum

Ein interreligiöser Vergleich

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Heike Grieser und Nicole Priesching



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# The Redemption of Jewish Captives in the 17th-Century Eastern Mediterranean Basin.

## The Intersection of Religion, Economics, and Society

MINNA ROZEN

The redemption of captives is defined in Jewish culture as actions to bring about the release of any Jew being held prisoner by non-Jews. Captivity is considered worse than death: "And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' say to them, 'Thus said the Lord: Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for hunger, to hunger; *those for captivity, to captivity*'" (Jeremiah 15:2, NIV).<sup>1</sup> And R. Yochanan said: "Each portion of this verse is harsher than the one before: a sword is harsher than death, hunger is harsher than the sword, [and] *captivity is harsher than all of them*, for all are contained in it."<sup>2</sup> For this reason, Maimonides stated: "*There is no greater mitzvah [religious commandment] than the redemption of captives.*"<sup>3</sup>

The redeeming of captives is considered one of the loftiest expressions of solidarity among Jews. In Jewish society and culture, there is a conscious assumption that financial, ethnic, geographical, or political differences are not to be taken into account when performing this *mitzvah*. Nonetheless, guidelines were instituted that limited the size of the ransom paid for captives to prevent a situation where Jewish prisoners would become too desirable a commodity. Already in the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), it is stated; "*Prisoners should not be redeemed for unreasonably high ransoms, for the protection of society [that is, to avoid burdening the community excessively, or encouraging future kidnappings].*"<sup>4</sup>

### Study Objectives

The present study focuses on the Mediterranean basin in the 17th century and the capture of Jews resulting from piracy or acts of hostility at sea. Captivity at the time was generally a consequence of piracy, war, or debt; Jews, however, could also be imprisoned based on a blood libel, in which case

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<sup>1</sup> All italics in citations of primary sources were introduced by me, M. R.

<sup>2</sup> Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra 8b.

<sup>3</sup> Maimonides, Laws of Charity 8:10.

<sup>4</sup> Babylonian Talmud Gittin 45a; MACKLER (1991) 143-161.

their release was conditioned on payment of a ransom.<sup>5</sup> We will be focusing primarily on the financial aspects and social significance of the redemption of captives in the portion of the Mediterranean basin from the Adriatic coast eastward.

#### Piracy in the 17th Century: Its Causes and Primary Actors

The seventeenth century was considered the “golden age” of piracy on the Mediterranean Sea as well as the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>6</sup> The late sixteenth century marked the beginning of a sharp rise in acts of piracy in the entire Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, there was substantial population growth in the major centers of piracy and in the trade based on the resulting spoils throughout the Middle East and in Malta,<sup>8</sup> Livorno (Leghorn) in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany,<sup>9</sup> Tunis, and Algiers.<sup>10</sup> The knights of the Order of Saint John, based in Malta (hereafter: the Knights of Malta), were the “prime movers” of piracy in the eastern section of the Mediterranean Sea, but other pirates of various types included the Knights of the Order of San Stefano of Pisa, who were based in Livorno, under the patronage of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany;<sup>11</sup> the Uskok, who were active in the Adriatic Sea, under the patronage of the Habsburgs;<sup>12</sup> British buccaneers;<sup>13</sup> and pirates who operated out of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli in the name of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the common assumption that the conflict between Christianity and Islam was the chief motivating factor for the acts of piracy in the Medi-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. for example manuscript 8° 61 in the National Library in Jerusalem (hereafter: Jerusalem Manuscript), epistle 208, published without annotations by BENAYAHU (1980) 246f. Benayahu placed the site of the blood libel in question in Greece, but this is not possible since Greece did not exist at the time. All of its future territory was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which did not accept claims of blood libels; cf. for example HED (1961) 135-149; COHEN (1986) 73-78. It is more logical to assume that the incident referred to in the letter took place in Ragusa, or in one of the Italian states.

<sup>6</sup> FONTENAY (2010) 240f.; GREENE (2000) 78f.; GREENE (2010) 78-81; ATAUZ (2008) 83; DI VITTORIO (1996) 28; BLONDY (1994) 76.

<sup>7</sup> BRAUDEL (1995) 880, detected the considerable increase in insurance premiums for goods shipped from Venice to the Syrian coast from the early 17th century onward; cf. also TENENTI (1967); MASSON (1967) 24-47.

<sup>8</sup> ATAUZ (2008) 168.

<sup>9</sup> TRIVELLATO (2009) 57.

<sup>10</sup> OGOT (1999) 125f.; CRESTI (2005) 466-469; RAYMOND (1979) 122.

<sup>11</sup> GUARNIERI (1960); TENENTI (1967) 32-55.

<sup>12</sup> TENENTI (1967) 3-15; BRACEWELL (1992).

<sup>13</sup> TENENTI (1967) 56-86; FUCHS (2000) 45-69.

<sup>14</sup> MASSON (1903) 60f.; BONO (1993) 9-42; 85f.; TENENTI (1967) 16-31; PENNEL (1989) 25-67; VITKUS/MATAR (2001); WEISS (2011).

terranean basin,<sup>15</sup> it should be stated that this violence was not sparked by religious principles. Beneath the self-proclaimed ideals, materialistic forces were at work in what was ultimately a profane struggle over power and resources.

Nor were the Knights of Malta, who are the focus of our interest, driven by religious motives, despite the stated purpose of their order:

“... to fight for the glory of Jesus Christ, to uphold His creed and the Catholic faith ... to be moved by the example of the Maccabees: those holy soldiers and martyrs who fought so gloriously to maintain their beliefs ... They are not afraid to take sword in hand, and with prudence, temperance, and strength, confront any danger in defense of the glory of Jesus and the Holy Cross ...”<sup>16</sup>

The belligerence displayed by the Knights of Malta against the merchant ships that sailed the eastern Mediterranean beginning in the late sixteenth century was not related to their holy war against Islam, nor was it caused solely by the waning of Ottoman naval power, or the Venetian patricians' diminished interest in Levantine trade,<sup>17</sup> or even the support of France,<sup>18</sup> which hastened to distance itself from them following the Capitulations of 1673.<sup>19</sup> Rather, it was tied to their own history and the fact that they had come to Malta not willingly but by force. Their previous home had been the isle of Rhodes, which they had conquered following their expulsion from Jerusalem (1187) and Acre (1291). On the face of it, their decision to settle in Rhodes had been motivated by a desire to continue fighting Islam and to try to return to the Holy Land. But it should be noted that the choice to remain in the Near East in effect preserved their *raison d'être* while allowing them to retain their economic independence from the European states.<sup>20</sup> During its Rhodes period (1337-1522), the Order's relationship with the Muslim nations alternated between trade and mutual piracy, which ultimately led to the island's conquest by the Ottomans in 1522. Thus, the Order of Saint John lost its headquarters for the second time.<sup>21</sup> It was only in 1530 that Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, granted the isle of Malta, and the small adjacent island, Gozo, to the Order as its base.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Rhodes, Malta was a barren outcropping of rock, without resources of its

<sup>15</sup> Cf. for example SALZMANN (2013) 396.

<sup>16</sup> VERTOT (1819) 10f.; 14; 32; 37; 104 i. a.

<sup>17</sup> BRAUDEL (1995) 865; 882; BONO (1993) 20f.; KAISER (2008) 13; FONTENAY (2010) 240-243; RESSEL (2013) (I am grateful to Magnus Ressel, who graciously shared his paper with me before publication); FRELLER (2000) 409f.

<sup>18</sup> GREENE (2010) 6-10; 13f.; 52-77.

<sup>19</sup> FONTENAY (1988) 367; 384.

<sup>20</sup> SCARABELLI (1998) 37.

<sup>21</sup> VATIN (2000) 19-38; 101-107.

<sup>22</sup> ATAUIZ (2008) 76-78; 82-88.

own. However, it was far from the shores of the Ottoman Empire, diminishing the Order's dependence on it as a trading partner.<sup>23</sup>

The Reformation in Europe was yet another blow to the Order; in the states whose rulers turned to various sects of the Reformation, its assets were lost, and with them, major sources of income.<sup>24</sup> As the sixteenth century drew to a close, the Order's economic status waned. The last real war in which it took part against the Muslim world was the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571), after which the Knights were forced to seek real sources of income outside the island. Piracy became their primary livelihood.

The uniqueness of the Order of Saint John of Malta lay in the fact that it was not a state, and its knights were not the knights of any country. They saw themselves as fighting for the Catholic Church in the name of the Pope though they were subjects of different (Catholic) states.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, this gave them a certain latitude, while on the other, it limited them. Their piracy could be cloaked as a type of mission, namely, to wage war against Islam. But at the same time, it provided an excellent source of revenue that solved their financial problems.<sup>26</sup> The economic aspect of their activity stands out clearly if we consider the fact that the number of knights on Malta was double the 300 who had operated in Rhodes, and that their involvement in "private piracy" expanded, overtaking their ongoing role of policing the Mediterranean on behalf of the Order.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the Order's financial distress, the escalation of its attacks on ships sailing in the Eastern Mediterranean can be understood from a different perspective: moving westward was a less attractive choice since that area was controlled by Muslim pirates from Tripoli, Algiers, and Tunis. Moroccan pirates also operated at times in the Western Mediterranean. Though the Venetian Republic occasionally fought the Ottoman Turks – usually not on its own initiative – its relationship with them was mainly one of "give-and-take", which was very fruitful for both sides. This made it an ally of their enemy in the eyes of the Knights of Malta, and hence a legitimate target for piracy.<sup>28</sup> The Venetian Republic was a Catholic state, however, and invading its ships under the pretext that they were carrying enemy goods was problematic from the point of view of the Holy See. Attacking ships owned by Greek subjects of Venice or the Ottoman Empire also posed a problem. True, they were not Catholics; but they were Christians, and the Vatican's decision to look the other way meant

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<sup>23</sup> GODWIN (2002) 39; ATAUZ (2008) 83; DI VITTORIO (1998) 28; BLONDY (1994) 73; 82-85.

<sup>24</sup> ATAUZ (2008) 79-82.

<sup>25</sup> FONTENAY (2010) 252-255; as well as THEUMA (2010).

<sup>26</sup> FONTENAY (2010) 325; 331; 336; 389f.; FONTENAY (1988) 361; ATAUZ (2008) 153f.

<sup>27</sup> GREENE (2010) 95-98.

<sup>28</sup> GREENE (2000) 70.

foregoing the desire to merge Greek Orthodoxy with the Catholic Church. In fact, the Pope did not share the enthusiasm of the Knights of Malta for robbing Greek ships, and the entire papal “license” for piracy was a complicated issue since the Vatican was a state with financial and political interests that conflicted with disrupting trade and transport.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the Knights of Malta were sailing in a somewhat “gray” area in terms of international law. But one thing was clear: Muslims were legitimate prey in the eyes of the Knights of Malta – much like the Jews. The situation was straightforward if they were subjects of the Sultan. If they were subjects of Venice or a different Catholic state, however, things were not so clear-cut, at least from the point of view of the Serenissima, the lofty Republic.<sup>30</sup>

Both Muslims and Christians engaged in piracy. The Muslims, for the most part seamen from Tripoli, Tunis, or Algiers under Ottoman patronage, or Moroccan sailors, attacked Spanish ships in particular but did not hesitate to raid French or other ships. The Knights of the Order of San Stefano in Livorno raided ships from the Maghreb while the Knights of Malta attacked merchant ships of the Ottoman Empire and of the Venetian Republic.<sup>31</sup> The major centers of the slave trade in the Christian Mediterranean were the Maltese islands; Messina, in Sicily;<sup>32</sup> Naples (particularly in the early seventeenth century);<sup>33</sup> and Livorno, in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany,<sup>34</sup> just as Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers were the chief bases of the slave trade in the Muslim Mediterranean.<sup>35</sup> A complex commercial and banking system grew up around the spoils. Goods were sold; people were given over into hard labor until they were redeemed or died in captivity, and the ships themselves were sold to the highest bidder or served the pirate fleet. The redemption of captives was a business unto itself, at the center of an intricate, sophisticated banking system, which is the focus of this article. Local Jews as well as Jewish subjects of Tuscany engaged in redeeming captives on behalf of Catholics and Protestants who had been captured in North Africa,<sup>36</sup> and Christian subjects of Italian states or France did the same for Jews and Muslims.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Cf. for example FRELLER (2000) 410; GREENE (2010) 217-219.

<sup>30</sup> GREENE (2010) 57f.; ROZEN (1992) 123-166; ARBEL (1995) 22; 27; 60, note 21.

<sup>31</sup> VITKUS/ MATAR (2001) 7.

<sup>32</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 187-251.

<sup>33</sup> SALZMANN (2013) 399; GREENE (2010) 93.

<sup>34</sup> SALZMANN (2013) 396; 399.

<sup>35</sup> TENENTI (1967) 16-31; WEISS (2011) 84-86; BASHAN (1996) 119-135.

<sup>36</sup> ROZEN (1985a) 90-92; WEISS (2011) 30; 33f.; 251, note 35; HIRSCHBERG (1981) 14-18; 24; 94; 207; 216-221; 227f.; 233; 235, note 76; 264; 270; DE GROOT (1985) 133.

<sup>37</sup> GINIO (2005) 144.

## Epistles from the Jerusalem Manuscript

Along with a reassessment of the literature, the centerpiece of our study is nine epistles that form part of a manuscript held at the National Library in Jerusalem (hereafter: the Jerusalem Manuscript).<sup>38</sup> Five of these have never been published, one was published in part, and the remaining three have never been properly annotated or researched. The manuscript comprises, *inter alia*, a collection of 232 epistles copied from the archives of Jerusalem's Jewish community by its scribe, a person named Ya'akov, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. He removed most of the identifying characteristics so that they could serve as prototypes for additional epistles. But fortunately for us, he was not that exacting in his work, frequently leaving hints and "markers" that enable us to ferret out quite a few details about the time, place, and circumstances in which the missives were written. They were composed in flowery, elegant Hebrew made up of a delicate interweaving of biblical verses, and it is often necessary to read the surrounding verses in order to fully comprehend the text. In most cases, the end of one phrase is also the beginning of the next, and this ornate stylistic convention interferes greatly with our understanding of the content. For the most part, the epistles in this portion of the collection date from 1625 to 1670. Some of them were sent from Jerusalem to various communities in the Mediterranean basin and beyond, while others were sent from these communities to Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> It is safe to assume that the letters dealing with redemption of captives are also from this period and relate to the same geographical space. Among the communities that can be identified in the full collection of epistles are those of Istanbul and Salonika as well as communities in Italy, Iran, the Maghreb, and Egypt. With the exception of the Italian states and Iran, it is important to note that these locations were all within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Although four of the nine epistles dealing with redemption of captives have been published in various places, no attempt has ever been made to explore the significance of their appearance in a single collection. By examining these epistles as one entity, I believe that we can augment our understanding of the financial aspects of the redemption of Jewish captives, casting the entire enterprise in a new light. Other documents from this period, published by such scholars as Simha Assaf,<sup>40</sup> Cecil Roth,<sup>41</sup> Eliezer Bashan,<sup>42</sup> Meir Be-

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix, pages 335-350 in this volume.

<sup>39</sup> On the scribe, the manuscript and its dating cf. ROZEN (1985b) 176f.; 299-315.

<sup>40</sup> ASSAF (1943) 107-115.

<sup>41</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 187-251; ROTH (1929) 164-171.

<sup>42</sup> BASHAN (1980).

nayahu,<sup>43</sup> and Daniel Carpi,<sup>44</sup> also enhance the picture that emerges from these nine epistles.

Six out of the nine letters that we will be discussing relate to the capture of Jews who were sailing in the eastern portion of the Mediterranean basin, that is to the east and south of the Adriatic coast.<sup>45</sup> In three letters the place of capture is unspecified. Four of the nine letters deal with individuals captured by the Knights of Malta while sailing to the Land of Israel.<sup>46</sup> In one instance, we were able to glean the port of departure – Salonika.<sup>47</sup> Two of the captives were seized on two separate occasions by pirates.<sup>48</sup> In a different case, an elderly man and wife were taken prisoner by the Knights and held on the isle of Malta.<sup>49</sup> A group of 34 men and women were captured on one ship by the Knights of Malta.<sup>50</sup> One man was kidnapped from his home and ended up wandering from place to place seeking the funds to return to his birthplace until he was eventually redeemed (see below).<sup>51</sup> Another prisoner “was taken captive by a cruel and merciless foe from a far-off land ... the city of Messina, may it be uprooted”; though the city of Messina, Italy is mentioned as the site of his captivity, there is nothing in this missive to indicate who captured him or whether he was taken at sea.<sup>52</sup> Until 1674, Messina was ruled by the kings of Spain, who were also the feudal lords of Malta. If the time frame of the collection applies to this letter as well, it may refer to a person who was (apparently) captured by the Knights of Malta, on land or at sea, and carried off into slavery in Sicily. Another of the epistles contains no hint of the place where its subject was seized or the circumstances of his capture.<sup>53</sup> Of the 46 captives referred to in all the epistles in question, 42 were captured by the Knights of Malta while at sea; one was apparently taken prisoner by them at an unknown location and brought to Messina, and three were seized in their city of residence under unclear circumstances.

<sup>43</sup> BENAYAHU (1980) 27-56; 243-278; BENAYAHU (1988) 361-381.

<sup>44</sup> CARPI (1981) 155-158; CARPI (2003) 175-222.

<sup>45</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 54; 196f.; 202; 205; 207.*

<sup>46</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 54; 196f.; 205.*

<sup>47</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 197.*

<sup>48</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 54; 197.*

<sup>49</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 207.*

<sup>50</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 202.*

<sup>51</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 148.*

<sup>52</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 155.*

<sup>53</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 164.*

## Fate of the Captives

Because of the stated purpose of these missives – raising funds to free the captives – their authors naturally tried to portray their situation in a way that evoked the greatest compassion. But based on our knowledge from other sources, there is no reason to think that the descriptions were unfounded. As depicted in the epistles, the prisoners were generally stripped off most – if not all – of their clothing<sup>54</sup> and forced to perform hard labor, usually as galley slaves, porters, or working “with bricks and mortar” (an allusion to the Hebrew slaves in Egypt).<sup>55</sup> Over and above the long hours, their living conditions were abysmal: their legs and neck were often chained to the wall or floor,<sup>56</sup> and they were given only meager amounts of food and water.<sup>57</sup> A British tourist who visited Malta around 1669 offers us additional details, not all of them corresponding to what we learn from the letters: At the time, he wrote, there were some 2,000 “Jews, Moors, and Turks” being held prisoner in Malta, most of them serving as galley slaves of the Order. The prisoners who lived on the island were required to return each night to the prison (a square structure known as a cloister). Since it was very difficult to escape from Malta, they wore only ankle restraints. The Jewish captives were also forced to wear a yellow badge. According to his account, a healthy male would normally fetch 120 to 160 Maltese scudi at Malta’s slave market.<sup>58</sup>

The prisoners were treated as pieces of property, expected to generate income through forced labor if they could not manage to raise the funds for their release. After their strength had failed them, and it was clear that they could not be sold further and that they were unlikely to raise the ransom money for themselves, they were usually brought to Jewish areas and offered at the slave market there, in hopes that the Jewish community would redeem them. This was, for example, the fate of the prisoner captured in his birthplace. He served his captors for 13 years and was not redeemed due to the high price placed on him. Eventually, his captors began taking him from city to city until the money was finally found in one Jewish community to redeem him. Though it was not the Jerusalem community that ultimately freed him, it was that community’s scribe who wrote a letter of recommendation on behalf of this wretched captive asking a different community that the man

<sup>54</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 202; 205; 207.*

<sup>55</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 148; 196; 202; 205; 207.*

<sup>56</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 54; 148; 155; 196; 202; 207.*

<sup>57</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle nos. 196; 202; 205.*

<sup>58</sup> SKIPPON (1704), cited by ROTH (1928-1931) 214. The 17th-century Maltese scudi was worth slightly less than the Spanish real; cf. HOPPEN (1973) 103-119.

passed through to come to his aid with money and provisions so that he could make his way home.<sup>59</sup>

The prisoner who was captured in his birthplace and brought to Messina was held there for three years in a jail "where the king's prisoners were incarcerated" since his masters demanded a huge sum for him.<sup>60</sup> A different prisoner was forced to serve as a galley slave and was transferred from ship to ship; when he no longer had the strength to row, he was beaten severely, starved, and tortured until he lost his sight. Even then, he was forced to continue to row while his captors mocked, cursed, and stoned him.<sup>61</sup>

Another prisoner was en route to the Land of Israel when he was captured by the Knights of Malta, who stripped him, leaving his buttocks bare. He was taken to Malta, where he was sold to "brutal masters" who forced him to perform "hard labor with bricks and mortar, and shoulder heavy loads of large precious stones." This may indicate that he was put to work at a marble quarry. His workday (like that of many others) lasted from dawn to dusk, and when he grew weak, he was beaten until he bled and his flesh dissolved upon his back.<sup>62</sup>

The older couple mentioned earlier were pressed into forced labor from morning till night, "naked and exposed to the heat of the sun and the cold of the night until their skin turned red and their flesh rotted and peeled off their bodies like slices of pomegranate."<sup>63</sup>

Somewhat unusual in the group of epistles presented here is the one dealing with the capture of 34 men and women from the same ship. The Knights of Malta demanded as ransom the sum of 15,000 *guruş*, an Ottoman coin that resembled the Dutch Reichstaler (referred to in Turkish as *esedi guruş* or *aslan guruş* after the lion engraved on it).<sup>64</sup> In the meantime, the entire group was forced to perform hard labor.<sup>65</sup>

#### Rabbinical Edicts on Redemption of Captives: 15th to 17th Centuries

The rabbinical scholars of the various communities in the Mediterranean basin were divided as to whether financing the redemption of captives was a recurring need calling for an ongoing solution or an occasional one that could be handled in an ad hoc fashion. It all depended on the time and place

<sup>59</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 148.*

<sup>60</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 155.*

<sup>61</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 196.*

<sup>62</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 205.*

<sup>63</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 207.*

<sup>64</sup> PAMUK (1994) 166.

<sup>65</sup> *Jerusalem Manuscript, Epistle no. 202.*

of the ruling. Whereas Rabbi Yosef Colon (c. 1420-1480), a rabbi and yeshiva head in Mantua in the latter half of the fifteenth century, held that the redemption of captives was not a frequent occurrence, Rabbi David Hacoen of Corfu (c. 1465-1527) emphasized that in the places where he served (Patras and Lepanto, on both sides of the Gulf of Corinth) redemption of captives was a common event.<sup>66</sup> Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev ben Matatyah, who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century in Venice, Arta, and various other locations in present-day Greece, ruled that if any sum was left over from monies collected by the community to redeem a captive, it should be put aside for the next case and not used for other charitable needs.<sup>67</sup> In his opinion, even money donated to support the poor should be diverted to the redemption of captives if the circumstances demanded it.<sup>68</sup> In terms of geographic distribution, it is immediately clear that the religious rulings handed down in port cities attached greater importance to setting aside funds for the redemption of captives, on the assumption that this was a chronic need.

#### Sources of Ransom Money

We find a similar emphasis on redemption of captives in port cities, as opposed to those further inland, when analyzing the sources of funding for these efforts. Although most of the major Jewish communities in the Mediterranean basin in the early modern period engaged in the redemption of captives, only a few of them established permanent funds for this purpose. Others had funds that were set up as needed and then dismantled. A more common scenario entailed communities who engaged in ransoming captives, even on a large scale, without having a special fund for this purpose. Thus, for example, we have a great deal of information about such activities in the Istanbul community, extending over a lengthy period; but it is not written explicitly in any source that the community had a permanent ransom fund, nor have we found evidence of individuals who financed this need on a regular basis. However, Jews seized in various places were frequently brought to the slave markets of Istanbul, and monies were generally collected on a one-time basis for each case.<sup>69</sup> Prisoners were brought to these markets from Russia in especially large numbers, and the community tried to redeem all of them. To this end, a new regulation was instituted early in the seventeenth century whereby Jewish merchants from other cities in the Empire that col-

<sup>66</sup> Cf. for example HACOEN (1968) § 28.

<sup>67</sup> BINYAMIN ZE'EV (1959) § 230f.

<sup>68</sup> BINYAMIN ZE'EV (1959) § 264.

<sup>69</sup> BASHAN (1980) 189f.

lected taxes from Istanbulis who traded there were required to pay a similar tax in Istanbul, which was then set aside for the redemption of Jewish captives from Eastern Europe.<sup>70</sup> This edict rested on the assumption that those whose commercial activities entailed traveling from place to place were more likely to be taken captive; hence the tax was a form of "insurance" against future ransom demands. This tax suggests the existence of a permanent fund despite the fact that, as noted earlier, there is no explicit source for this; the monies collected may also have been transferred to a dual-purpose fund for assistance to the Land of Israel, whose inhabitants were always considered in danger of being captured.

At the time of the Chmielnicki pogroms of 1648/1649, the Crimean Tatars brought thousands of captives (primarily women and children) sold to them by the Ukrainian Cossacks to the slave markets in Istanbul. The community raised large sums of money in various ways, but on an ad hoc basis, each time a group of prisoners was brought to the market. Women sold their jewelry, the community borrowed money from the local Karaites, and it relied on the services of the Venetian community to collect donations for this purpose in Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, and Posen.<sup>71</sup> In Alexandria as well, levies for the redemption of captives were collected from Jewish merchants from other locales who came to trade there. There are no sources, however, to substantiate the existence of a permanent fund in the city for the redemption of captives.<sup>72</sup> More commonly, contributions were made by community members to mark special occasions in their families, or as part of wills, in the form of both specified amounts,<sup>73</sup> and property trusts.<sup>74</sup> Jewish communities also initiated special fundraising appeals in times of exceptional emergency arising from the capture of a large number of individuals at one time, or in close succession.<sup>75</sup>

The Jewish communities that maintained permanent redemption funds were those in countries that were frequently involved in conflicts, and where Jews lived near the site of the hostilities. Almost always, these were in port cities or islands in the Mediterranean, all of them belonging to the Ottoman Empire or the Italian states. Ideally, the ransom monies were derived from regular taxes on community members. Such was the case in Salonika<sup>76</sup> and

<sup>70</sup> DI TRANI (1861) II, HM, § 13.

<sup>71</sup> BASHAN (1980) 193-197.

<sup>72</sup> HALEVI (1716) YD, law 3, § 10.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. for example HACOHEH (1968) (CORFU) § 2; HACOHEH (2011) (Chios 1564) pt. IV, § 94; SASSON (1626) (Chios) § 83; BASHAN (1980) 237-239 (Venice); 247 (Firenze and Hamburg); 264 (Amsterdam); all relating to the 17th century.

<sup>74</sup> BASHAN (1980) 208f.; 222; 229; 235; 255f.; 260f.; 264.

<sup>75</sup> BASHAN (1980) 116; 200f.; 207; 238; 264.

<sup>76</sup> BASHAN (1980) 202.

Rhodes,<sup>77</sup> as well as Venice (which was the major center in the Mediterranean basin for the redemption of Jewish captives),<sup>78</sup> and later Livorno.<sup>79</sup>

#### Redemption of Captives by the Venice Jewish Community

Venice is the common thread between Mediterranean piracy and the epistles of the Jerusalem Manuscript. By tying the Venetian Jewish community's efforts to redeem captives (in particular those held on Malta) with the missives in our possession, we can understand the chain of financial activities whose outcome we see in these letters.

The actions of the Venetian Jewish community undoubtedly stemmed from the city's leading position in international trade in the Mediterranean basin. Though its stature had diminished by the early seventeenth century, Venice was still the major link between those in need of redemption who had been put up for sale in the markets of Malta and Sicily and the Jewish communities in both the Christian and Muslim worlds. This was because its ships were considered a legitimate target by the Knights of Malta in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even early eighteenth centuries. Because of the close commercial ties between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, the assumption was that any Venetian ship was carrying goods belonging to the enemies of Christianity, if not the enemies themselves (that is Jews and Muslims). Several different funds for the redemption of captives operated in Venice, belonging to the various Jewish communities in the city. The two major ones were run by the youngest of the city's congregations: the Levantini congregation of Jewish merchants from the Ottoman Empire, who traded and resided in Venice; and the Sephardic congregation, whose members were known as "Ponentini" Jews, meaning "from the West." The latter were "New Christians" who had returned to Judaism in Venice.<sup>80</sup> We have at our disposal considerable material on the activities of both these congregations: a bound set of copies of letters written by "the officials in charge of the redemption of captives on behalf of the Talmud Torah [Ponentini] congregation" between 1654 and 1670 is located in the archives of the Venetian community and formed the basis for Daniel Carpi's important study;<sup>81</sup> but the primary

<sup>77</sup> BASHAN (1980) 208.

<sup>78</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 187-251; ROTH (1929) 164-171.

<sup>79</sup> See below p. 173.

<sup>80</sup> Regarding both congregations cf. RAVID (2003) 17-61; RAVID (2002) 203-246; RAVID (1991) 203-223; RAVID (1990) 10-27; RAVID (1988) 35-54; RAVID (1987a) 169-202; RAVID (1987b) 211-259; RAVID (1976) 187-222; RAVID (1975a) 153-167; RAVID (1975b) 274-279; COOPERMAN (1987) 65-84; ROZEN (1997) 35-52.

<sup>81</sup> CARPI (2003) 175-222.

source for the activities of the community's functionaries from 1671 to 1711 – a weighty volume of 523 copies of letters written by them, on which Cecil Roth based his studies – has unfortunately vanished.<sup>82</sup>

The Levantini congregation, founded prior to the Sephardic Ponentini congregation, was apparently the first to undertake the redemption of captives, already in the late sixteenth century.<sup>83</sup> As the Ponentini became more well established in Venice, the two congregations joined forces on this issue. A decision of the board of the Talmud Torah congregation in Padua, Italy, dated 25 Tamuz 5400 (15 July 1640) shows that the Levantini and Sephardic congregations of Venice were already working together, with their fund combining all the monies collected for this purpose from a substantial number of Jewish communities, at least in Italy. The language of the decision is fascinating, stating that the functionaries in charge of the redemption of captives from both the congregations “have taken it upon themselves to be the ones to redeem captives as the need arises from time to time, with the exception of captives from the Black Sea onward, and have eliminated [individual] missions of any kind to raise funds for this purpose.”<sup>84</sup> What this meant is that the fund took responsibility for the redemption of captives in the Mediterranean Sea and its environs, with the exception of those seized from the Black Sea northward and eastward (the latter presumably fell under the aegis of the Istanbul community). Taking on this task gave the Levantini and Ponentini congregations the authority to insist on halting all private initiatives to raise funds for the redemption of captives, and amassing in Venice all monies collected by Jewish communities in Europe.<sup>85</sup> When the Livorno Jewish community became more established, it took upon itself the handling of all Jewish prisoners to its west and on the Barbary coast, that is North Africa.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the earmarked contributions of major philanthropists, the Venetian ransom fund benefited from an annual toll on all tax-paying members of the Jewish community as well as a three quarters percent levy on all goods shipped by them to Jewish merchants elsewhere, and a one-eighth

<sup>82</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 219, note 24; compare with CARPI (2003) 176f.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. CARPI (1978) 22; CARPI (1981) 156; CARPI (2003) 7; BENAYAHU (1980) 29; 179. Although Roth noted that the Levantini had a keen interest in the redemption of captives in the Mediterranean basin due to their commercial activities there, in his opinion the establishment of the ransom fund was not related to this but was the result of a pressing need to redeem the captives of the 1648/1649 pogroms; ROTH (1928-1931) 218.

<sup>84</sup> CARPI (1981) 158.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. CARPI (1981) 158; as well as ROTH (1928-1931) 220. Regarding the geographical scope of the fund's activities cf. ROTH (1928-1931) 223.

<sup>86</sup> Letters dated 19 September 1667 from the officials in charge of redemption of captives in the Levantini and Ponentini congregations in Venice to Yitzhak Arrojo in Algiers and a letter from them dated 8 January 1668 to Natan Franco in Tunis; CARPI (1981) 183f.

percent tax on all merchandise received by them from abroad. The monies accumulated by each congregation were kept in a fund managed by five "Deputados de Cautivos" (officials in charge of redemption of captives), three of them from the Ponentini Sephardic congregation and two from the Levantini. The fund was not a voluntary association but a formal undertaking of both congregations, and the decisions of the Deputados were binding on all members.<sup>87</sup> Hence, in my opinion, Roth was correct in his conclusion that the ransom fund functioned much like an insurance company established by the members of both congregations. It should be recalled that they were all of Iberian origin, and their major source of livelihood was trade with the Levant. More than their Ashkenazi fellow Jews in Venice, or other Jews elsewhere in the Levant, they and their wares were constantly under threat of capture.<sup>88</sup>

During the period of the letters in the Jerusalem Manuscript, the officials in charge of redemption of captives in Venice employed local non-Jewish agents in Malta who represented them in the ransom transactions. The first of these was Ottaviano Bandinelli, who worked for them from 1648 to 1668, when he retired due to advancing age.<sup>89</sup> Upon his departure, he was replaced by a French merchant named François Garsin, who later became a judge on the Maritime Court of Malta (Consolato del Mare). The court was established in 1697 by the head of the Order of Saint John (known as the Grand Maestro) as a secular body, with the aim of preventing Greek Orthodox merchants from petitioning the court of the papal legate, who until then had served as the sole arbitrator on questions of maritime law in Malta. The previous court's decisions could be appealed before the Pope in Rome, and the Knights of Malta came to realize that he was not inclined to rule in their favor in cases where Greek merchants who were Venetian or Ottoman subjects sued for the return of their goods or their ships.<sup>90</sup> Garsin was thus a very important man in Malta. A merchant by the name of Thomas Louis da Souza, who had assisted Bandinelli, asked to continue helping Garsin, and actually did so from 1673 to 1674, until Garsin asked the redemption officials in Venice to "free" him of da Souza's "assistance."<sup>91</sup> Garsin served as an agent until his death in 1706, whereupon his son Jean Baptiste inherited the position, which he filled for the next ten years.<sup>92</sup> Both Bandinelli and Garsin were portrayed by the Venetian functionaries as saintly individuals who per-

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<sup>87</sup> CARPI (1981) 178-181.

<sup>88</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 221.

<sup>89</sup> Regarding Bandinelli cf. CARPI (2003) 187f.

<sup>90</sup> GREENE (2010) 208-223.

<sup>91</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 224.

<sup>92</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 225.

formed their duties out of altruism.<sup>93</sup> When Bandinelli asked to step down from the position and they sought a replacement, they wrote that they were pleased to have the opportunity to express their indebtedness for the dedication and compassion he had shown for so long toward the wretched slaves.<sup>94</sup> In a letter to Thomas da Souza, who wished to replace him, they wrote that Bandinelli had carried out his work with pure devotion and benevolence, performing this “labor of mercy” (*obra de misericordia*) without ulterior motives, as if he were the father of these unfortunates.<sup>95</sup>

François Garsin was also singled out for his kindness and devotion to the prisoners. In 1671, members of the central *yeshiva* of Venice wrote to the rabbis of Cairo and Alexandria concerning Garsin that the “treasurers of the ransom fund” of the Levantini and the Sephardim

“had taken for themselves, upon careful deliberation, a gentile merchant from that land [Malta] to be their emissary there, to act upon their instructions with the captives and their masters; and this he does at all times without thought of personal gain, working tirelessly for the benefit of the captives. And his name is Francisco Grasin [sic].”<sup>96</sup>

There is no doubting the fine character of the two men or the service they performed on behalf of the Jewish prisoners in Malta; but it is important to remember that all the agents dealing with the redemption of captives – whether Christians working for the functionaries in Venice or Jewish agents working in Tunis and Algiers to release prisoners from Christian lands<sup>97</sup> – were businessmen first and foremost, and the redemption of captives was a business like any other.

The agent would come to the prison, identify the prisoners he was responsible for, and question them about their country of origin, citizenship, and most likely, the financial means at their disposal beyond what had been seized by their captors. The agent would then give each of them a small sum of money for expenses, and during the first month of their captivity they would receive from him, in the name of the functionaries in Venice, a stipend of one ducat a week.<sup>98</sup> In the eyes of the terrified captives, the agent was doubtless seen as an angel of God. He would keep the Venetian officials apprised of events and wait for their response concerning the chances of raising the necessary money for each of the prisoners in turn. Those in charge of the ransom fund did not automatically disburse the required sum, but the agents did have some latitude, which was crucial due to the distance between

<sup>93</sup> Concerning Bandinelli cf. CARPI (2003) 187f.; on Garsin cf. ROTH (1928-1931) 225.

<sup>94</sup> CARPI (2003) 188, note 53.

<sup>95</sup> CARPI (2003) 188, note 53.

<sup>96</sup> ROTH (1929) 166f.

<sup>97</sup> ROZEN (1985a) 90-92; 96.

<sup>98</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 227.

Venice and Malta. When the prisoners were auctioned off, the agent could pay a sum of 60 to 70 ducats, or roughly 120 to 140 *kuruş esedi*, per person without authorization from the officials in Venice (higher sums required their approval).<sup>99</sup> In practical terms, this meant extending a line of credit to the officials – and credit was not given for free. But the fact that the agent enjoyed a “standing license” of this type suggests a relationship of complete trust.<sup>100</sup>

In cases where the agent reported that the price being demanded for a prisoner was too high, the functionaries in Venice followed two courses of action concurrently: at their behest, the agent bargained with the captors, while at the same time they themselves tried to find a way to collect the ransom money from family members or via donations by interested parties or benevolent individuals. When the officials were satisfied in terms of the price being demanded for the prisoner and the sources of money available, the authorization was sent to the agent in Malta, who paid the ransom to the captors.

None of the documents goes into any real detail as to how the money was brought from Venice to Malta – a question that naturally arises since transferring coins between Venice and Malta was obviously risky. Thus, even if the functionaries in Venice wrote on several occasions that the agents acted solely out of kindness, this fact alone – namely, that the transfer of cash between the continent and the island was not a wise choice – tells us that the agents were not paid a fixed salary for their work but undoubtedly received a certain percentage of the ransom money. When he paid the captors for the prisoner, the agent was providing credit to the functionaries in Venice. He received the money from these officials via a bill of exchange (“*lettera di cambio*”), in a manner to be explained below. A certain percentage was added on, in effect constituting interest plus a service fee.<sup>101</sup> Just as Bandinelli and Garsin were the agents (“*fattore*”) of the Venetian officials in Malta, the latter were the agents of Bandinelli and Garsin in Venice; in other words, the relationship worked both ways. A bill of exchange was sent to the agent in Malta stating: “Pay to A [owner of the prisoner] on the basis of this letter the sum of X ducats (which is equivalent to Y Spanish reales or Z Maltese scudi) for the release of B, at the rate of 2 reales to 1 ducat [for example].”

<sup>99</sup> CARPI (2003) 231; cf. also BENAYAHU (1988) 377, letter to Rabbi Shemuel Garmizan, where mention is made of a similar sum of 100 reales for a standard ransom and 200 reales if outside sources of funding were found (one real was equal to approximately one *kuruş*).

<sup>100</sup> CARPI (2003) 187, note 51.

<sup>101</sup> Carpi was aware of the various methods of transferring money, but for some reason he did not explore this issue in depth; cf. CARPI (2003) 189, note 56.

Charge this to our account.”<sup>102</sup> Charging the payment to the account of the officials in Venice meant that the agent in Malta was in effect providing them with credit; hence he could instruct them at any time, on the basis of the bill of exchange, to purchase goods in this amount for him in Venice, or to pay monies owed by him to a third party in Sienna (which was apparently Bandinelli’s birthplace),<sup>103</sup> in Venice, or in any other location.

Another option was a letter stating: “Pay to A [owner of the prisoner] on the basis of this letter the sum of X ducats (which is equivalent to Y Spanish reales or Z Maltese scudi) received from C for the release of B, at the rate of 2 reales to 1 ducat [by way of example]. Charge this to our account.” In such a case, the officials in Venice had coverage for the payment, yet they were still unwilling to transfer actual currency to Malta and were thus left owing money to the agent. This debt, too, would be paid when he instructed them to withdraw money from their fund in Venice to carry out transactions of his choice in a location to which they had access.

In the collection of Venetian letters dating from 1654 to 1670, we found evidence of this method of payment. It is clear from these records that, during those years, the money was not sent directly to the agent in Malta but passed through the hands of several intermediaries. The term “bill of exchange” is not mentioned anywhere, but this was the only plausible way to carry out such transactions. The officials deposited the money in Venetian ducats with a Venetian merchant by the name of Pietro Castelli – the agent of the Dutch consul in Sicily, Giovanni Battista van den Broeck.<sup>104</sup> Castelli issued a bill of exchange in Sicilian scudi equal to the sum in ducats that he received, minus his fee. The bill was then sent to van den Broeck, who had dealings in Malta. The distance between Sicily and Malta is not great, and van den Broeck may have paid the money to Bandinelli in cash; but it is more likely that he converted the note into Maltese scudi, subtracted his fee, and sent the note to his agent in Malta, who paid Bandinelli (in fact, Bandinelli himself may have been his agent). The latter then passed along the payment to the owners of the captives after deducting his own fee.<sup>105</sup>

The benefit to the agents from their relationship with the Venetian redemption officials is evident from the fact that Thomas Louis da Souza was so eager to become part of this business. The advantages extended beyond the fees involved. In an epistle sent by the Venetian officials to the rabbis

<sup>102</sup> Regarding bills of exchange and “fattore” in the history of banking in the early modern era, cf. DE ROOVER (1942) 52-65; DE ROOVER (1946-1947) 111-128; DE ROOVER (1948); DE ROOVER (1953); DE ROOVER (1954) 38-76; cf. also MUNRO (1992).

<sup>103</sup> CARPI (2003) 188f.; 191.

<sup>104</sup> GILTAJ (1997) 43.

<sup>105</sup> CARPI (2003) 187f.; 194.

and religious scholars of Cairo and Alexandria in 1671, they recounted that a Jew from Egypt (it is unclear from which of these two communities) by the name of Yisrael Ashkenazi had been in possession for the past seven years of a sum of approximately 220 reales which rightfully belonged to François Garsin, based on a claim by the notables Shelomo and David Mercado that Garsin's brother-in-law, one Marc'Antonio Persigier, owed them this sum. Garsin complained bitterly that he had no hand whatsoever in his brother-in-law's dealings and demanded his money. The Venetian officials vigorously supported his claim, citing the benefit that he brought to the prisoners in Malta.<sup>106</sup> In addition to this type of assistance, the officials gave the agents various gifts for their services as expressions of good will.<sup>107</sup>

As shown below, the business arrangements related to ransoming of captives have become known to us in various ways, both from external corroboration of the epistles in our possession and from the letters themselves. The following are a few examples drawn from material not included in the Jerusalem epistles: Rabbi Shelomo Abuhav was one of the Venetian officials in charge of the redemption of captives in 1668, 1671 to 1672, 1684, and 1686. Preserved in the collection of his letters are seven missives to rabbinic sages from the Land of Israel who were captured by the Knights of Malta during their travels to collect donations for their congregations in the Holy Land. At the time the letters were written, he was not one of the Venetian officials but was close to those in charge and carried influence with them. Three of the letters were written to Rabbi Hayyim Navaro, an emissary of the Safed community who was captured in 1647 or slightly earlier. From the letters, it is clear that the officials felt that he could not be released until the money was collected in Venice or at least until there were pledges covering the ransom money and accompanying expenses. Only then was the letter sent to Bandinelli, who was authorized to pay the ransom and to send Navaro wherever he wished to go. The letter to Bandinelli served in effect as a bill of exchange.<sup>108</sup> Three additional letters were sent by Abuhav to Rabbi Shemuel Garmizan, a prominent *hakham* (Sephardic scholar) and emissary of the Jerusalem community, who was captured in 1650.<sup>109</sup> In the case of such a renowned rabbinic scholar as Garmizan, who was engaged in the holy task of collecting funds for the Jews of Jerusalem, the functionaries hastened to write to Bandinelli that he should add to the standard ransom whatever was needed to secure his release. They did so despite the fact that their depleted

<sup>106</sup> ROTH (1929) 166f.

<sup>107</sup> Concerning the gifts to Bandinelli cf. CARPI (2003) 187, note 51; for the gifts to Garsin cf. ROTH (1928-1931) 224f.

<sup>108</sup> BENAYAHU (1988) 375-377.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. introduction by Meir Benayahu to GARMIZAN (1945).

coffers (most likely due to the ransoms paid for captives from the Chmielnicki pogroms of 1648 and 1649) meant that they generally allocated no more than 100 reales (each worth slightly more than a *kuruş esedi*) per person, and 200 reales if there were pledges from additional sources.<sup>110</sup>

To Rabbi Shelomo Ashkenazi,<sup>111</sup> an emissary to Safed who wrote to Abuhav of his bitter fate in captivity in Messina, Abuhav responded in 1651 that he had arranged for the ransom officials to write to their agent in Messina that if he could redeem Ashkenazi for the sum of 100 reales that he should do so immediately. Reading between the lines, we can see that Abuhav and his brother paid the ransom money to the Venetian officials.<sup>112</sup> It is very likely that van den Broeck was the agent in question and that he was occasionally asked to engage in the actual redemption of captives and not only in the transfer of funds.<sup>113</sup>

The final letter in this group was written by Abuhav on 24 September 1666, to two Jerusalem sages being held captive in Malta: Yehuda Saraf and Yisrael Binyamin. The latter served as a *hakham* of the Jerusalem community from 1635 to 1668 and was thus very well known. At the time of his capture, he was a man of advanced years.<sup>114</sup> Yehuda Saraf was a respected scholar who had lived for a short time in Jerusalem and became a follower of the false messiah Shabbetai Zvi; it is possible he was sent with Binyamin to assist him.<sup>115</sup> Due to Binyamin's importance, when word of his capture reached the functionaries, they appealed to the "ricevitor", an official of the Malta Order,<sup>116</sup> to release the two men along with the money in their possession, which they had collected for the destitute of the Land of Israel. Abuhav wrote to them that this official had promised him that if a request would be made to the king of France, he can impose on the Knights the release of the ship with all its passengers and cargo, without the need for any payment.

The capture of the ship carrying Binyamin and Saraf is reminiscent of an incident referred to in a letter to Bandinelli from the Venetian officials dated 17 July 1659; in fact, it may even be the same episode. We learn from this letter that because of the Ottoman siege of Crete (then under Venetian rule) –

<sup>110</sup> BENAYAHU (1988) 377f.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. regarding him BENAYAHU (1988) 369.

<sup>112</sup> BENAYAHU (1988) 379.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. for example CARPI (2003) 206.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. concerning him ROZEN (1985b) 147f. Benayahu was mistaken in thinking that this was the grandson of Yisrael Binyamin, who carried the same name. In the sermons of Rabbi Moshe ibn Habib, there is a eulogy to the elder rabbi, delivered in 1669 on the first anniversary of his death.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. regarding him ROZEN (1985b) 215; 220; BENAYAHU (1988) 371-374.

<sup>116</sup> The "ricevitor" was an official of the Malta Order who took care of its assets overseas; cf. for example GIUFFRIDA (2006) 21-40.

a siege that lasted from 1645 to 1669 – Venetian ships were flying the French flag and operating under the patronage of France, which was an ally of the Ottoman Empire; this is why the “ricevitor” advised the Venetian officials to turn to the king of France. In the incident referred to in the letter to Bandinelli, the Venetian officials turned to government of the Venetian republic which demanded from the “ricevitor” to bring to the release of the captives.<sup>117</sup> It should be noted that Crete was placed under siege in revenge for an attack by the Knights of Malta on a convoy of Ottoman ships that had set sail in 1644 from Istanbul to Alexandria carrying pilgrims en route to Mecca for the Hajj. On board one of the ships was the *kizlar ağası* (Black Eunuch in charge of the Sultan’s harem), Sünbüllü Ağa, who intended to retire to Egypt and was carrying valuable cargo, along with the *qadi* of Cairo; and a woman and her young son whom the pirates believed to be the favored wife and the son of Sultan Ibrahim I.<sup>118</sup> The Knights of Malta slaughtered many of the passengers, among them Sünbüllü Ağa, and divided up his vast wealth. A total of 30 women and 350 men survived. It is generally believed that the furious Ottomans then seized the opportunity to blockade and conquer Crete (though the Venetians had played no part in the incident).<sup>119</sup> The name of Yisrael Binyamin is not mentioned in the Jerusalem registers for a lengthy period from 1650 until 1669, when he was eulogized by Rabbi Mosheh Ibn Habib on the first anniversary of his death. It is highly probable that he spent a fair portion of those years as a prisoner in Malta.<sup>120</sup> From references to this episode in letters from the Venetian officials, we learn that the prisoners for whom France’s intervention was requested were finally released in 1668, nine years after they were captured, and the same year that Yisrael Binyamin died in Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> While the ransom officials were dealing with the matter of Yisrael Binyamin, they took the opportunity to handle the matter of other prisoners in Malta, whom Binyamin was trying to help. That same year, Bandinelli stepped down and adamantly refused to continue serving as the officials’ agent in Malta. The money that had been sent to Malta (in the form of bills of exchange, of course) to obtain the release of the captives lay untouched, and the prisoners were not freed. Abuhav also wrote to Mosheh Azoulay – a prisoner who had remained in Malta and served as a “leader” of sorts to the arriving and departing prisoners – asking him to look

<sup>117</sup> CARPI (2003) 198.

<sup>118</sup> SETTON (1991) 111. According to others, the woman was the former governess of Mehmet IV and the maidservant of Sünbüllü Ağa; cf. MIGNOT/ HAWKINS (1787) 97; MIGNE (1863) 1029; MORERI (1725) 718.

<sup>119</sup> On the capture of the Ottoman ship and the siege of Crete, cf. SETTON (1991) 111; GREENE (2000) 13-18.

<sup>120</sup> ROZEN (1985b) 147-149.

<sup>121</sup> CARPI (2003) 198-201.

for a new agent in place of Bandinelli: "a fair man, acceptable to the Jews, with abundant assets and influence with the authorities, to be placed in charge of this undertaking in exchange for proper remuneration."<sup>122</sup> François Garsin is the man whom Azoulay ultimately found.

Another episode involved a Jew from Istanbul by the name of Mosheh Galimidi, who was captured by the Knights of Malta en route from Istanbul to Cairo. The Venetian functionaries in charge of redemption of captives were informed (apparently by Garsin) that Galimidi was being held in Malta along with fifteen other prisoners, and they instructed Garsin to pay Galimidi's ransom. At the same time, they wrote, on 16 August 1672, to the treasurers of the Istanbul community to verify how much they had given, or would give, for this purpose since the officials in Venice felt that the amount paid for him by Garsin would be insufficient.<sup>123</sup> But there is more to the story. It appears from this letter that Garsin paid the ransom, and only then did the fund in Venice attempt to raise the money in Istanbul, Galimidi's birthplace, where the ransom would come from the treasurers of his community, who would likely try to collect it from his family members. This process was essential since there were prisoners who did not have financial backing from any person or community, and they, too, needed to be redeemed. Likewise, the assistance to the prisoners in Malta itself cost money, and the commissions collected by the agent also added to the ransom expenses. The size of the ransom was not noted in this case. On the other hand, the fact that Garsin was ordered to pay the ransom immediately is very telling. When the ransom of a rich merchant was at stake, the redemption process was handled swiftly. This supports the theory that the Venice fund for the redemption of captives functioned in many ways as a type of insurance agency. A merchant such as Galimidi most likely had business partners in Venice with a vested interest in his wellbeing along with the welfare of his business.

In another incident, in 1673 (described by Roth), Yitzhak Moreno of Belgrade was taken captive along with his wife and three children. Their captors demanded 575 *kurus* for them, but the fund agreed to pay only 300 *kurus*. The pirates, however, were insistent. In this case, the ransom officials invoked the principle referred to above: "Prisoners should not be redeemed for unreasonably high ransoms, for the protection of society", and refused to redeem them. They wrote to the agent: "If said masters expect to obtain more for a useless old man, a sick woman, and three children, (one of them blind), who have nothing to offer but (pardon the expression) lice, they are much mistaken." Even when the owners threatened to convert one of the children

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<sup>122</sup> BENAYAHU (1988) 369-380.

<sup>123</sup> ROTH (1929) 168.

to Christianity, the officials in Venice did not give in.<sup>124</sup> The family's fate is unknown.

This case as well merits a closer reading than Roth gave it. Those in charge of the redemption of captives believed that the sale of the family would not bring the owner a sum even close to his "asking price"; hence they saw the demand as extortion, pure and simple. On the other hand, there is no evidence that any effort was made to raise funds for the family's release. Moreover, if we recall that the standard price the fund was willing to pay per prisoner was between 100 and 120 *kurus*, the sum demanded by the owner of these captives was not excessive. This leaves us to conclude that this simple family had no influence among the wealthy men of Venice, no fame or importance, and no financial support from their community or family members in the city of Belgrade. This would have been an expense paid out by the ransom fund without any ability to refill its coffers. It is no wonder that they instructed the agent to take a firm stance.

#### Letters from the Jerusalem Manuscript in Light of the Actions of the Redemption Officials in Venice

In analyzing the letters from the Jerusalem Manuscript, it is important to recall that the Jerusalem community was not in a position to raise funds for any prisoners. It had more than enough troubles of its own.<sup>125</sup> It is therefore reasonable to ask how it is that we have found so many letters (in relation to the total number of epistles in the manuscript), spanning such a brief period, that deal with the redemption of captives. The answer rests in part on the fact that eight of the prisoners were captured on their way to the Holy Land, which would suggest that the leaders of the Jerusalem community had a certain interest in freeing them. The rest of the answer lies in the connection between the above background and the content of the letters themselves.

Four of the epistles (54, 148, 164, 196) were written to help former captives who had been released to collect funds to support themselves after their release. It is unclear whether they were written in Jerusalem to assist these individuals in soliciting donations in other locations or whether the released captives had come to Jerusalem with letters of recommendation from other places – only to realize that the Holy City would not be the source of their salvation. However, one of these missives (196) contains details that connect with the historical material above. The prisoner who was forced to be a gal-

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<sup>124</sup> ROTH (1928-1931) 229.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. on this topic ROZEN (1985b).

ley slave and had gone blind was redeemed after his fellow captives collected his ransom money among themselves. As stated in the letter: "The other captives took upon themselves the full debt to his master and sent him here accompanied by a non-Jew, and we were obliged to pay such-and-such a sum." In truth, the prisoners themselves did not have enough money to redeem him. Based on the letter, the transaction was carried out as follows: those captives who were expecting their bills of release instructed the agent in Malta to increase their ransom money so that the excess amount for all the captives combined could be used to redeem the blind prisoner. The latter was sent to Venice in the company of a Christian (apparently representing the captors), and thus the functionaries were obliged to pay for his redemption as well. The fact is that the officials were sometimes confronted with a "fait accompli". They were not happy about it, but there was little they could do.<sup>126</sup>

In a different case, involving the prisoner who was chained for three years in Messina (155), the Venetian officials decided to send a bill of exchange to pay his ransom despite the fact that they did not have the funds to cover it. Upon his release, they gave him letters of endorsement so that he could raise the ransom money and repay them. Here too, it is not known if the epistle in question was a recommendation from the Jerusalem community concerning the young man or one sent by a different community to the Jerusalem congregation. What is clear is that the Jerusalem community did not come to his aid.

The case of the elderly couple who were sold "as slaves at auction to cruel masters" (207) is also somewhat ambiguous. It is not clear from the wording if letters were sent to Jewish communities to raise monies for the ransom fund in order to free them or if the money was collected following their release in order to reimburse the fund.

The fate of the prisoner who was put to work in the marble quarries and was redeemed by an individual who brought him to Alexandria (205) becomes clearer in light of the above. The man was not officially released but came to Alexandria with the person who had paid his ransom, under obligation to return the money to him. The leaders of the Alexandria community had arranged his redemption on condition that he takes it upon himself to raise money to replenish their fund. They then sent him to various Jewish communities to collect the necessary sum.

A similar picture emerges from the episode of the Salonikan family that was captured on two occasions en route to the Land of Israel. The father was sent by his captors the second time to collect the ransom money for the entire family (197). This practice of dispatching a prisoner "under obligation"

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<sup>126</sup> Compare for example with CARPI (2003) 197.

("dispegno") was quite common. The captive was sent away without a bill of release and undertook to give over the sum of his ransom to the captor or his representative once he had collected it, at which point he would receive the formal document freeing him.<sup>127</sup>

Most fascinating of all is the epistle titled "A good and important intercession for the prisoners" (202) dealing with the 34 prisoners captured on one ship, for whom a ransom of 15,000 *kurus* was demanded. This came to 441 *kurus* per prisoner – an enormous sum, relative to what the fund was accustomed to paying. The captors, who understood that they would not receive more than 3,000 to 4,000 *kurus* per prisoner from the fund for the entire group, sent two of them "under obligation" to plead with the communities for the remainder.

This case is similar in many respects to an episode mentioned in letters from the Venetian officials in 1654 describing a group of 24 prisoners being held under extremely harsh conditions. In this case, the functionaries succeeded in raising only 5,000 reales out of the enormous sum demanded by the captors. One of the prisoners, who had already been released in a different transaction, set out "under obligation" to beg for the remaining amount. Those in charge of the fund refused to give him any additional money since the 5,000 reales already paid out had also been provided on credit. Interestingly enough, it never occurred to any of those involved to break their commitment to the Knights of Malta.<sup>128</sup>

As we delve into the maze of details from all these sources, the original portrait takes on added nuances. The wrenching personal stories, the violence and cruelty, and the displays of compassion and solidarity among Jews are only part of the picture. The information gleaned from the Jerusalem epistles, along with other sources, points to a sophisticated, multi-faceted world of business based on mutual trust – not only between the officials in Venice and their agents (and vice versa) but between the pirates and those who redeemed the captives. Moreover, the financial details of the ransom transactions testify to the "insurance" aspect of the Venetian fund and the connection between the socioeconomic status of the captive and his chances of being redeemed by the functionaries in Venice.

The presence of the above collection of letters in the archives of Jerusalem's Jewish community is not insignificant or coincidental. The community did not have the means to assist either those released from captivity who had fallen into a state of abject poverty or those prisoners who had been sent "under obligation." The fact that, despite this, such letters are found in the

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<sup>127</sup> CARPI (2003) 191; 196.

<sup>128</sup> CARPI (2003) 190f.; and compare with 204.

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- CRESTI (2005)** = Federico CRESTI, *La population d'Alger et son évolution durant l'époque ottomane. Un état des connaissances controversés*, in: *Arabica* 52/ 4 (2005), 466-469.
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archives tells us several things: first, that these desperate individuals went to great lengths (in more than one sense) to collect donations; and second, that Jerusalem's Jewish community, though it lacked the capacity to help, was considered a "good address" on letters of approbation to other congregations. Its sanctity lent added weight to these endorsements and could help a released prisoner, or an individual sent "under obligation", to succeed in his fundraising mission. And finally, one must consider the "subversive" notion that destitute captives whose ransom had been paid by the fund in Venice without any outside help were sent (following their release) from one community to the next – telling their tale of woe and collecting donations to pay back to the ransom fund some portion of the money expended on their release. This can of course not be proven, but it should be borne in mind as a possibility.

In sum, just as piracy was not solely, or even primarily, an expression of religious allegiance or holy wars, the redemption of captives was not only a reflection of lofty ideals and obedience to religious commandments.

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## Jerusalem Manuscript 8<sup>0</sup>61 (Appendix zum Aufsatz von MINNA ROZEN)

Epistle 54, p. 98

The sound of a cry, shrieking and groaning reach our ears because of the distressing circumstances of this indigent, the bearer of this epistle, who is impoverished and emaciated. We have heard, and our hearts have melted, our strength has fled and so has our speech, as we have seen his anguish as he supplicates before us. As a result of the tens of thousands of hardships, desolations, and calamities, [visited upon him] by the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, destruction upon destruction from one side to the other, he is likened unto a man who has no strength. The burdens that have overcome him do not allow him to continue his spirited discourse for his lengthy speech has fatigued him. He goes forth weeping, and the light in his eyes is extinguished, and his soul is verily shocked. Going forth hunched over, not by might, nor by power, but with a broken spirit. Like the anguish of a woman bringing forth her firstborn, like a pregnant woman who is close to giving birth, anxious, excluded, trembling, swaying on her perch, like a bird swaying in its nest, and like an unfortunate man, his heart in his breast has dissolved, will melt under his burdens. He is under tribute. Overthrown, turned into several variants, of different types, the vagaries of time have beaten him, wounded and embittered him, many trials have banded together, suffering worse than death has engulfed him,<sup>1</sup> they have trod him down with ease, and caught up with him in the narrow straits. I will recount his first loss first, when he set off on a journey to the Holy Land by way of a ship in the midst of the high seas, and malicious and cruel ships set forth in raiding parties to take him captive, enslaved him, robbed him and stole all of his wealth. For he had been a wealthy man, but his wealth was utterly consumed by the terrors and the upheaval. He labored much and was left with nothing. But the second loss affected him more grievously – his fall into enemy hands. In his distress, his soul was grieved by his labors. They hurt his foot with fetters, and he was laid in iron, with bitter suffering, with collars around his neck and heavy chains, and were it not for the Lord of Hosts [who saved us] with wonders and signs, not even a small vestige of us would have remained as His remnant. For He inspired the Jews to pay the ransom, but nevertheless, it was not

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<sup>1</sup> One who has been informed upon to the (Gentile) authorities endures suffering worse than death; cf. *Shulhan Arukh* YD, Laws concerning Idolatry, 157:8.

enough to gain the prisoner's release. And now he remains "poorly clad and bare", for he was released from captivity penniless, and he lets out a great and bitter cry before us from his embittered soul. He shall cry, indeed, roar; everyday he will roar, making his anguish heard and known by the public. At night he will go to sleep weeping, and in the morning he will declare, "Would that I have died as I left my mother's womb, why did I not perish when I came out of the belly, so that I would not witness the evil that has befallen me?" Burdened every day like a pile of husk, constant shame and never ending disgrace for his unwed sister, who was close to him, was also left in Rhodes, lying on her deathbed naked and thirsty, in complete destitution. For with a heart that was scalded he concluded and said, "I will go to the great ones. Please may I collect and gather from the sheaves? I will raise my eyes unto the mountains – the mighty ones, a group of noble men, lordly men who stand in the breach in every city and in every place which the potentate's words reach to execute justice and law." Perhaps, God, the Lord of Hosts, will show His mercy and will gather up handfuls, a bit here and a bit there – a little bit, a handful, saved from the storm. And life will be rekindled within him. For he arrived at the gates of our city about three months ago, and we have also showered him with kindness to the best of our abilities. And so, our brethren, those who can redeem us, may you cherish this poor soul, verily grant him a voluntary tribute from the blessings of your hands as sustenance for his journey, and may your merciful charity flow on hearing the distress of, the cry of, the destitute. Listen and provide him with succor by petitioning on his behalf in his name. Better is the poor man who maintains his innocence,<sup>2</sup> for his reason has departed due to his stress and indigence. And behold your sheaves have turned to him,<sup>3</sup> displacing the terror and anger that has almost engulfed him, so may your blessings serve to bless this poor man, for this is the inheritance, the glory of God's worshippers and their righteousness will remain forever, as a nation that has acted righteously, and we will gird our senses in prayer and supplication before the One who dwells in heaven, the eternal God. We will greet him with gratitude, etc.

He was granted a great boon, as he was delivered from prison and from amongst the uncircumcised who had captured him on the Salt Sea, the Dead Sea,<sup>4</sup> and he returned to his home to find tranquility. Who is this man who

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew text is corrupt, but clearly this is a quote from Proverbs 19:1.

<sup>3</sup> Echoing Genesis 37:7: "For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf" (KJV). The author means to say that the generosity of the benefactors has reversed the poor man's bitter misfortune.

<sup>4</sup> The author compares the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea on account of the deadly tribulations that assailed the bearer of the letter on the Mediterranean.

comes to offer righteous offerings, either a vow offering or a freewill offering, behold his recompense, etc.

I will speak further about charity.<sup>5</sup>

Epistle 148, p. 178

#### An Intercession for a Captive Pauper

After offering praise and prayers before the awesome Doer of Deeds, may He continue to uphold the joy and tranquility of your strongholds and the glorious grandeur of your greatness, behold, we the holy community of Sephardic Jews, may their Rock protect and redeem them, in Jerusalem, the holy city, who are suffering the yoke of exile and penury, have set forth in this scroll-book [the request] that you speak for us and be our beneficent intercessor, to inform and make known, and express the tempestuous woes that have distressed this indigent and emaciated man, the bearer of this letter. This is the name that he should be called, which we have heard of from authors and read in books, all of the hardships that visited him incessantly, many evil troubles have encompassed him. He was living tranquilly in the land of his birth; he was taken captive by Gentile captors who came and injured his foot with fetters; and he was held captive and enslaved by them for thirteen years; and he did not succeed in gathering the money to redeem himself because his captors demanded a ransom of so many *kurus*,<sup>6</sup> so he went from bad to worse, until he arrived at the holy community of X and there they exerted themselves with all their might [to redeem him]. And now he roars like a lion seeking to obtain food for himself, [but he obtains] the bread of affliction and the water of adversity, for the land was "the land of the Negev",<sup>7</sup> and he was not acquainted with its ways; therefore, he decided to return to his home, the land of his birth, but he did not have even a farthing to spend or to pay for travel expenses, for all he had gained through his labors was his staff and his pack. And for this reason, he has importuned us to write these lines for him so that they may be a mouthpiece and an intercessor in every place that he sets foot in your holy camps, and you will give him enough to supply his want, that which he lacks, and instruct him in the straightest route that will bring him safely to his desired destination, and grant him sustenance for the journey, and this will be considered a righteous act on your parts, for this [enabling him to reach his home] is exactly like re-

<sup>5</sup> The last five lines were presumably added by the copyist who sought to provide additional examples of what could be written in such a case.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. my paper, p. 169, note 61.

<sup>7</sup> Allusion to Judges 1:15. The Negev is known to be dry and sparsely vegetated.

deeming him from captivity, for you are the priests of God, the law of redemption is upon you. May your kindness reach beyond the very heavens, and may you give him twice [what he needs] in your spirited generosity, at every place that this poor, indigent, and emaciated man arrives. To support him on his right and open up your generous hands, verily granting him from your righteous granaries and your kind vineyards a goodly portion like the rising of the dawn so that he may return to his home joyous and with a gladdened heart, in keeping with your customary goodness and your quotidian ways. So, may he not return depressed and ashamed, for you are people known for your great hearts, and it is attested that you immerse yourselves in Torah and good deeds. Raise up your hands in the sanctuary [to perform holy deeds] and fill his hands, and in recompense for this, etc.

Those people who come near to the Lord, who try to redeem captives, and have girded themselves with strength and have broken the jaws of the wicked man, and redeemed him [this captive] from his hand, and sent him hither, for his soul wished to dwell in the land of the living, the land of Israel, and to take refuge under the wings of the Divine presence, and now, etc.<sup>8</sup>

Epistle 155, pp. 187f.<sup>9</sup>

You who sit on couches and walk on a paved path to establish the land by the rule of law and rebuild Zion through righteousness, cultivated like Jerusalem on its hill, these are the noble men, the nation of the God of Abraham, the holy seed, the precious nation, men of lineage and esteem, the cornerstones of the holy hosts, those who raise up the Lord with all-encompassing love. Those who are zealous hasten to perform any holy precept, to redeem the captives into prosperity. They will not consider the cost; they will pour out gold from their bags with compassion and mercy. To let the oppressed go free, they must verily decide to distribute their abundance with a generous spirit for their glory. They are the noble men, who will always be called the men of great renown. For any particular of the worship of God, may His name be blessed, and the exaltation of His awesome and respected Name, they will be the first to take action. A brave cohort, behold these are mighty men, [eager] to do the will of their Creator with all their hearts and all their possessions. And from this day forth, mercifully, He will constantly come to their aid, and from this time on, they will lack no good, and He will raise

<sup>8</sup> The last paragraph might have been added by the Jerusalem scribe, as an example to what can be written for a redeemed captive who wishes to go to Jerusalem.

<sup>9</sup> Published in Meir BENAYAHU (ed.), *Relations between Greek and Italian Jewry from the Spanish Expulsion to the End of the Venetian Republic*, Tel Aviv 1980 (Hebrew), 244-246.

their heads in honor, and they will be like the celestial lights that are available for refuge and for shelter, and [He will provide] His might and His aid in times of trouble, in every city and every country. They will not become fatigued nor will they tire when brutal upheavals overtake Israel, their faith will give them strength. And, in particular, of their leaders, their elders, their financial pillars and their rich and honorable men, who lead “those that are numbered” [the Israelites],<sup>10</sup> to provide merit for the public, to show compassion to the poor, the unfortunate, we hope for their compassion, we urgently request and ask – of them first – leaders, and first among them a bundle of myrrh.<sup>11</sup> May their portions be in the eternal world, the perfectly wise men [the scholars]. May God bless their might, take them and uplift them all the days of the world. May they ascend the rungs of the ladder that our forefather Jacob dreamed of. A.N.S.V.<sup>12</sup>

After offering blessings of abundance, peace, and truth, [we must] establish what is to be done. The letters [this epistle is written in] are divine letters chosen to inform and to make audible to the ears of your exalted excellencies, the troubles that this young, impoverished and emaciated man, the bearer of this epistle, has endured. He comes in anticipation of your mighty, wise, and insightful wisdom and insight. His name, for he is called X, who was suddenly robbed in his tents and taken captive like a bison in a net. Behold, he cries bitterly with a scalded heart for his peace, because of his trials at the hands of an uncircumcised, ritually impure, Gentile. How he sighed in the dungeon of his captivity, for he was taken captive by a cruel, merciless enemy from a distant empty wasteland. This land (she) was a stumbling block and offense for the children of Israel and let the fire not blown consume her, for great is the conflagration in the city that God has cursed, he has prepared it with his anger and his wrath. Set to reign destruction on Israel, the city of Messina was ripe for a blow, and “Ekron shall be uprooted”,<sup>13</sup> for there “his [the bearer of the letter’s] loins were afflicted”<sup>14</sup> for three years, until God perceived his destitution, and caused it to happen that he came to the city of X [bound] in chains of iron, in the hands of hard masters: his legs were hurt by fetters, and he lay in iron. And they placed him in prison, in the place where the king’s prisoners are incarcerated, and blessed be the Lord who does not deprive his people of a redeemer, his flock of sheep has mighty redeemers, after all ... him. And he informed our outstanding re-

<sup>10</sup> Numbers 7:2.

<sup>11</sup> A flowery combination of Exodus 30:23 and Song of Songs 1:13.

<sup>12</sup> Acronym standing for *Amen. Netzah. Selah, Va'ad* a well-known concluding phrase. This phrase not only indicates the author’s hearty assent, as *Amen* by itself would, but further asserts that nothing can shake his declaration. It stands forever (*Netzah*) and ever (*'ad*).

<sup>13</sup> Zefania 2:4.

<sup>14</sup> Psalms 66:11.

deemers, our precious ones, men of valor, sons of the living God, merciful ones, to importune his master and establish the ransom necessary to redeem him, and even though he was difficult and raised the price, they increased the ransom and the amount to appease/ to tempt him until he finally accepted our pleas and was tempted. So they apportioned an amount of silver that was sufficient to ransom him, after great and onerous labor and travail, in the amount of X, and they placed their trust and their hopes in the mercies of God, and in the gifts of God's kind worshippers and their righteousness, the charitable of the people of the God of Abraham, those who are versed in the art of war – the battle of studying Torah and performing God's precepts, they will look and see him. They will generously disperse their abundance to ransom him, wherever they may be as is their beneficent custom. And we, who are weighed down by the yoke of exile; and the poverty and the humiliation, encircled by hardships on all sides, frequent troubles and travails, like birds that fly, devastation and destruction, an unending desolation caused by the burdens of kings and of princes who constrain us every day, a sin offering for theft, a sin offering for misusing sacred property,<sup>15</sup> frequent troubles that crowd in upon one another. While one is still speaking another one comes and captors fall upon us.<sup>16</sup> They will not let us catch our breath, [even] after we have spent a year ravaged by fire and pillaging, and fire fell from the heavens on our property and all the houses of Israel burned in the conflagration unleashed by God; as the entire world knows, an end has been made of all of those with deep pockets and who are the generous among the people. How has the gold become dim! An end has been made of them by the terrors of the fire and looting. But even so, we will not give up, and we will not take a step backwards, for our hands are full of money (even though our hands are covered in blood)<sup>17</sup> to contribute to the redemption of this captive, a good, tender young man. All those who know him and are acquainted with him will attest, will speak as one, that his origins are blessed<sup>18</sup> and he deserves mercy, since the history of our time has brought him to this pass.

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<sup>15</sup> The offerings are made to the rulers of the country who are engaged in embezzlement and extortion.

<sup>16</sup> The lords of the country, the Ottoman rulers of Jerusalem.

<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew plays on the word *damim* which means both "blood" and "money". Isaiah 1:15 uses this phrase to mean "our hands are covered in blood."

<sup>18</sup> He comes from a good family.

Epistle 164, pp. 195f.

Another one.<sup>19</sup> The nobles and lords of Judea for the Law and for testimony ... a nation ... for God, the righteous One who performs righteous acts, the love of the remnant, agreeable men of influence, out of all the goodly vessels, the congregation of ... Noble men who stand in the breach, the mighty ones, the foundations of the earth, merciful ones the offspring of merciful ones, purveyors of loving-kindness the progeny of purveyors of loving-kindness, the foundations, the pillars of the heavens and the earth, those who perform righteous acts on behalf of the public, like stars that eternally illumine and shine upon the earth and its inhabitants, for are they not the best of their communities, the praise of Israel who [dwell] in every city and every country, every place the word of the King, the King of the World, reaches, for the lovers of righteousness and loving-kindness, it brings joy and happiness to them, [raising them] above their heads for the renown and the praise, the honor and the glory, the crown of the wholly wise men, may our Rock protect them and save them, their financial pillars, and their leaders, the precious cornerstone that glorifies their judges, may God [shed his countenance] upon them, and may they live from now on and forever more, and may there be peace in their fortresses. Amen.

This poor man is calling out, he who is considered like one dead from a broken and oppressed heart, break upon break, who is unable to perform any labor for he has been broken and held captive by cruel strangers. He was given to drink from the bitter, accursed waters. Is his name not X? He calls out from [the depths of] a bitter soul likened to wormwood ... tears and copious waters leak from under his eyelids. He is in great pain. His shadow has disappeared.<sup>20</sup> They have raised earthworks.<sup>21</sup> His spirit has been bruised and his soul most affrighted. And his arm is broken from the stem, so he does not control it, nor can he benefit from his labor to hunt prey for his family, etc. His prospects terrify him for how could he endure seeing the evil that has overtaken his progeny. His innards have been boiled, they are weakened, languorous, overcome by starvation and thirst and the lack of all. Disloyal time has placed on him all [types of] hardship and burden has loaded him down daily with a crushing weight to desolate him from ... and his heart has verily melted at this moment because of the fire, the tongue of fire, the flame

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<sup>19</sup> That is to say, another epistle.

<sup>20</sup> This means that the captive is likened to a man who has already died and been buried, for according to Jewish mystic belief whoever's shadow disappeared between New Year's Eve and the Day of Atonement would die within the year; cf. Hayyim El'azar Reich, *Sefer Roke'ah*, Cremona 1557, "Laws of Sukkot" § 221.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel 11:15.

of the tribulations band together [as one] for they have almost engulfed him. His flesh and his skin have dissolved. Our eyes have seen this. Our ears have heard this. And we understand the distress, the bitterness of his spirit. His spirit is broken. And even though we are also burdened by hardships that are incessantly visited upon us, our pity is extended to him, and we have done for him as the hand of the Lord has been good to us. And is it not for this reason, faithful believers of Israel, those who pursue justice and repair all the breaches, this is your great kindness that reaches beyond the heavens: verily endow him with all that he is lacking, and may he be happy, and may the lot of the one who grants him [from] the delicacies of his righteousness and from the vineyards of his kindness and opens his hand [in generosity] be a happy one/ of all his possessions to give him a generous portion. May the Lord open his goodly treasury for him and be pleased with his labors and make him lie down in green pastures and lead him in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His name. And do not delay him. Let him go and return to his house loaded down by the burden of your generosity, which is of a full measure and exceedingly great, as is your way. The path of righteousness it shall be called. And may you be fully recompensed by God, and may this be considered for all of us [an act deserving of God's future] compassion and kindness and mercy. And may the Lord, God give you ... and He will give, and He will return and give a set blessing upon all the works of your hands as befits your exalted and elevated selves, full of wisdom and knowledge and awe of the Lord, and like your brethren the faithful of ... where is the boldness love of the world,<sup>22</sup> those who inquire about the welfare of the honorable glory of your grandeur. All those who stand in awe with an upright heart, the young of the flock, who affixed their signatures here, and the poor man, whose body is his witness and his countenance brings him merit, it is a tremendous religious obligation to aid him, etc.

Epistle 196, pp. 231f.<sup>23</sup>

#### An Intercession for a Captive

Sacred seed, the orchard of the Lord in which to glorify Himself, the chosen of the chosen people, all of them purveyors of loving-kindness with their wealth and their fortunes, all of them beloved and blessed, acting out of love. Behold, they are the holy communities that are found in every city, may they always appear before the Lord, Amen. And after them, all the men of integri-

<sup>22</sup> This phrase is unclear due to the lacuna.

<sup>23</sup> Published in Simha ASSAF (ed.), *In the Tents of Jacob*, Jerusalem 1943 (Hebrew), 111.

ty, mighty nobles, financial pillars, appointed ones. May they carry the holy work on their shoulders. May God dwell among them. Amen. And may their crowns be on their heads above them to indicate their splendor, and may honor come to those who disseminate the Torah in Israel, the perfect sages. May they merit length of days [presiding] over their domains in tranquility and safety.

To peace there is no end, our letters come to speak about charity, about the bearer of this letter, an atrociously poor individual, X who was trapped in the dungeon of his captivity for several years on the isles of Malta. They tortured his leg with fetters attached to a heavy stone burden. And, even after doing this, they did not leave him alone; rather, they hurried him out of the dungeon and placed him on the ships, in great penury,<sup>24</sup> in the midst of the sea. They closed in around him and led him from harbor to harbor. They encompassed him with terrors and evil days. With clubs and whips they beat him, dealt him wounds and contusions and returned his bread by the weight of blood, in measure, and due to the extent of his weeping he lost his eyesight, and he did not know in what direction the light might shine. And the uncircumcised men would insult him and mock him and pelt him with stones and with disgusting objects. And the trickery overmastered him, accompanied by cursing and blasphemy, and they [his captors] turned the very order of creation upside down, behaving towards him in a fashion that they had never acted towards another captive. Therefore, all the other captives took upon themselves the full debt to his master, and the master sent him here accompanied by a non-Jew, and we were obliged to pay such-and-such a sum. And behold this poor man left his hometown in order to fulfill a vow to ascend to the Holy Land, but he was taken captive, and he does not have any possessions at all. And furthermore, since he has children and his daughters have reached marriageable age and he does not know for which of them he should claim [a dowry] and which of them he should beg [a dowry], he turns to you whose knowledge of Torah does you honor. This good deed, therefore, falls upon you, the priests, in every place where his footsteps fall, to give him from the vineyards and granaries of your righteousness, and open for him the gateways of generosity and grant him access<sup>25</sup> to the way in which he should go until he returns to his city. And everywhere he goes he should display an azure clothe, the sign of your excellency. And he will bless you. And may the blessing of a common person not be inconsequential in the eyes of one whose knowledge of Torah does him honor, for from the heav-

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<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew reads *'aniyut*, which means "penury", but with a small change in punctuation and spelling, it can be read as *oniyot* which means "ships", alluding to his slavery in the galleys.

<sup>25</sup> Zecharia 3:7.

ens will you be blessed with relief and salvation as you provided for them etc.

This is the man who fears the Lord. He pleads for himself, since he should be considered as one being murdered all day long. For he has left the pit of his captivity, and he is passing among you with his staff and his pack for his evil fortune has caused this, [he said] "Be lucky my luck and tire not."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, he has asked us to implore before you whose knowledge of Torah does you honor. Consider well his feebleness and verily respond to his request. Verily lend to him until he has bread in his basket and the reins and the rods of the yoke have been severed because of his suffering. And his voice will be heard in the hilly region saying God has remembered his nation and his children have returned to their borders, each man to his tribe.<sup>27</sup>

Epistle 197, pp. 232f.

The beloved of the congregation, the lordly men, the mighty men, crowned with several crowns, and the crown of a good name outweighs them all. They possess reverence, and they are elevated [above other men], and they face one another and say "be strong" to perform acts of loving-kindness and charity, to satisfy every desirous soul. These are the noble men forever and ever, the men of renown among the communities, the praise of Israel, found in each and every country, the places to which the King's holy words and laws reach, and their lordly men, their princes, their advisors, their financial pillars, with their crowns on their heads, the wealthy men with lineage,<sup>28</sup> the great celestial lights, the mighty rabbis, the foundations of the world, the pillars of the heavens, etc.

After [offering a blessing of] abundance, life, and peace, as is the law for those whose love of Shem is the glory of their greatness,<sup>29</sup> behold let your holy eyes look without averting their gaze at the bitter tidings that are contained in these epistles that are borne by this man – one of Constantinople's<sup>30</sup> rabbis etc. These will give expression to the sorrow and sighing for what has happened to this man who has been veritably submerged under water, the

<sup>26</sup> According to Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 67b reciting this passage falls under the proscribed category of the ways of the Emorites.

<sup>27</sup> The last paragraph might have been added by the Jerusalem scribe to serve as another example of what else can be written on behalf of such an unfortunate person.

<sup>28</sup> Literally, "golden spouts"; based on Zecharia 4:15.

<sup>29</sup> The word for "name" in Hebrew is *shem*, but this was also the ancestral name of Noah's son, the father of all the Semitic nations. Thus, the author plays with this homonym in order to express his wishes for the addressee.

<sup>30</sup> Istanbul.

bearer of this letter, who sojourns before your holy encampments for his name is X, who is known to us as one of the wealthy and noble men from Salonika, who gave joy to many with his possessions. For when his soul desired to ascend and see the pleasantness of God, to prostrate on the graves of the righteous men in Jerusalem and throughout our country, he took ship and in the midst of the sea captors attacked him and took him and his household prisoners, but with God's mercy he redeemed himself with his wealth and went free. Afterwards, however, they were attacked a second time, and they were taken captive on another occasion and brought to Malta, and their masters demanded an exorbitant sum for their ransom. So, he left his wife and children there and turned to the surrounding [communities] to collect their ransom. And when he came here, to our city, even though we were burdened by hardships and evils, crises on top of crises, and the trumpets of war, we still spent less ourselves in order to strengthen his hands with whatever came to our possession, for our very innards sigh and flow with pity for him. And, therefore, you, the priests of the Lord, call out in every place that he arrives. Open the gates of righteousness with great generosity, looking out like the dawn in accord with his honor, for he had been a wealthy man. It is not every day that contributions are raised for a decent and deserving man, one of elevated standing, like him, whose very face vouches for him. And, therefore, happy is the man who can do this, and [happy is the man] who can strengthen him. So may he and those who wish him well be held in esteem in your eyes, to open your palm to him as quickly as possible, to proclaim liberty for the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound<sup>31</sup> with your righteous right hand, those who are so glorious with power. And [as recompense] for this act, behold here is our Lord whom we have hoped for, and he will save us. May He save you forever and ever. May He pour His blessings over you without end, and may your granaries be full. May you live long and well. May your years be pleasant, and may the Lord our God grant you mercy.

Epistle 202, p. 234<sup>32</sup>

#### A Good and Important Intercession for Prisoners

The nation chose God as an inheritance, the inheritance of the Lord from the heavens, they are binding their sheaves with loving-kindness and mercy, the princes of the hosts, leading the people. Their desire and their salvation

<sup>31</sup> Isaiah 61:1.

<sup>32</sup> Published, in part, in Simha ASSAF (ed.), *In the Tents of Jacob*, Jerusalem 1943 (Hebrew), 113f.

lies in emptying their sacks and the silver in their bundles to show compassion for the poor and the indigent. Merciful ones the progeny of the merciful ones, kingdom in which the sons of the mighty dwell. A nation that remains faithful. Those who lead the Israelites “who are numbered”,<sup>33</sup> purveyors of loving-kindness the offspring of purveyors of loving-kindness, our brethren, the men who are our redeemers who [dwell] in every city and every country, every place the word and law of the King, the King of the World, reaches. Joy and happiness for the Jews, and their crowns are upon their heads. The eyes of the congregation [are upraised] to the Law and to give testimony. The rabbinic decisors, the rabbis of each and every country and after them all the men of integrity, the financial pillars, the leaders of the holy communities, may the Lord of Hosts protect them and uplift them forever, for they are all likened to stars. Amen.

When this news reached our ears we lamented: On the day of the enemy’s triumph, when the Maltese ships fought against the Israelites and took many captives, so many people at one time. They cried out, but they did not manage to escape. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen a nomadic community taken captive by the enemy in chains? And may this be a sign,<sup>34</sup> and if he is impoverished<sup>35</sup> and he is unable [to pay the ransom] because he is ill and horror has permeated the community, [with emotions as] stormy as a pregnant woman, and the people have reached a crisis<sup>36</sup> lacking money to pay. So they are to become slaves and maidservants sold at an exorbitant price, no less, and their captors have kept them and raised their ransoms to 15,000 *kurus*.

They embittered their lives with hard work. The young men have borne the mill in the islands of the Hebrews, and the children of Gentiles and old men have stumbled under the wood;<sup>37</sup> in water they swam, if not in rivers. And women are trampled by the voice of the archers.<sup>38</sup> Because of famine and thirst they lie on the ground between the “sheepfolds”.<sup>39</sup> Stripped to the

<sup>33</sup> Numbers 7:2.

<sup>34</sup> In Hebrew the word for “sign” is *ot*. In the original manuscript this word was emphasized, perhaps in order to allude to the sum of money demanded for each of the captives – over 400 *kurus*. The numeric value of the Hebrew letters that comprise the word *ot* is 407.

<sup>35</sup> In Hebrew the word for “impoverished” is *dal*. In the original manuscript this word was emphasized to denote the number of the captives. The numeric value of the Hebrew letters that comprise the word *dal* is 34.

<sup>36</sup> The Hebrew for “crisis” also means the “birthing chair”.

<sup>37</sup> Lamentations 5:13. The captors may have placed millstones or wood on their shoulders to torture them or tire them out.

<sup>38</sup> Judges 5:11.

<sup>39</sup> Psalms 68:14. The verse reads: “Though ye have lien among the pots [some: sheepfolds], yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold”

skin with just a belt to cover their loins. Concerning this our hearts ache. Who gave over this holy community to be ravaged by hard labor? And Israel is plundered and given to hard work with bricks and mortar by those who eat delicacies. They would have been forced to rot for many more years, heaven forbid, in the lands of their enemies if Lord of Hosts had not seen their devastating plight. The poor man<sup>40</sup> rejoiced since a ray of salvation appeared in the form of a man, and they were given the opportunity to send "two berries in the top of the uppermost bough",<sup>41</sup> the bearers of this letter, men of faith, who will trudge in exile from city to city, from region to region, moaning in a mournful tone. For they will be, and they are, crying "vai vai", as like a crane they have become.<sup>42</sup> Has such a sorrowful thing ever been or heard? For the measure of destruction has outweighed the proper measure.<sup>43</sup> [They must collect] such-and-such reales in cash, and without delay. And they have come to this city,<sup>44</sup> to a people that is fatigued and weak because [we have dealt with] several other groups of captives, collector after collector, the despoilers of the despoiled. And this is but another instance of their evil misfortune, for they have not managed to find mighty men of valor of the days of old to pay their obligations, according to their asking price, for it is exorbitant. And they cannot restrain their cries, like the sea they roar, and they pray devoutly<sup>45</sup> in their distress. For we have also seen their prayers, the anguish in their souls over having been forced to transgress the law, in addition to their desecrating the Sabbath. And when we saw this, our insides writhed in pain, and according to the needs of the hour we made do with less ourselves and paid on their behalf such-and-such an amount, commensurate with the good God has given us as well as provender for their journey, for their road is long, and now the good deed falls upon you, the builders. The weak one will say I am a hero<sup>46</sup> and hasten to provide refuge for them from the storm, as it says in the Torah "he shall not rule with rigor over him in thy sight."<sup>47</sup> And the one who fears [the Lord] and is softhearted will give him a handful, for better is a handful of rest given generously [than both the hands full of labor striving after wind].<sup>48</sup> And He will return and heal their illness-

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(KJV). Here the captives lay in the sheepfolds, but they were stripped bare, not covered by wings of a dove. Furthermore, they clearly had no gold or silver.

<sup>40</sup> Here again the word *dal* ("poor") is used in Hebrew to allude to the thirty-four captives.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 17:6.

<sup>42</sup> The crane was known for its high-pitched, shrieking cry.

<sup>43</sup> The captors are demanding more than usual, which leads to their destruction. [Doesn't this lead to the destruction of the captives, who can't get out?]

<sup>44</sup> Jerusalem.

<sup>45</sup> Isaiah 26:16.

<sup>46</sup> Joel 4:10.

<sup>47</sup> Lev 25:53.

<sup>48</sup> Based on Ecclesiastes 4:6.

es, proclaim the captives' liberty and [grant them an] even path. And the angels of Shalem<sup>49</sup> those emissaries sent to carry out the commandments, those who walk wearily, downcast, who cry bitterly like the pupil (of the eye), may you grant them life and strengthen their hands [so that they can act] on behalf of their brethren, the prisoners of poverty and iron, whose eyes are affixed on you hoping for a goblet of salvation from your vineyards of righteousness, and the hope of a thread of loving-kindness from your granaries of righteousness and in recompense for this, may God dwell among you, wait to show you compassion, raise you up to show you mercy, and remove the yoke of their poverty from your necks. And may He spread a booth of peace over you. So both of our eyes – yours and ours – will see the construction of the palanquin<sup>50</sup> and the altar,<sup>51</sup> and may the redeemer come to Zion.

Epistle 205, p. 237<sup>52</sup>

Faithful believers of Israel, sacred seed, the people chosen by God as His inheritance, the inheritance of the Lord from the heavens, binding their sheaves, [performing] good deeds, and a fortress of salvation, to satisfy with your beams of light parched souls, those who provide the public with merit, like stars illuminating the earth and those who inhabit it, those who seek out rest and relaxation for the Jews, performers of loving-kindness, merciful ones the progeny of merciful ones, a wall and a refuge for your poor and the destitute, for anyone who asks, whether from among the oppressed or from among the poor of your nation, to gain a name and progeny for the benefit of the last remnants that God denotes "this nation I created for Myself". Behold they are holy and pure communities and their leaders were a light to the thousands of children of Israel in each and every city and in each and every country, financial pillars, appointed ones, advisors. To the Temple may it rise above, and on the host below rests the guarding eye of their glory. The perfect scholars, disseminators of Torah, you are among them. May the Lord protect you, and May you take pleasure in much peace forever. A.N.S.V.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Jerusalem.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Song of Songs 3:9f.

<sup>51</sup> The Hebrew word *harel* means "altar" in Ezekiel 43:15, but it can also refer to Jerusalem or, quite literally, the Mountain of God, the Temple Mount.

<sup>52</sup> Published, in part, in Simha ASSAF (ed.), *In the Tents of Jacob*, Jerusalem 1943 (Hebrew), 113.

<sup>53</sup> Acronym standing for *Amen. Netzah. Selah, Va'ad*, a well-known concluding phrase. This phrase not only indicates the author's hearty assent, as "Amen" by itself would, but further asserts that nothing can shake his declaration. It stands forever (*Netzah*) and ever (*ad*).

After [offering a blessing of] abundance, peace, and truth<sup>54</sup> as is the law of Shem to those who love their glorious name,<sup>55</sup> these letters of ours go forth to speak their righteousness concerning the bearer of this epistle, a sweet singer of Israel, the son of holy people etc. who left his native land to fulfill a vow he made to go to the Land of Israel, may it be rebuilt and be re-established, to bow and prostrate himself upon the graves of the righteous ones and on the Western Wall. But when he was sailing in his ship in the midst of the sea, bandits and pirates fell upon him < And the Sabeans fell upon them ><sup>56</sup> They took him prisoner, and they took all that he possessed, leaving him naked and bare, with his backside exposed to the elements. And as if this were not enough, they chained him to the water trough and brought him here to Malta and sold him in a slave auction. There he fell into the hands of brutal masters, who were verily as bitter as wormwood, for they set him to perform hard labor with bricks and mortar, and to shoulder heavy loads of large precious stones. From dawn till dusk he was beaten, and he went naked and barefoot; he starved and was thirsty, and lay on the ground, and the guards would beat him brutally on the back until the blood flowed to the earth and his flesh melted like beeswax. Many evil trials visited him, but God did not restrain the pity and loving-kindness He has for those who fear His name, and His mercy went out to this man, and an uncircumcised man providentially happened to come along and purchase him from his harsh masters to take him to Alexandria the Great<sup>57</sup> on condition that he would be repaid out of the charity fund. Therefore, you should know and we plead that when this man arrives at your pure and holy encampments, freely give him sustenance for his journey and open the gates of your righteousness to pay the vow that he took upon himself, and verily grant him this. For who is the man who fears [the Lord] and is softhearted, who will have mercy and compassion for this man? For this is the loving-kindness that you should perform: send [funds] to this man quickly for sustenance on his journey so that he pays his vow. And as recompense for the performance of this good deed, the living God, the King of the World will endow you [with the opportunity to live] in the circles of his justice and integrity for honoring His name, as you wish, etc.

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<sup>54</sup> Jeremiah 33:5.

<sup>55</sup> The word for "name" in Hebrew is *shem*, but this was also the ancestral name of Noah's son, the father of all the Semitic nations. Thus, the author plays with this homonym in order to express his wishes for the addressee.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Job 1:15 and the remainder of the verse: "and took them away". The words inside the triangular parenthesis were added by the community scribe as an option for future users of the collection of epistles.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 1:1 for the rabbinic use of the name *No-amon* to denote Alexandria the Great.

## Epistle 207, p. 239

The inheritance of the Lord from the heavens, binding their sheaves, [performing] righteous deeds, and a fortress of deliverance to satisfy with their beams of light parched souls. Men of truth, may justice rest among them. And now may they disperse sprays of silver with fervent yearning; may they rush to [perform the righteous deed], scampering, scurrying, [above all] hurrying, etc.

Concerning the old man wrapped in a coat of splendor and suffering who upon departing with his wife was taken into captivity and brought to be imprisoned in the mountains of Edom, the isles of Malta, where they were sold as slaves at auction to cruel masters and subjected to hard labor, with arduous beatings, and with bricks and mortar and stones. Tortured by iron chains from morning to evening, they were left naked and exposed to the heat of the sun and the cold of the night until their skin turned red and their flesh rotted and peeled off their bodies like slices of pomegranate. Therefore, our mighty oaks, those who carry the burden of the Torah and the commandments hurry and act on behalf of these people, to shower them with your loving-kindness and fill their hands, and we will also not spare ourselves from collecting for this divinely sanctioned cause. So when they pass through your honored dwelling place, please act charitably with them and be inclined to let your kind contributions flow. From your holy firmaments, immediately rain down upon them the first and last rains [of the rainy season], and do not delay them, so that they may return to their home. For their wives watch over the doings of their homes.<sup>58</sup> And in recompense for this [good deed] live quietly and tranquilly with a life full of blessings.

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<sup>58</sup> Either this last sentence was added by a copyist or perhaps it refers to emissaries who were sent on behalf of the couple and had left their families at home.