

# Captives in Mediaeval Spain: The Castilian-Leonese and Muslim Experience (XI-XIII Centuries)

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## Abstract

War in the borders between castilian-leonese kingdom and al-Andalus during the XI-XIII centuries was an economic activity in which booty allowed some people to enrich themselves, while captives were a substantial part of the war profits. The transformation of war into a lucrative business gave rise to the appearance of real specialists in a type of warlike practices which sought fundamentally to make booty. The owners of such captives would take advantage of them as manpower, either in urban trades or for working in the fields. The treatment given by the owners to captives must have varied, but usually their situation entailed therefore hunger, hard and humiliating works, beatings and tortures, dark and unhealthy cells or being in chains. Societies developed diverse mechanisms for the collection of money destined to the redemption of captives and it was so common on both sides of the border that it gave rise to the appearance of a number of customs and institutions providing for the liberation of the captives.

## Key words

Captives, booty, redemption, Castilian-Leonese Kingdom, al-Andalus.

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## Resumen

La guerra en las fronteras entre el reino de Castilla y León y al-Andalus durante los siglos XI y XIII fue una actividad económica en la cual el botín permitía enriquecerse, siendo el cautiverio una parte sustancial de los beneficios de la guerra. La conversión de ésta en un negocio lucrativo propició la aparición de especialistas en operaciones bélicas que eran realizadas específicamente para conseguir botín. Los propietarios de cautivos se aprovechaban de ellos como mano de obra, tanto en actividades urbanas como en el trabajo en el campo. El trato dado a los cautivos por sus propietarios fue diverso, pero generalmente su situación conllevaba sufrir hambre, realizar trabajos duros y humillantes, golpes y torturas, vivir en celdas oscuras e insalubres o estar encadenados. Las sociedades desarrollaron diversos mecanismos para recaudar dinero destinado a la redención de cautivos y fue común a ambos lados de la frontera la aparición de costumbres e instituciones concebidas para la liberación de los cautivos.

## Palabras clave

Cautivos, botín, redención, reino de Castilla y León, al-Andalus.

Alfonso X the Wise's *Partidas* or 7-part code distinguishes two types of incarcerated individual: the prisoner and the captive. They share the common characteristic of having been apprehended by others; however, although the former would lose his freedom, his captor was required to keep him alive, could not bring him to harm or suffering, could not sell him, could not enslave him, could not bring dishonour upon him in front of his wife and could not separate him from his wife and children to be sold separately. When the authors of the *Partidas* laid out these conditions, they were thinking of the kind of prisoner who shared the same religion or belief – the same law – as his captor: for instance, he who is captured in a “*war among Christians*”. On the other hand, circumstances for the captive were entirely different, unquestionably harder and much more dramatic: according to the *Partidas*, captives were those “*that had been captured by men from a different religion*”. On account of the contempt held by the captors for the captive's beliefs, the latter could be murdered subsequent to his imprisonment, he could be tortured through “*cruel punishments*” or be used as a slave or servant for such – tough and degrading – work that they “*would rather die than live*”. In addition, they were prevented from possessing anything, they could be sold and even taken away from their relatives. The *Partidas*

makes an overwhelming conclusion with regard to captives: “*it is the worst fate man could face in this world*” -“*mayor mal andança que los omes pueden auer en este mundo*”<sup>1</sup>. This article focuses on the circumstances borne out by captives in the Castilian-Leonese kingdom and in al-Andalus between the 11th and 13th centuries<sup>2</sup>.

War on the borders between the Castilian-Leonese kingdom and al-Andalus during the 11th to 13th centuries was an economic undertaking in which looting allowed some people to enrich themselves, with captives constituting a substantial part of war profits. At times, this activity has been described as a genuine industry or a commercial operation<sup>3</sup>. Unsurprisingly, on a strictly economic calculation, Muslims and Christians were willing to respect the life of the defeated or confined enemy: selling the captive, benefitting from his labour or negotiating his release were far more profitable dealings than killing him. Of course, for the victim, the loss of his goods, his social status and his freedom, as well as the alienation and abuse that went with captivity, were indeed dramatic and caused much detriment with there being no remedy possible on many occasions. Nonetheless, in certain circumstances – as in

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- 1 *Las Siete Partidas del Sabio Rey Alfonso*, Salamanca, 1555, *Partida II*, Tít. XXIX, Ley I. This paper was written within the framework of research projects FFI2015-64765-P and HAR 2016-74968-P of the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness and is part of the activities of Research Group HUM023 in the catalogue of Research Groups of the Region of Extremadura. Translator: Robert Taylor.
  - 2 About captivity in mediaeval Spain the most recent general book is José Manuel CALDERÓN ORTEGA and Francisco Javier DÍAZ GONZÁLEZ, *Vae Victis: Cautivos y prisioneros en la Edad Media Hispánica*, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Alcalá de Henares, 2012. See also James William BRODMAN, “Captives or Prisoners: Society and Obligation in Medieval Iberia”, *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia*, 20 (2011), pp. 201-219. Particularly about this matter in the Castilian-Leonese context during the 11th to 13th centuries, Francisco GARCÍA FITZ, “¿De exterminandis sarracenis? El trato dado al enemigo musulmán en el reino de Castilla y León durante la Plena Edad Media”, in *El cuerpo derrotado: cómo trataban musulmanes y cristianos a los enemigos vencidos (Península Ibérica, ss. VIII-XIII)*, Maribel Fierro & Francisco García Fitz (eds.), CSIC, Madrid, 2008, pp. 113-166 (esp. 128-142), which forms the base for this article: certain aspects have been expanded on and the bibliography has been updated.
  - 3 Charles DUFOURCQ and Jean GAUTIER-DALCHE, *Historia Económica y Social de la España Cristiana en la Edad Media*, El Albis, Barcelona, 1983, pp. 97-101; Luis Miguel VILLAR GARCÍA, *La Extremadura castellano-leonesa. Guerreros, clérigos y campesinos (711-1252)*, Junta de Castilla y León, Valladolid, 1986, pp. 162-164 and 181-184; Emiliano FERNÁNDEZ DE PINEDO, “Guerra, distribución de la renta y actividad comercial en la Edad Media”, in *El Fuero de Santander y su época*, Santander, 1989, pp. 241-253; Ernesto PASTOR DÍAZ DE GARAYO, “Las parias y el botín en la configuración de la renta de la aristocracia castellana del siglo XI. El ejemplo del Cid”, *Les sociétés médiévales à l’âge féodal (Espagne, Italie et sud de la France (X<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> s.). Hommage à Pierre Bonnassie*, Paris, 1999, pp. 215-221.

sieges – this could be considered a lesser evil: for example, in 1212 the Muslim defenders of Malagón were ready to surrender the castle to the crusaders and turn themselves in as captives – “*ut essent semper captivi*” – in exchange for preserving their lives<sup>4</sup>.

Everyone was aware that, according to the customs of war, conquering a fortress by force could lead to indiscriminate deaths. Accordingly, when coming to the end of resistance and before the definitive assault took place, the garrisons and inhabitants of besieged fortresses or cities chose the following solution: to give up their freedom in order to save their lives.

For instance, in the final episode of the campaign of Las Navas de Tolosa, the crusaders besieged Úbeda – between 20 and 23 July 1212 – and initiated the assault on the walls. When the inhabitants realised that defence was impossible, they engaged in negotiations to hand over the fortress after which they would be able to ensure that their lives, albeit not their freedom, would be respected. It may be that witnesses and contemporary sources go overboard when analysing the number of captives – from 60,000 to 100,000 prisoners – but it is true that “*the damned multitude*”, which “*was dispersed over all regions of the Christians*”, must have been substantial, and that the ensuing business – buying and selling, donations, rescues, etc. – was remarkable<sup>5</sup>.

The image of long rows of captive Muslims, escorted by their captors, travelling towards Christian lands after every conquest, would come to repeat itself often throughout the 13th century, as soon as al-Andalus (subsequent to the crisis of the Almohad empire) had been exposed to assaults from Castille and León with a highly limited response capacity. Thus, in 1224 during the first military operation of Fernando III against the Muslims, the Castilians took Quesada, pillaged their wealth and captured “*men and women, elderly and children. So many were found that it would have been impossible to believe it before*”<sup>6</sup>. The following year, the

4 *Carta de Arnaldo Amalarico, arzobispo de Narbona, al Capítulo del Cister, sobre la batalla de Las Navas de Tolosa*, in Gaspar IBÁÑEZ DE SEGOVIA PERALTA Y MENDOZA, *Memorias históricas de la vida y acciones del rey don Alonso el Noble, octavo de ese nombre*, Madrid, 1783, p. CIV.

5 *Crónica Latina de los Reyes de Castilla*, ed. Luis Charlo Brea, Cádiz, 1984, p. 35; *Carta de Alfonso VIII al papa Inocencio III sobre la Batalla de Las Navas de Tolosa*, in Julio GONZÁLEZ, *El reino de Castilla en tiempos de Alfonso VIII*, CSIC, Madrid, 1960, doc. 897, pp. 571-572.

6 *Crónica Latina de los Reyes de Castilla*, p. 64.

troops of Ferdinand III took the city and fortress of Loja: many inhabitants lost their lives during the combat and following the assault by force. However, many more – the historian inflates the numbers to 13,000 or 14,000 people – were taken captive<sup>7</sup>. When negotiations to hand over the fortress during the assault fell on deaf ears and the garrisons held on to the last, or when for whatever reason there was no margin for negotiation, the fate of the defeated was ever thus: death or captivity. Indeed, in 1247 the Castilian-Leonese army fought and took the town of Cantillana by force, killing and taking captive everyone in it – according to the historian the fallen and those taken captive numbered 700<sup>8</sup>.

In contrast, when an assault failed due to the arrival of back-ups to defeat the attackers, it was the latter group who would end up joining the ranks of the captives. For instance, in 1279 the troops of Alfonso X laid siege to the city of Algeciras by land and sea; however, after a number of months they were compelled to withdraw after the Muslim fleet defeated the Castilian one. It was a total disaster and many sailors were taken captive, including the admiral of the Christian fleet<sup>9</sup>.

Nonetheless, the war of siege was not the only context where fighters could take captives. One of the most frequent ways of waging war in the mediaeval Hispanic world was sacking – known as “*cabalgadas*” or raids – without seeking to conquer strongholds; instead, the aim was to secure riches or destroy the enemy’s property in order to weaken him. In this context, the fighters fundamentally sought to engage in looting, as well as gathering riches that could be transported, stealing cattle and capturing men, women and children<sup>10</sup>.

These operations of plunder and destruction were common in life on the borders, but the consequences – including imprisonment of captives, of course – were intensified, particularly when huge expeditions

7 *Crónica de Veinte Reyes*, Coord. César Hernández Alonso, Ayuntamiento de Burgos, Burgos, 1991, Book XIV, Chapter X, p. 301.

8 *Primera Crónica General*, ed. R. Menéndez Pidal, Gredos, Madrid, 1977, chap. 1076, p. 749.

9 *Crónica de Alfonso X*, ed. M. González Jiménez, Real Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, Murcia, 1998, chap. LXXII, pp. 200-204; IBN ABI ZAR: *Rawd al-Qirtas*, Anubar, Valencia, 1964, vol. II, pp. 622-629. The captives that went to the monastery in Santo Domingo de Silos to thank the saint for their release include several that were imprisoned during the episode. See *Los milagros romanzados de Santo Domingo de Silos de Pero Marín*, ed. Manuel González Jiménez & Ángel Luis Molina Molina, Real Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, Murcia, 2008, miracles nos. 14 and 74. Regarding the same source, see 12 below.

10 Francisco GARCÍA FITZ, *Castilla y León frente al Islam. Estrategias de expansión y tácticas militares (siglos XI al XIII)*, Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, 1998, esp. chap. I.

were undertaken. For instance, during the final three decades of the 13th century, the Castilian lands in the valley of the River Guadalquivir were substantially affected by invasions led by troops from Granada and from the Marinids from North Africa. Muslim chronicles describe the devastating effects of these operations on the lands and hamlets – the destruction of towns and fortresses, the burning of crops, the felling of trees – but they also go into detail about the booty secured, underlining the taking captive of people. There are reiterated references to groups of “*chained infidel captives*”, imprisoned “*infidels, woman slaves, children*” in such numbers that they “*carpeted valleys and mountains and could not be counted*”, captives that were gathered “*in groups*” to be taken to Muslim cities where they were exposed in the victory parades organised by the Muslim conquerors: in the parade organised in Algeciras “*the Christian chiefs and captives went before him [in front of the North African commander who had led a major expedition in September 1275] tied with ropes, fettered in chains and shackles*”. Solely in this expedition does the historian calculate that “*the number of captives including men, women and children was 7830*”<sup>11</sup>.

Some Christian sources wholly confirm the dramatic consequences the raids could bring about for the population. What is more, they provide first hand testimony to allow us to be familiar with what captivity was like at the time. Here we are referring to the stories told by certain captives that were subsequently freed who attributed their freedom to a miracle caused by Saint Dominic of Silos. During the Castilian 13th century this saint was famous for miraculously intervening in the freedom of Christian captives who had been taken by the Muslims and were living in captivity in cities in the Kingdom of Granada and North Africa. As a result, on those occasions when they were able to slip through the fingers of their holders they would head for the monastery, give thanks to the Saint and tell about their experiences. Thanks to these testimonies, which were noted down in books by the monks, we can become acquainted with many aspects of life in captivity, including the circumstances of their arrest<sup>12</sup>.

11 Textual references in IBN ABI ZAR: *Rawd al-Qirtas*, vol. II, pp. 593, 597, 602-603.

12 *Los milagros romanizados de Santo Domingo de Silos de Pero Marín*. This source is essential for examining captivity in the Iberian Peninsula and it has given rise to the publication of several studies on the topic. In addition to the “Introducción” to the edition we have mentioned, see other works including José María COSSÍO, “Cautivos de moros en el siglo XIII”, *Al-Andalus*, VIII (1942), pp. 49-112; Juan TORRES FONTES,

The testimony reveals that most Christians taken during a military operation were caught while taking part in a raid in Muslim territory. They were often small groups of combatants (between three or four and several dozen men) who advanced into the kingdom of Granada to cause destruction or secure booty – the phrase often used to describe their aims is “*to take something*” or “*to take something off the Moors*” – when they were taken unawares by a group of Muslims who defeated them and took them captive<sup>13</sup>. On other occasions, they formed part of a larger military contingent that had suffered defeat while defending their own territory from an onslaught of Muslims or while taking part in a major raid in the kingdom of Granada<sup>14</sup>.

Even so, during these times of war on the frontiers, insecurity shrouded the entire population. We consider it to be of major significance that more than half of the captives whose testimonies were laid down in the *Miracles of Saint Dominic* were not combatants; instead, they were peasants, peddlers or couriers who had been taken unawares and caught by the Muslims while they were going about their day-to-day chores and running errands (watering or working on allotments, harvesting, looking after cattle and taking it out to drink or pasture, harvesting wheat, weeding the fields, taking bread and wine to the work-

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“La cautividad en la frontera gaditana (1275-1285), *Cádiz el siglo XIII*, Universidad de Cádiz, Cádiz, 1983, pp. 75-92; Manuel GONZÁLEZ JIMÉNEZ, “Esclavos andaluces en el reino de Granada”, *III Coloquio de Historia Medieval Andaluza*, Diputación Provincial de Jaén, Jaén, 1984, pp. 327-338; María de los Llanos MARTÍNEZ CARRILLO, “Historicidad de los ‘Miráculos romançados’ de Pedro Marín (1232-1293): el territorio y la esclavitud granadinos”, *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 21 (1991), pp. 69-96; Juan TORRES FONTES, “La cautividad en la frontera granadina (1275-1285)”. *Estampas Giennenses*”, *Boletín de la Institución de Estudios Giennenses*, no. 162, 2 (1996), pp. 895-910; Ángeles GARCÍA DE LA BORBOLLA, “La espiritualidad de los cautivos de Santo Domingo en la obra de Pero Marín”, *II Estudios de Frontera*, Diputación Provincial de Jaén, Jaén, 1998, pp. 257-267; Ángeles GARCÍA DE LA BORBOLLA, “Santo Domingo y las milagrosas redenciones de cautivos en tierras andalusíes (siglo XIII)”, *Collectanea Archivi Vaticani*, 46 (2000), pp. 539-548; Ángeles GARCÍA DE LA BORBOLLA, “Santo Domingo de Silos, el santo de la Frontera: la imagen de la santidad a partir de las fuentes hagiográficas castellano-leonesas del siglo XIII”, *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 31/1 (2011), pp. 127-145; Carmen ARGENTE DEL CASTILLO, “Cautiverio y martirio de doncellas en la Frontera”, *IV Estudios de Frontera*, Diputación Provincial de Jaén, Jaén, 2002, pp. 31-71; José Enrique LÓPEZ DE COCA, “La liberación de cautivos en la frontera de Granada (siglos XIII-XV)”, *En la España Medieval*, 36 (2013), pp. 79-114; Raúl GONZÁLEZ ARÉVALO, “Cautiverio y esclavitud en el Reino de Granada (siglos XIII-XVI)”, *Vínculos de Historia*, 3 (2014), pp. 232-257.

13 *Los milagros romançados de Santo Domingo de Silos de Pero Marín*, for instance nos. 8, 11, 20, 30, 36, 42.

14 *Ibidem*, for instance nos. 18, 26, 89.

ers at a vineyard, taking grain to the mill, transporting wheat or other products, moving from one place to another, travelling to buy bread or grain, going fishing, heading to a specific location to collect a debt, sailing in a boat with goods (cloths, wine), taking messages or products to various locations on the border)<sup>15</sup>.

The existence of a border between Christians and Muslims and the transformation of war into a lucrative business gave rise to the appearance of genuine specialists in these kinds of warlike practices. For example, the leaders of the city of Ávila, including Sancho Jimeno, managed to become notorious among the Andalusian population during the second half of the 12th century. When the military contingent he led was defeated in 1173, they were carrying major booty estimated by a contemporary to be fifty thousand sheep, two hundred cows and one hundred and fifty men – “*captive Muslims*” – who were over-watched by their “*guards*” and were marching “*shackled, imploring God*”<sup>16</sup>.

The small raids undertaken by the inhabitants of the frontier cities or by the urban militias “*to gain something from the lands of the Moors*”, which certainly affected shepherds, peasants and inhabitants of villages, gave rise to complex regulations in the municipal jurisdictions, dealing with issues ranging from the military leadership of these campaigns to details about the allocation of the booty obtained: as far as prisoners are concerned, we know that some people in the expedition – called the “*guards of captives*” or “*cuadrilleros*” (gang) – were requested to watch over the prisoners day and night until the distribution had been carried out. They had to keep track of the captives and received two sheep from the booty as wages<sup>17</sup>.

15 *Ibidem*, for instance nos. 6, 9, 19, 21, 25, 31, 33, 35, 41, 45, 48, 51, 55, 57, 58, 61, 64, 66, 70-80, 83, 84.

16 IBN SAHIB AL-SALA: *Al-Mann Bil-Imama*, preliminary study, translation and indices by A. Huici Miranda, Anubar, Valencia, 1969, pp. 228-230.

17 *Fuero de Cuenca. Formas primitiva y sistemática, texto latino, texto castellano y adaptación del Fuero de Iznatoraf*, ed. Rafael Ureña & Smenjaud, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, 1935, El Escorial edition, chap. XXX, rub. XV, XVI & XVII, pp. 644-646, chap. XXX, rub. XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, pp. 650-2. See also James William BRODMAN, “Municipal Ransoming Law on the Medieval Spanish Frontier”, *Speculum*, vol. 60, no. 2 (1985), pp. 318-330; IDEM: *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain: The Order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic Frontier*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, esp. pp. 6-8; POWERS, J.F.: *A Society Organized for War. The Iberian Municipal Militias in the Central Middle Ages, 1000-1284*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1988, pp. 179-181.

It is impossible to determine the value of a Muslim prisoner of war in comparison to other looting gains, but we can assume it would be high because captives constituted the reward given to the bravest warrior, for instance, the first warrior to enter the enemy castle by assault, or those who held important positions in the expedition, like the priest or the notary<sup>18</sup>.

When the expeditionaries returned home, they took aside a fifth or sixth of the booty in order to hand it over to the king or the local authorities, they compensated those who had suffered losses of certain goods during the raid (horses or weapons, for instance) or those who had sustained injuries with part of the earnings. They then sold the remaining booty, including prisoners at public auction and distributed the profits among themselves. Accordingly, war captives generated direct financial gain for their captors. In addition, once they were sold, the captives were immersed in labour and commercial circles generating further economic gains, not only for the owners who as we will see were able to exploit their labour or resell them, but also for the State that indirectly benefitted from captives as a result of the taxes buyers were required to pay out in order to secure their acquisition<sup>19</sup>.

There is no specific data from the period to make it possible to ascertain the extent to which the price of a Muslim captive on the market varied from the time his captor first sold him to the point when he fell in the hands of his ultimate owner, but some testimonies set out in the *Miracles of Saint Dominic* show that the prices of Christian captives swiftly rose, meaning that the gains could be huge: for example, the captor of a resident of Matrera initially sold his captive for 4 “*doblas*” and the buyer later sold him on for 8 “*doblas*”: a 100% profit. The earnings for one buyer of a Christian from Cuellar, who secured his purchase for 25 “*maravedís*” and sold him for 35 (a 40% profit), were somewhat lower although in this case the first owner of the captive had also benefitted from his free labour in manufacturing esparto. The case of one resident from Seville is intriguing. After being taken captive during a raid, he was initially sold in a public auction, or *vendue*, for 13 “*maravedís*” and was later sold on for 15. It must have seemed somewhat undignified for the captive to have been worth so little as

18 *Fuero de Cuenca*, versión valentina, Book III, tit. XIV, 19, p. 653 and 31, p. 665.

19 *Fuero de Cuenca*, versión valentina, Book III, tit. XIV, 27, p. 659 and 35, p. 669.

he called his buyers “dogs” claiming he was worth more than a donkey and they should buy him for 20 “*maravedís*”. He was ultimately bought for 23 “*maravedís*”<sup>20</sup>.

We know little about the living conditions of Muslim captives during the period, but predictably, as happened in later periods<sup>21</sup>, the owners of such captives would take advantage of them as manpower, either in urban trades or for field labour. In some cases they may have been used for hard labour to build or repair fortresses or other buildings. According to Alfonso VIII, the crusaders took many Muslims with them who had been made prisoners after the capture of Úbeda in 1212, “*in order to serve the Christians and the monasteries that had to be repaired on the frontier*”<sup>22</sup>.

On other occasions, however, the Muslim captives were more fortunate, as working in the service of their owners brought them redemption. There are several cases dating from the middle of the 13th century of Muslim captives agreeing their release with their owners – in this case with nuns from the convent of San Clemente in Toledo – after a period of five to eight years of work on their owner’s lands<sup>23</sup>. In actual fact, this is a circumstance contemplated in Islamic law known as “contractual release”, an agreement between captive and owner according to which the former undertook to pay the latter – by working for him or through his own means – for his freedom over a specific period of time. Indeed, this would appear to be common practice in many kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula as it also took place in Majorca and Valencia at the time. The Majorcan examples we are familiar with specifically reveal that the prices to be paid for the release of Muslim captives were twice the cost to the owner in the public auction, making it a nice, quick business deal for the owner<sup>24</sup>. Of course, this meant that captives did benefit from a certain de-

20 *Los milagros romanizados de Santo Domingo de Silos de Pero Marín*, nºs 32, 35 and 44.

21 Concerning the economic and professional activities of Muslim captives in the 15th century see Francisco VIDAL CASTRO, “El cautivo en el mundo islámico: visión y vivencia desde el otro lado de la frontera andalusí”, *II Estudios de Frontera*, Diputación Provincial de Jaén, 1998, p. 785.

22 “...*quosdam captiuos duximus ad seruitium christianorum et monasteriorum que sunt in marchia reparanda*”, *Carta de Alfonso VIII*, p. 572.

23 Jean Pierre MOLENAT, *Campagnes et monts de Tolède du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Casa de Velázquez, Madrid, 1997, pp. 35-36.

24 Francisco VIDAL CASTRO, “El cautivo en el mundo islámico”, pp. 778, 791 y 812. The Majorcan and Valencian examples from the 13th century have been studied by Josep TORRÓ, “*De bona guerra*. El ambiguo estatuto del cautivo musulmán en los países de la

gree of freedom of movement, security and physical integrity in working for their owner or working for themselves in order to buy their freedom.

Though the sources scarcely offer any information, it is obvious that the treatment meted out by Christians on Muslim captives must have varied enormously and many of them suffered dreadful experiences of abuse during their captivity. It can be supposed that their situation did not differ substantially from that of their co-religionists in the 15th century, who complained about the arduous work they had to carry out in the fields or erecting buildings. They complained about having to work on days off in order to clean their owners' homes. They moaned about living in dark, lonely rooms, handcuffed and shackled<sup>25</sup>.

Life for Christian captives in Muslim territories was by no means dissimilar. The stories of captives released who went to the monastery in Santo Domingo de Silos to lay testimony on their miraculous release affords us with in-depth records of circumstances for Christian captives during the 13th century.

Virtually all captives were required to work for their owners unremunerated. Many were employed for agricultural tasks, ploughing or digging the land, working on vineyards, raising cattle or transporting straw to make manure, although they were more often compelled to grind privet, wheat or other cereals manually. On more than one occasion, the released captives stated that during the day they were forced to work on the fields and at night they had to mill the grain. There are also records of them working on construction, manufacturing plaster, building walls in houses or other buildings, and sawing wood for building houses. In some instances, although less commonly, the captives in al-Andalus were exploited for handicraft, such as the manufacture of earthenware, the grinding of earth to make pots and terrazzo, ironmongery to produce steel items or for forging, or working esparto. There are also records attesting that they were sometimes required to perform tougher domestic chores, such as drawing water from deep wells to feed the bathroom and their owner's house or heating the stove for the bath<sup>26</sup>.

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Corona de Aragón (siglos XII-XIII)", in *El cuerpo derrotado: cómo trataban musulmanes y cristianos a los enemigos vencidos (Península Ibérica, ss. VIII-XIII)*, Maribel Fierro & Francisco García Fitz (eds.), CSIC, Madrid, 2008, pp. 450-453.

25 Francisco VIDAL CASTRO, "El cautivo en el mundo islámico", p. 786.

26 *Los milagros romanizados de Santo Domingo de Silos de Pero Marín*, for instance nos. 8, 9, 14, 15, 19, 27, 30, 31, 32, 35, 38, 40, 46, 47, 51, 57, 61, 62, 67, 69, 87

In general, captives worked for their owners in houses, workshops or on their land without receiving any pay. When a captive was owned by more than one person, he would work for each of them according to weeks<sup>27</sup>. However, there are instances of captives who rented out their labour to others and paid their owners a share: for instance, one of them had to work esparto and pay his owner two “*silver dineros*” daily, allowing us to conclude that his employer was not his owner; another had to work building the hamlet of Algeciras and was required to hand over to his owner two silver “*alquilates*”; from another case it would appear – although the testimony is not entirely clear – that the captive was required to walk around the hamlet offering to mill grain for residents in order to pay for his food. In the first two examples, which stipulate that a sum of money was paid by the captive to his owner on a daily basis, there was a punishment of 40 lashes if on a particular day the former did not work hard enough to earn what he was required to pay his owners<sup>28</sup>.

Almost all the testimonies of captives were provided by men, but women captives also appeared in the tales of the miracles. They generally performed the same tough jobs as men, but there are references to their fate as concubines to their owners: one of the captives released, for example, tells of the fact that upon his release he was assisted by a Christian captive woman named María “*la Baldera*”, who was a “*friend*” of a Muslim leader in the city of Guadix and who moved around the city freely enough to deal with the captives. A more explicit example is the Christian captive Catarina de Linares, with whom her owner – a brother of the king of Granada – fell in love and became infatuated: “*pagóssse de ella*”. He locked her in a house where she remained prisoner for four years and had two children with him. Also living in the house were four other captive women, although it is not known if they too were treated as concubines<sup>29</sup>. In both examples, the owners were members of ruling groups from Granada, making it possible to assume that perhaps concubinage was more common when the owners formed part of the Nazrid political elite, while in the remaining cases captive women would generally be employed to perform regular chores.

In addition to carrying out arduous tasks, living conditions for these captives were similarly difficult: many of them spoke of the scant

27 *Ibidem*, no. 66.

28 *Ibidem*, nos. 47, 53 and 85.

29 *Ibidem*, nos. 48 and 76.

amounts of food their owners gave to them, expressly stating that they received “*very little*” food and that they “*were never full*” with such tiny amounts of food<sup>30</sup>. On top of this, the food was of poor quality and often consisted of bread made from unsavoury cereals that would normally be used to feed the animals, such as barley, maize, spelt, “*seyña*”, millet and bran. The odd testimony speaks of resorting to eat the meat of a dead horse, while another claims he received bread made with such a black grain it seemed like coal, with others even eating bread made from grain mixed with roots of asphodel<sup>31</sup>. On the odd occasion, to prevent the captives from eating the wheat they had to grind at work, iron clamps were inserted into their mouths, held with padlocks<sup>32</sup>.

Nevertheless, exceptionally one captive recalls an occasion when his masters offered to let him eat rabbits, partridges, bread and figs, and another recalls being allowed cheese<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, some captives even promised to fast on bread and water during Lent when they begged to Saint Dominic for their release, which would lead to the conclusion that the quality of what they ate on a daily basis was better<sup>34</sup>.

In any event, considering the testimonies as a whole, hunger seems to have been a common experience that many captives recall as part and parcel of their lives in captivity<sup>35</sup>. It was a dreadful experience that would be etched permanently into their minds, but the owners had a twofold financial logic behind the lack of food and its poor quality: firstly, the less spent on keeping a captive, the greater the profit would be once he was sold or redeemed; secondly, it was a way of pressuring captives into doing everything possible to secure their redemption as early as possible and at the best price.

Another experience captives could not forget had to do with the conditions in which they were held overnight: to prevent them from escaping, the owners would often lock their captives in houses – prisons – or rooms that were sealed tightly with padlocks and watched by guards and dogs, or in underground dungeons that had been dug out

30 *Ibidem*, nos. 29, 33, 36, 39, 47, 51, 57, 63, 66-70, 79.

31 *Ibidem*, nos. 29, 33, 36, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 51, 53, 55, 57, 60, 62, 63, 65-71, 74, 75, 77, 79, 81.

32 *Ibidem*, no. 8.

33 *Ibidem*, nos. 22 and 38

34 For instance in *Ibidem*, nos 35 and 38.

35 In addition to the reference in note 29 on scarcity of food, see *Ibidem* nos. 6, 7, 15, 18, 20, 25 and 30.

a number of metres deep. Some were even held in silos and storage tanks for goods or water, in “*alhóndigas*” (corn exchanges) and “*algibes*” (cistern wells) and even in chambers located at a certain height – garrets and “*algorfas*”. Likewise, the captives were shackled by their feet and necks, tied with handcuffs around their wrists or immobilised by a trap. For example, one released captive recalls that he had been “*in prison, it was very deep, more than 25 metres underground – 16 fathoms – and I had iron on my feet and a chain around my throat*” (miracle 6)<sup>36</sup>.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, one of the most painful aspects of captive life was abuse. The testimonies of many captives released reveal that the most common form of torture was being slashed by a whip, although some were also hit with poles, burnt with smouldering iron and even had their teeth removed<sup>37</sup>. There were many reasons behind the punishments and tortures suffered by Christian captives: sometimes, owners would hit their captives as a consequence of any damage they or other Christians had caused or if they tried to get away<sup>38</sup>; on occasions, albeit in an isolated manner, Christian captives were tortured to compel them to change religion and accept Islam. Indeed, such punishments bear a higher level of cruelty: one case reported claimed that to convert him into a Muslim he was “*burnt many times with smouldering iron*”, while another captive had 12 teeth pulled out<sup>39</sup>; it was common for captives to be threatened with beatings and lashings if they did not fulfil the work obligations imposed by their owners, and there are examples that tell us that these threats were actually carried through when captives failed to work hard enough for whatever reason<sup>40</sup>. Nonetheless, the most common policy was for owners to abuse captives to pressure them into redeeming by handing over a specific sum of money: physical suffering by a captive would motivate him into getting in touch with his relatives on the other side of the border to do everything possible to secure the sum of money he needed. Certain punishments were particularly harsh: in order to make him seek redemption, one owner dealt one captive “*one hundred and two lashes*

36 For instance in *Ibidem*, nos. 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 32, 41, 77.

37 *Ibidem*, nos. 6, 8, 13, 15, 18, 22, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 53, 57, 58, 66, 69, 71, 72, 73, 80, 81.

38 In this manner for instance in *Ibidem*, nos. 13, 58 and 73.

39 In this manner for instance in *Ibidem*, nos. 43 and 47.

40 In this manner for instance in *Ibidem*, nos. 38, 47, 53 and 67.

*with a tough belt that had an iron pin on the end that would dig into his flesh*”, while another told of receiving 240 lashes in two days, *“leaving him virtually dead”*<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, the physical pain caused by the blows and lashes sometimes went hand-in-hand with the threat of the captive being sent to North Africa, a situation that would induce horror in any captive as it virtually meant it would be impossible to ever regain their freedom again<sup>42</sup>.

In any event, these testimonies should be interpreted reservedly because the stories of miracles could have gone over the top in terms of the most painful circumstances of captivity in order to highlight the benevolence of the release secured by Saint Dominic. For instance, it is hard to understand why owners would torture their captives to convert them to Islam because if they did they would have to waive receiving a benefit for their redemption. Also, although the physical abuse did bear logic on the context of the financial purpose of captivity – pressuring a captive to reap the biggest profit possible – excess violence was counterproductive for business as it hindered the prisoner from working and, in the case of death, destroyed the investment: *“order that he be taken care of or lose what you paid for him”*, one guard told the owner of one of the captives who had been flogged in a particularly cruel fashion<sup>43</sup>.

Accordingly, it is clear that the primary goal of owners was to reach an agreement with their captives to ensure they would undertake to pay a sum of money or other riches in exchange for their release. Some examples of testimonies of captives released show that it was a lucrative business: a captive bought for two and a half *“doblas”* after receiving a great deal of punishment agreed redemption for 30 *“doblas”*, two fabrics and two knives from Pamplona, meaning that if the deal went ahead the owner would have obtained a profit of more than 1200%; another who was bought for 20 *“doblas”* undertook to pay 100 *“doblas”* for his redemption<sup>44</sup>.

At times, the agreement between the parties meant that the captive had to personally secure the money for the redemption agreed on. He would then be released, although to take his place a hostage would need

41 In this manner for instance in *Ibidem*, nos. 22, 37, 40, 41, 42, 53, 57, 65, 66, 69, 71, 72, 80, 81, 89.

42 In this manner for instance in *Ibidem*, nos. 22 and 53.

43 *Ibidem*, no. 53.

44 *Ibidem*, nos. 37 and 41.

to sit as a guarantee for payment. Normally, these hostages were the captives' children holding their parents places while the latter managed to put together the money needed for their release<sup>45</sup>.

Nonetheless, these prisoners could count on the fact that in Muslim and Christian societies, different mechanisms had been devised for the collection of money intended for the redemption of captives. Thus, the entire Muslim community actively took part in this activity, with legacies being established or alms being given for this purpose. It is known, for example, that in June 1182 the members of a Castilian cavalcade through the countryside of Cordova and Seville caught “seven hundred persons, both men and women” who were rescued later by “the people of Seville for two thousand, seven hundred and five gold dinars, one hundred of which Ibn Zuhr paid out of his own pocket with the rest being collected by the people in the mosque”<sup>46</sup>.

Likewise, this type of situation was so common on both sides of the border that it gave rise to the emergence of a number of customs and institutions providing for the liberation of captives. Accordingly, the municipal charters of Castile and Leon during the 12th and 13th centuries regulated the figure of the “*exeas*” or “*alfaqueques*” who devoted themselves to securing the release of captives in exchange for payment of ransom<sup>47</sup>. These “*alfaqueques*” are commonly mentioned in the *Miracles of Saint Dominic*, acting as go-betweens for the families of captives and the Muslim owners of the latter, passing on messages and ransom money<sup>48</sup>. On at least one occasion, there is mention of two friars of “*Saint Eulalia of Barcelona*” who engaged in this function of mediation<sup>49</sup>.

45 In the miracles there are several examples of these practices, *Ibidem*, nos. 41, 69 and 72.

46 IBN IDARI AL-MARRAKUSI: *Al-Bayan al-mugrib fi ijtsar ajbar muluk al-Andalus wa al-Magrib*, ed. and trans. A. Huici Miranda, t. I, Editora Marroquí, Tetuán, 1953, p. 42.

47 See, for example, the laws about “*alfaqueques*” and ransom in *Partida II*, Tít. XXX, Leyes I-III; *Fuero de Coria*, ed. Emilio Sáez, Instituto de Estudios de Administración Local, Madrid, 1949, 392-394, pp. 104-105; *Fuero de Úbeda*, ed. Mariano Peset, Juan Martínez Cuadrado y Josep Trench Odena, Universidad de Valencia, Valencia, 1979, LXX, p. 392; *Fuero de Baeza*, ed. Jean Roudil, Van Goor Zonen, La Haya, 1962, 869, pp. 227-228; *Fuero de Zorita*, ed. Rafael Ureña, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, 1911, 805, p. 355; or *Fuero de Plasencia*, ed. Eloísa Ramírez Vaquero, Editora Regional de Extremadura, Mérida, 1987, 682, p. 160.

48 In this manner for instance in *Los milagros romanzados de Santo Domingo de Silos de Pero Marín*, nos. 71, 72 and 80.

49 *Ibidem*, no. 84.

On other occasions, Muslim captives were exchanged for Christian prisoners, but even in these cases the owner received compensation regulated by the municipal legislation from the time. The payment of ransom, together with the profit from labour exploitation of the prisoner, made capturing prisoners on border regions a profitable business. Public authorities – not only the king, but municipalities also – benefited from this business by charging transaction taxes<sup>50</sup>.

Sometimes, captives were used as hostages or played a particular role in the context of political negotiations or military agreements between Christians and Muslims: we know, for example, that a significant number of Christian warriors captured by Muslims after the defeat of Alarcos in 1196 were exchanged for a similar number of Muslim prisoners in the following few years<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, the fact that in Alfonso X's *Partidas* the king keeps for himself the right to retain as prisoners the prominent figures captured in the course of a military operation – and this is also the case with the municipal authorities – allows us to assume that the prisoners would have been used later to obtain economic, political or territorial gains from the enemy<sup>52</sup>.

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50 *Partida II*, Tít. XXVI, Leyes IV-VII; *Fuero de Cuenca*, versión valentina, Book III, tit. XIV, 13, p. 649-; *Fuero de Cáceres*, ed. Pedro Lumbreras, Ayuntamiento de Cáceres, 1974, 387, p. XC; Carlos SÁEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Colección Diplomática de Sepúlveda*, Diputación Provincial de Segovia, Segovia, 1991, volume II, doc. 19, pp. 26-27; José Damián GONZALEZ ARCE, “Cuadernos de Ordenanzas y otros documentos sevillanos del reinado de Alfonso X”, *Historia. Instituciones. Documentos*, 16 (1989), p. 128; *Fuero de Baeza*, 915.

51 IBN JALDÚN: *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale*, trad. Le Baron de Slane, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, , París, 1978, II, pp. 213-215.

52 *Partida II*, Tít. XXVI, Ley V; *Fuero de Cuenca*, versión valentina, Book III, tit. XIV, 22, p. 655.

