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PHD THESIS

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BEYS, CORSAIRS AND DIPLOMATS

**RELATIONS OF THE REGENCY OF TUNIS WITH THE WESTERN
EUROPEAN STATES AND THE UNITED STATES, 1605–1830**

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I. SUBJECT CHOICE, THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The history of Maghreb in early Modern Times is not a thoroughly researched topic in Hungarian historiography. The dissertation is trying to make up for the existing gap by using primarily the published contemporary Christian sources, and the monographs and studies published by French, English, American and Tunisian scholars in Modern Times.

The dissertation aims to present the diplomatic and military relations, as well as the events of wars between the provinces of the Ottoman Empire, namely Algiers, Tripoli and mainly Tunis, and the Western European States and the United States in early Modern Times. Our time frame is between 1605, the signing of the first treaty between Tunisia and the Western European states in early Modern Times and 1830, the French annexation of Algiers. The study is basically looking at the history of the region through the problem of piracy and through the conflicts that erupted.

The central topic of our dissertation is the presentation of the relations between the Regency of Tunis (1574–1881) and the United States of America (1783–1824), which not only Hungarian but also in international research has failed to pay adequate attention to. This part of the work describes the Tunisian–U.S. relations through three major events: the conclusion of the Tunisian–U.S. treaty in 1797 and its renewal in 1799, the period of the American war against Tripoli (1801–1805) and the antecedents and the signing of the Convention of 1824.

In our dissertation we would like to provide answers to the following questions: (1) What kind of political development did Tunisia go through from the Middle Ages to early Modern Times, and what was the perception of the state in our period? (2) What were the characteristics of Mediterranean piracy and what was the role of the Muslim and Christian pirates/corsairs within it? (3) What were the diplomatic principles of the Western European States in relation to the Maghreb in the 16–18th century? (4) What political considerations characterized the United States in its relations with the Muslim countries in the Mediterranean Sea, and how could the American leadership handle the various conflicts in this region? (5) Why is it that the Barbary Wars, i. e. the Tripolitan War (1801–1805) and the War against Algiers (1815–1816) received a lot of attention in historiography? (6) What kind of relationship existed between the Regency of Tunis and the United States (1783–1824), and what were

the main elements and characteristics of the Tunisian legations which travelled to the U.S. for the first time between 1805 and 1806?

Researchers primarily paid attention to the captivity of American merchants and sailors in Algiers and to the so-called Barbary Wars, namely the Tripolitan War and the War against Algiers. Thus, examination and presentation of U.S. relations with the Regency of Tunis which did not take an active role in these wars have been peripheral in Western European and American historiography.

II. SOURCES OF THE DISSERTATION

Between the 16th and the early 19th century several Christian slaves/captives, redemption priests, travellers and diplomats wrote memoirs and reports about North Africa, the regencies, its inhabitants as well as about Muslim piracy. These Christian sources can be an excellent starting point for studying the history – e.g. economy, society and politics, etc. – of the Maghreb.

In preparing the thesis we relied on several manuscripts, archival documents and edited sources. Important manuscript sources of the early Tunisian–U.S. relations can be found at the *Archives Nationales de Tunisie*, that is the National Archives of Tunisia. Here we can find the French version of the Tunisian–U.S. treaty of 1797, most of the documents and correspondence related to the event of the year of 1805 and also the convention of 1824. In addition, that Archives of Tunisia has made available her materials in several publications. For example, in 2011 the *Cahiers des Archives*, a collection of treaties of the period of 1626–1955 was published and edited by Mehdi Jerad assistant professor at the *Université de Sousse*.¹

The published materials are also important sources of the Tunisian events between 1805 and 1807. For example, the six-volume *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, a collection of sources, edited by Dudley W. Knox contains several letters and reports related to the relations between the United States and the Maghreb for the period between 1785 and 1807. A significant part of this collection of sources is the documents of the war between the United States and the Regency of Tripoli.²

¹ JERAD, Mehdi ed.: *Cahiers des Archives : Traités et accords conclus entre la Tunisie et les puissances occidentales (1626–1955)*. Archives Nationales de Tunisie, Tunis, 2011. Another publication of the Archives of Tunis has also recently been published with the title of *Archives-Histoire* in 2014. *Archives-Histoire No. 1. „Sources – Preuves – Souveraineté”*: Publication annuelle des Archives Nationales de Tunisie. Les Archives Nationales de Tunisie, Tunis, 2014.

² KNOX, Dudley W. ed.: *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*. 6 vols., Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1939–1944.

The secondary literature about the diplomatic and military relations between the Christian States and the Maghreb is also extensive. The Anglo-Saxon, mainly the American researchers have thoroughly examined the relations between the United States and the North African States in the first years of the young Republic. Because of the events of 9/11, 2001 many American historians reinterpreted the U.S. relations with the North African Muslims. Some researchers drew parallels between the Barbary piracy and Modern-time terrorism and they also made the two terms interchangeable. The titles of recent publications are very expressive in this matter: *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801–5* and *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War against the Pirates of North Africa*.³

Historical research on the Regency of Tunis was also carried out by Western European, mainly French scholars. The main topics of the French historians were the Tunisian corso/piracy and the commercial relations with France. In addition, in the middle of the 20th century several excellent monographs were published by Tunisian historians. The three founding fathers of Tunisian historiography, Taoufik Bachrouch, Mohamed Hadi Chérif and Khélifa Chater, for example, devoted their main research to a specific century of Tunisian history.

III. STRUCTURE AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DISSERTATION

Our dissertation is divided into three larger parts that consist of different chapters. **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** of the thesis give the reasons for the choice of the topic, the novelty of the research and an overview of the chapters.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the historiography of the Mediterranean piracy, the history of Ottoman North Africa, and within it, mainly the Regency of Tunis. Furthermore it discusses the significant sources, studies and monographs published by Hungarian and international researchers about the so-called Barbary Wars.

Chapter 4 gives a historical summary about the political and diplomatic history of the Mediterranean with a special emphasis on the Maghreb region from the Middle Ages to the establishment of Ottoman rule. As a result of the Arab conquest, which started at the beginning of the 7th century, several Muslim empires and states had been established in North Africa which was the political basis for the Ottoman regencies in early Modern Times. Before the

³ WHEELAN, Joseph: *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801–5*. Carroll & Graf, New York, NY, 2003.; LEINER, Frederick: *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War against the Pirates of North Africa*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2006.

Ottoman conquest, one of the most stable governments was established in *Ifriqiya*, western Libya, Tunisia, and eastern Algeria under the leadership of the Dynasty of the Hafsids between 1229 and 1574.

During the 16–19th century a special relationship developed between the Ottoman Empire and her North African provinces. Chapter 4 also describes the main features of this relationship, especially in the light of the development of the political system of the Regency of Tunis. One of the most important conclusions of this section is that several aspects of independence and dependence toward the Empire can be traced in the policy of the regencies with the *Sublime Porte*. Another conclusion of the chapter is that the North African regencies, as part of the Ottoman Empire became a significant and recognized factor in international diplomacy.

Chapter 5 from a theoretical point of view and also through various examples what stereotypes existed in the minds of the Western Europeans of the era about the Maghreb region and its inhabitants in early Modern Times. For example, according to Western Europeans of the era piracy of the Muslim States was simply banditry which did not have any legitimacy.

Nevertheless, we must clearly distinguish between the concept of the so-called official/licensed piracy (*corsairing*) and unofficial plundering (*piracy*) in the history of international and Mediterranean piracy. The former category had well-defined criteria in the Christian law from the Middle Ages to early Modern Times, for example sovereign state, the existence of a state of war, letter of marque.

In addition, Chapter 5 also describes the participants of Muslim and Christian corsairing. The most important participants of Muslim corsairing were the Maghreb States, while the Christian ones were the Knights of the Order of St. John of Malta. One of the conclusions of this section is that Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli met the theoretical and practical criteria for official piracy, formulated by the Western European States, therefore they were not simply pirate, but corsairing states in the 16–19th century.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the diplomatic and military relations between the Maghreb region and the Western European states, primarily the United Provinces of the Netherlands, England/Great Britain and France in the 17–19th century. As a result of negotiations bilateral agreements were concluded between the Maghreb countries and the Western European Powers in the 17th century. Because of the negotiations and the contracts, special diplomatic principles of Mediterranean piracy (*corsairing diplomacy*) developed, which defined the further relations between the states. Such principles were, for example, the question of sover-

eignity, ransoming of captives, issuing of passports, providing consular gifts and maritime stores for the purpose of concluding and maintaining peace, etc.

The Chapter presents the above mentioned principles of international diplomacy, showing that it was the Western European states that on several occasions carried out an aggressive policy, namely the so-called gunboat diplomacy against the Maghreb. This diplomacy mostly characterized the second half of the 17th century when the Christian States prevailed over the Muslim regencies in a military way. The peak of the gunboat diplomacy was in 1816 when the united British–Dutch fleet, led by the British admiral, Lord Exmouth (1757–1833) bombarded Algiers.

The most important conclusion of Chapter 6 is that the precedents and norms were established as a result of two centuries of diplomatic and military relations, which basically defined the relationship between the United States and the Maghreb, most specifically with the Regency of Tunis in the first half of the 19th century.

Chapter 7 describes the relationship between the North African States and the United States in early Modern Times through several examples. This section, on the one hand shows how the American leadership tried to ensure the protection of the young nation and its commerce. Because of the failures of American foreign policy in relation to the European states, the United States had two options: either to choose negotiations as solutions or to use force in her policy with the Maghreb States. Initially, American politicians chose the first alternative and only after several failures did they decide to send out fleets that led to the outbreak of the War against Tripoli in 1801.

On the other hand, the chapter also outlines the establishment of the U.S. Navy and how the Americans used their ships in practice. This section gives a brief overview of the antecedents of the Tripolitan War, its major events and the conclusion of peace. By the beginning of 1807, the United States had more or less succeeded in concluding peace treaties, and protecting her commerce in the Mediterranean Sea. However, this situation did not last long. Chapter 7 also describes the culmination of American violence with the Barbary States in the form of a War against Algiers between 1815 and 1816.

The main conclusion of Chapter 7 is that the United States conducted a similar policy with the Barbary States as the Western European Powers had practised in the Maghreb in the 17–18th century.

Captivity of the American sailors, merchants and soldiers in the Barbary was a central theme in several literary genres in the United States. The section also examines this aspect of

the relationship. For example, the *Barbary Captivity and Sea Narrative* genre flourished in America in the 18–19th century. The genre not only presented American life in captivity but it also revealed the criticism about the institution of slavery in North America. The *Oriental Spy or Observer* genre was also an interesting example for the creation and development of American nationalism in the context of the Barbary Wars.

The theme of **Chapter 8** is the development of Tunisian–U.S. relations in the course of the Tripolitan War, when Hammuda pasha bey was at variance several times with the Americans. The peak of these tense relations was when a state of war almost developed between the two states in the spring of 1805. On April 24, 1805 the Americans arbitrarily captured three Tunisian vessels during the blockade against Tripoli. The so-called „Tunisian xebec affair” provides an insight into the United States policy, most specifically in the actions of the commander of her fleet, namely John Rodgers (1772–1838) and his violent policy, which afterwards did not only characterize the U.S. relations with Tripoli, but also with other states.

The central topic of Chapter 8 is the presentation of the diplomatic solution to the misunderstanding which emerged in 1805 between the United States and the Regency of Tunis. Sidi Soliman Mellimelli was the first Muslim envoy who negotiated in the United States in the interest of his country (November 4, 1805 – September, 17 1806). The history of the legation provides several interesting lessons. Through Mellimelli’s mission we get some ideas about the habits of the American politicians and inhabitants towards to the Muslim world and its customs. In addition, thanks to this legation we can also observe what methods were used by the American diplomats during the negotiations with a Muslim envoy in the early 19th century.

Finally, Chapter 8 also discusses the Tunisian–U.S. relations between the period of the War against Algiers and the conclusion of the Convention of 1824. The focus is on the Convention of 1824, namely the alteration and supplementing of the Treaties of 1797 and 1799.

IV. THE RESULTS OF THE DISSERTATION AND POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the results of the dissertation is the fact that research on the history of Tunisia in early the Modern Times has been carried out for the first time in Hungarian historiography. In our opinion the same can be stated about research in Hungary on the early relations of the U.S. with the Mediterranean. Our dissertation can also be considered a novelty in international

research in a certain way. Examination of the relations between the Regency of Tunis and the United States from 1783 to 1824 has been a peripheral topic in international research. The dissertation has successfully complemented for some of this deficiency.

Extension of the thesis is possible both in time and space, as well as in multiple directions and topics. In connection with Hungarian research about the Maghreb it would be worth examining the primary sources related to the Tunisian relations with Austria and the Habsburg Empire, which can be found in the National Archives of Tunisia (*Archives Nationales de Tunisie*). For example, Chapter 6 of the essay points out (Table 3) that the Regency of Tunis also concluded treaties with the Habsburg emperors in the 18th century (1725, 1748, 1758 and 1784).

Examination of other aspects of the connections between the Regency of Tunis and the United States may also be useful. Many Americans held diplomatic and consular positions in the regency in the 18–19th century who wrote several works not only about their own activities but also about Tunisia. The translation and the analysis of the works of Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785–1851) or Amos Perry (1812–1899) may also be of interest to Hungarian readers.⁴

Furthermore, in connection with the mission of Sidi Soliman Mellimelli in North America it would be worth to examine the activity of General Otman Hashem, Tunisian diplomat and politician, who arrived in the United States in 1865. What was the aim of his commission? What were the key moments of the history of the legation? Did the American politicians and citizens receive the Ambassador in the same manner as their predecessors received Mellimelli in 1805?

Finally, the examination of *Barbary Captivity and Sea Narrative* also carries potential and interdisciplinary (literature and history) research opportunities. The fact the researchers and students of the *Universität Innsbruck* have begun a long-term project in this direction shows that it is becoming an important topic. We can ask the following questions: How much was fiction and reality in these narratives (e.g. in the works of Daniel Defoe or Miguel Cervantes)? Was there any overlap and borrowing between the *American Indian* and *Barbary Captivity Narratives*, and if so, to what extent?

The analysis of these issues can be the subject of a new monograph or essay in the future.

⁴ NOAH, Mordecai: *Travels in England, France, Spain and the Barbary States in the Years 1813–1814 and 1815*. John Miller – Kirk and Mercein, London – New York, NY, 1819.; PERRY, Amos: *An Official Tour Along the Eastern Coast of the Regency of Tunis, Geography and History of the Country, and Manners and Customs of the People*. Standard Printing Company, Providence RI, 1891.; PERRY, Amos: *Carthage and Tunis, Past and Present in Two Parts*. Providence Press, Providence, RI, 1869.

V. THE AUTHOR'S PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC

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- „Az 1805-ös krízis az Amerikai Egyesült Államok és a Tuniszi Kormányzóság között a források tükrében”, *Mediterrán Világ*, 27–28 (2013), 89–111.
- „Diplomatic and Military Relations between the Regency of Tunis and England in the Early Modern Age (1662–1751)”, *Archives-Histoire No. 1. „Sources – Preuves – Souveraineté” : Publication annuelle des Archives Nationales de Tunisie*, (2014), 25–34.
- „Encounter of Different Cultures and Interests: Supplementary Observations on the Activity of the Tunisian Envoy in the USA, 1805–1806”, *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies*, 25éme Année (octobre, 2014), No. 50. 55–79.
- „Keresztény rabszolgák a Barbarikumban: Keresztény források a muzulmán kalózkodás 16–18. századi történetéből”, *Világtörténet*, 3. (35.) évf. (2013), 1. sz. 1–18.
- „Keresztények a Magrebben az ókortól napjainkig”, *Az Élet Fája*, 3. évf. (2014), 8–12.
- „Political, Military and Cultural Impact of the North African Muslims on the United States during the first years of the Early Republic, 1783–1807”, *Mediterrán Tanulmányok*, XXIV. László J. Nagy ed., SZTE, Szeged, 2015. 19–40.
- „Szidi Szulejmán Mellimelli tevékenysége az Amerikai Egyesült Államokban, 1805–1806”, *Aetas*, 30. évf. (2015), 2. sz. 44–56.
- „The History of an Almost War: Crisis between the Regency of Tunis and the United States of America in the last year of the Tripolitan War, 1805”, In: *Les Relations Diplomatiques de la Tunisie en Temps de Crises (XVIe-XXe siècles) : Actes de la journée d'études, organisée à la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Sousse le 19 février 2013*. Jerad, Mehdi ed., Université de Sousse, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Sousse, Sousse, 2015. 59–95.
- „Traité entre la régence de Tunis et l'Angleterre le 19 octobre 1751 (A.N.T., S.H., Carton 224, Dossier 405)”, *Archives-Histoire No. 1. „Sources – Preuves – Souveraineté” : Publication annuelle des Archives Nationales de Tunisie*, (2014), 95–121.