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NOTE DE L'AUTEUR

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Introduction

- 1 This paper looks at the infrastructure of a very specific –one may even call it exotic– business of the early modern era that connected Northern and Southern Europe. The ransoming of Northern Europeans enslaved by North African corsairs may be considered as a rather odd business. Only a few thousand Northern Europeans were ever taken by Muslim corsairs to Morocco, Algiers, Tunis or Tripoli, and thus their ransom was of little economic significance, the high prices and often bitter fortunes of many individuals notwithstanding.¹
- 2 However, the ransoming business illustrates a structural pattern of trade that is of great historical importance. The organization of ransoming Northern Europeans was a very complicated and highly precarious affair and was constantly threatened to fail by the incalculable behavior of those engaged. How could it be otherwise? Mostly illiterate sailors from very distant parts of rural and underdeveloped Northern Germany or Scandinavia found themselves captured, often on ships with foreign flags, and then

abducted to poor and underdeveloped North African countries that were mostly disconnected from world commerce and constantly at war with or embargoed by the Iberian and Italian states. Northern European authorities with sufficient will power to invest substantial time and money had to negotiate with Muslim authorities to ransom the enslaved sailors and, in case of an accord, to enact a risky payment, since it was always demanded in cash. This occurred in an age that had no means of long-distance communication other than postal letters and traveling mediators. However, despite these problems, ransoming occurred, starting with the first captures of Northern Europeans, and their ransom rate was mostly much higher than that of Southern Europeans.² The North's desire to have its sailors liberated ensured that substantial resources were invested to attain that goal.

- 3 This configuration led to a scenario that is of substantial help in mapping the infrastructure of communication and commercial organization of the early modern era. First, because of the difficulty of organizing ransoms, documentation has survived in the archives providing information on nearly every problem that could arise. Second, because of northerners' desire to pay the least amount of transaction costs possible, they turned to the best organized and most highly developed communication and commercial centers of the age. Surprisingly, in the eighteenth century for the Danish monarchy this meant Venice, which emerges from the sources as an important node for ransom affairs. The explanation of this preference over Livorno can help to explain the still relevant position of Venice in the eighteenth-century commercial world.
- 4 The article is divided into two main parts: First, I provide a more global context, i.e. the origins and structure of Northern European ransoming as it evolved in the seventeenth century, when it was based in Livorno, and then how and when Venice began to play a role herein at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the second part I connect these observations with newer research on Venice as a mercantile hub in the eighteenth century, and I assess the effectiveness of ransoming via the lagoon-city.

Northern European ransoming via the Italian peninsula

- 5 Venice was affected by the upsurge of Muslim corsairing in the Mediterranean from the 1520s onwards. However, at a time when the newly-won Ottoman regencies of North Africa were still subject to the authority of the Porte, Venice's ships probably enjoyed better treatment by corsair fleets.³ The problem thus remained limited for the powerful republic, which in any case had the capability to arm convoys. It was no coincidence that the first office for the redemption of slaves in the Italian peninsula was established in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1548.⁴ After the watershed of Christian-Muslim warfare in the Mediterranean of 1580, made famous by Braudel, several parameters changed fundamentally.⁵ The Porte lost much authority over the Barbary regencies, and the war of the fleets was replaced by a "petite guerre" of endless corsairing, primarily by Spaniards and Italians against North Africans and vice versa.⁶ In the last decade of the sixteenth century Venice began to suffer more, and around the turn of the century it had to make its ransoming business more professional.⁷
- 6 The Northern Europeans in the Mediterranean after 1590 were primarily Hanseatic, Dutch and English. They did not suffer much from corsairs until 1610 since they were often regarded as enemies of Spain. Yet, the capture of northerners rose constantly thereafter, most likely due to the Dutch-Spanish truce of 1609 that ended the latent

alliance between the Dutch and the North Africans, reaching around 1,500 ships in 1610–1650.⁸ Thus northerners soon had to begin ransoming. England and the Dutch Republic opted for different models.⁹ The former sent squadrons to fight the corsairs and after 1641 used state funds for most of its captives. The latter did not engage in ransoming at all, leaving redemption to the private side. Regardless of this choice, which affected the frequency of ransoming, the channels are not yet traceable in detail. Both states primarily used their consuls in North Africa and, in times of war, resorted to merchants (mostly of their own “nation”) in Livorno.¹⁰ From the surviving fragmentary sources it seems Hanseatics mainly followed the same path. After having tried ransoming via the French and Dutch consuls from 1610 onwards, a shift toward Dutch merchants in Livorno began in Hamburg in June 1620. At the latest, in 1631 the hitherto hesitant Lübeckers also made this switch.¹¹

7 Venice was thus left aside. In the early seventeenth century Livorno had rapidly become the new emporium for many entrepreneurial Northern European merchants, who increased the intensity of northern business contacts.¹² Venice certainly was home to many German merchants, but most were from southern Germany and, around 1600, they were still rather distinct from the Hanseatic-dominated German north. German merchants in Venice had thus at best a very indirect connection to the problems of slave redemption.¹³ Livorno was the main center for organizing and enacting the ransom of northerners during the entire seventeenth century.

8 We know, however, that German and Jewish merchant communities in Venice were engaged in ransoming activities that cannot be traced with much precision. In Venice we know of a fund set up by Jews at the latest in 1609 that for some decades became a central element of ransoming activities for and by Jews everywhere in the Mediterranean, be they captured by Christians or Muslims.¹⁴ For the Germans in Venice we have no information other than these lines from a 1715 handwritten chronicle of the *nazione alemana*:

And in the year 1591, which followed that unprecedented famine, how many hungry were not satiated by the most pious Nazione? Many memorial-books which still exist among the old scriptures (the ones that remained after the fire) testify clearly of the liberation of poor captives and slaves from the hands of the Barbarians and of giving poor damsels pious alms.¹⁵

9 Unfortunately, this remains vague. Most likely, German merchants gave money to the *Provveditori sopra ospedali e luoghi pii e riscatto degli schiavi*, the office charged with redemption of Venetian slaves.¹⁶

10 German merchants in Venice could not engage in any trading activities in the Mediterranean and thus had no ships sailing to or from Venice. They had substantial privileges in Venice, such as reduced tolls and the prohibition for Venetian merchants to do business in Germany, but their restriction to overland trade to Germany meant they were of best use to the Serenissima. Being thus intensely connected to southern Germany in the years around 1600, German merchants in Venice seem to have been only rarely in contact with the Hanseatic merchants who expanded their range in the Mediterranean in these years, though these were mostly limited to Livorno and Genoa; Venice was only sporadically touched by North Germans. With the strengthening of Dutch trade in the Mediterranean after 1610, the northern Germans also saw their position in the west Italian port cities reduced and even more so in Venice.¹⁷ After 1621 the Venetians strengthened their trade with the Levant whilst at the same time the war north of the Alps reduced traditional trade with Germany.¹⁸ The Thirty Years' War

spared the most important Hanseatic cities enabling Hamburg and Lübeck to maintain a solid position in the western Mediterranean during the war. Yet, trade between northern Germany and Venice remained marginal, as did communication. In the years around 1650 German merchants in Venice prohibited the admission of new merchants to the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the house of the German merchant community, who were not approved by the *nazione alemana*.¹⁹ This measure was effectively directed against Hanseatic merchants who from then on had practically no chance of admission to the Fondaco and its privileges in Venice. Livorno and Genoa remained an important harbor for the North Germans; Venice and Genoa for the South Germans.²⁰

- 11 All ransoming activities thus were concentrated in Livorno, which had one profound disadvantage. Merchants in Livorno had a bad reputation for engaging too often in risky businesses and operating on the threshold of bankruptcy. This is usually taken to be a result of the Livornine of 1591 and 1593, the liberal legislation of the Medici.²¹ It stipulated amongst other things that no one who settled in Livorno could be brought to trial for past bankruptcies.²² This attracted a diverse range of merchants from all over Europe, some of whom tried to escape their creditors or had a dubious past.²³ Even solid merchant houses were affected, since they had to engage in business with partners there. Trust, thus, was of greater importance here than elsewhere, and we see the demarcations of single “nations” of merchants being more pronounced and durable.²⁴ Yet, after its declaration as a free port in the late sixteenth century, Livorno was until 1800 the place on the Italian peninsula with the best connections to Northern Europe and the Muslim world.
- 12 We may give examples for the seventeenth century. Between 1624 and 1634 Hamburg and Lübeck charged the firm of Bernard van den Broecke in Livorno with their ransoming business. Moreover, in February 1624, Hamburg signed a contract with a professional ransoming expert, Francis van Iperseel, who sailed regularly between Livorno and Algiers. The enactment of the payments was intended to be done via the merchant house of Broecke. Yet, in August 1627, Hamburg did not extend the contract since much of the money had allegedly sunk with two ships between Algiers and Livorno. Nobody had been ransomed and the senators in Hamburg seem to have suspected that Iperseel stole their money. Thereafter Hamburg continued to rely on Broecke but had all its ransoming money insured against sinking or stealing at rates of 30 percent.²⁵ Iperseel, however, continued with his business in the Mediterranean, of which ransoming always formed an integral part. The last trace we have of him is a three-page memoir from 23 March 1661 to the States General. Here he presented himself as consul of Denmark and the Hanse at Algiers, a blatant lie since any remote affiliation to these places had been severed decades ago. He offered to ransom 384 Dutch slaves for 131,006 guilders, a comparatively small sum for so many slaves.²⁶
- 13 Whatever the answer of the Dutch Republic in this specific case (most certainly it was negative), it is important to stress that men of dubious standing engaged in the ransoming business and seem to have enriched themselves. The merchant houses of Livorno also were problematic in this regard. Control was difficult so far away from the northern world. Broecke went bankrupt in 1634, and it may be that money earmarked for redemption got lost.²⁷ Even though this is not synonymous with fraud, the ransoming institutions of Northern Europe still suffered in such cases. In 1650 Lübeck wanted to install a proper ransoming agent in Algiers to reduce dependency on Livorno, but this attempt failed.²⁸ The Dutch and Hanseatics remained dependent on

their partners in Livorno for ransoming and had to face substantial extra payments either for insurance or in cases of fraud or bankruptcy. It seems that neither the Hanseatics nor the Dutch were satisfied with this strong dependency on Livorno. This can be deduced from Hamburg's reaction when a Dutch consul settled in Algiers in the late seventeenth century. In 1684 the Dutch Resident in Hamburg, Gerard Kuysten (1647–1708), wrote to the Senate that the Dutch consul in Algiers, Christoffel Mathias (1655–1702),²⁹ was willing to ransom Lübeckers and Hamburgers who had served on Dutch ships. This was certainly intended to strengthen the peace of the Dutch with Algiers, which was constantly endangered by Dutch hesitation after having signed the peace treaty to ransom the sailors of many nations who had been taken on their ships. In Hamburg it was decided to use this channel to ransom all Hamburgers, not only the ones taken on Dutch ships. Hamburg sent to Mathias the substantial sum of 6,800 Reichsthalers for the ransom, a fact that hints at some dissatisfaction with the traditional contacts via Livorno.³⁰

- 14 The Danes found another way in 1715. When they created their *Sklavenkasse* in Copenhagen to ransom some one hundred Norwegian sailors captured by the Algerians between 1706 and 1714, they approached the richest German merchant house in Venice, the business of Johann Jacob Pommer (1659–1717).³¹ By then, contacts between the German merchants in Venice and the Danish monarchy were already well established. King Frederick IV had nominated the German merchant Mathias Bachmair in 1702 as Danish consul in Venice.³² The same king had visited Venice in the winter of 1708–1709.³³ In 1710 Gabriel Soderini was sent from Venice to Copenhagen to negotiate a business treaty between the Serenissima and the northern monarchy. Even though, due to lack of interest by most merchants in Copenhagen, this did not result in a formal treaty, –some entrepreneurs were already thinking of a stronger Danish– controlled maritime intra-European trade independent of the still dominant Dutch.³⁴
- 15 One of these presumably was Abraham Kløcker (1673–1730), one of the most visible and active merchants from Copenhagen in the early eighteenth century.³⁵ He most likely had business contacts with Pommer, who in around 1700 was called the “greatest banker of Venice.”³⁶ From 1707 onwards Kløcker had been a member of the council of Copenhagen as a merchant. In the next twenty-three years he made an impressive career, close to the court and government, which brought him such powerful positions as the directorship of the Danish West Indian Company and into the Chamber of Commerce.
- 16 Johann Jacob Pommer was the nephew of Johann Christoph Pommer (1626–1708) who had moved from Vienna to Venice in 1645. There he acquired an impressive fortune which brought him several prestigious positions in Venice (consul of Sweden, twice consul of the *nazione alemana*). Johann Jacob had begun his training as a merchant in the house of his uncle in 1678 and moved afterwards around Europe where he frequented and learned at the most important merchant houses of Germany, Holland, England, Brabant, France and the Italian peninsula. When he came back to Venice in the last decade of the seventeenth century, his uncle was so impressed by him that he made him his associate and soon bequeathed his entire firm to him.³⁷
- 17 Now the best connected merchant of Copenhagen and the best connected merchant of Venice, both fluent in German, intensified their contact when faced with the need to ransom on a large scale. When Kløcker was appointed as one of three directors of the Danish *Sklavenkasse* in 1715, this new royal institution approached Pommer in Venice

with the request to be the central figure for the ransoming of captured sailors from Danish-Norwegian ships. In the first surviving letter of the *Sklavenkasse* to Pommer (20 April 1715), the directors mention a letter written by Kløcker to Pommer on 16 April, asking him to serve as agent of the *Sklavenkasse*. It seems unlikely that Pommer would have been contacted had not some prior business partnership existed between the two.

38

- 18 Johann Jacob Pommer accepted the task. After his death in 1717, his son Johannes Pommer (1692–1753) took over and continued the business. For thirty years, from April 1715 until March 1745, these two Pommers did practically all the ransoming the Danish *Sklavenkasse* needed. They ransomed around 180 slaves taken on fourteen ships of the Danish monarchy (six from Slesvig-Holstein, eight from Norway, none from Denmark). The *Sklavenkasse* paid 173,310 Reichsthalers for these ransoms. Probably more than 95 percent of this money was directly transferred to the Pommers in Venice through letters of exchange from business partners in Amsterdam, London and Hamburg; the rest was used for other correspondence, payment of scribes and charges to partners in the named commercial centers. The Pommers usually kept 1 percent as commission; thus in nearly thirty years they earned a bit more than 1,500 Reichsthalers.³⁹ For a merchant family like the Pommers, which operated with money-flows of thousands of Reichsthalers, this business was thus rather a side affair. But not negligible was the prestige and sympathy they acquired in Copenhagen, the center of a powerful composite monarchy. Even more, since the *Sklavenkasse* in Copenhagen had no direct financial connection to Venice and always ordered its bills of exchange from other firms in London, Amsterdam and Hamburg, this may have been an important step to intensify the connection of the Pommers (and thereby Venice) with some of the most important merchants and firms in Northern Europe. Among the flow of letters from the *Sklavenkasse* to the Pommers we find transactions of Danish merchants that were completely unconnected to the ransoming business, showing that ransoming *en passant* helped create or increase connections between Northern and Southern Europe.

Venice as a mercantile and ransoming center in the eighteenth century

- 19 Had the choice of a contact in Venice been made because of the little expertise in Denmark on Mediterranean affairs or, on the contrary, because of strong expertise? The Hanseatics and the Dutch Republic never let merchants in Venice do any of their ransoming; both always relied on their partners in Livorno. The choice of Livorno thus reflects the basic tendency of the most innovative merchants to make use of the main line of commercial interactions between northwestern Europe and Italy. Had Denmark, as a country without knowledge of Mediterranean affairs, perhaps chosen a merchant in Venice as partner due to its unfamiliarity with this trading area?
- 20 This may be the case; yet it also may have been a decision based on profound reflection. Certainly Venice in the eighteenth century was no longer the strong commercial hub it had been in the Middle Ages. This notwithstanding, nowadays we see much clearer just how solid the position of Venice remained until the convulsions of the Napoleonic era. One of the first historians to put this idea forward was Eugène Tarlé, in 1928.⁴⁰ This has found support among economic historians. While the American historian Richard Rapp pointed out how well Venice maintained its economy during the seventeenth century,⁴¹

more modern research has pointed out how many profitable and rich industries the Republic was able to retain deep into the eighteenth century.⁴² This does not mean that Venice in the eighteenth century has been completely misrepresented. There was a commonly shared sentiment of crisis, especially in the second half of the century, at least in the sphere of public finance.⁴³ Starting in the 1780s, difficulties grew with the increasing efficiency of Austrian mercantilist policy and competition from a strongly subsidized Trieste.⁴⁴

- 21 Even in the last decades of the republic, Venice benefited strongly from its political stability and creditworthiness. It remained an important center of information.⁴⁵ German merchants were still attracted by important privileges, and the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, far from being an outdated and medieval instrument, was obviously still alluring.⁴⁶ It is surprising just how many German merchants remained active in Venice. The group in the eighteenth century for the first time even included some native Hamburgers.⁴⁷ That they and the traditionally dominant southern Germans were now, in contrast to the seventeenth century, well-connected to the pulse of world trade, was pointed out by Jean Georgelin, who wrote after having compared tax registers on the respective merchant groups of the 1770s (mostly Greeks, Jews, Venetians and Germans):

Les négociants de la Dominante n'avaient donc rien à envier à leurs collègues étrangers. Et l'on est en droit de conclure à l'opulence de dizaines d'entre eux. Mais les Vénitiens se retrouvaient minoritaires [...] les plus puissants des Allemands, Rech et Lamenit, s'assuraient des revenus supérieurs du double à ceux du plus riche vénitien.⁴⁸

- 22 German merchants in Venice were obviously a group to be reckoned with. They played an important part in what Ludwig Beutin has called the "silent expansion" of German trade in the Mediterranean in the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ In this regard the economic growth of the German world from the 1740s onwards may also have had a positive effect on the German merchant community in Venice.⁵⁰ Venice was the closest Italian port to the German Empire and traditionally had been intimately connected to its fate.
- 23 These indications explain why the Danish crown chose a rich banker in Venice as its main agent for ransoming. He could receive letters relatively quickly, he could forward substantial sums of credit, he could do his business with few transaction costs due to his standing among contemporaries and he knew with whom to do business in the Italian peninsula. The Pommers commissioned business partners in Livorno with the actual ransoming. Even though Tuscany and the Barbary regencies were officially at war, an old agreement on safe passage between Algiers and Livorno ensured the safe exchange of prisoners.⁵¹ This was practically the only way to actually get the prisoners onto Christian ground. The alternative of Marseilles was rarely used, most likely due to the absence of a strong Jewish community there.⁵² This brings us to the second important reason that made Livorno the principal hub of ransoming: a large and flourishing Jewish/Sephardic community lived there, and its merchants had the most extensive and durable contact network with and into the Muslim world, where Jews were among the most influential merchants.
- 24 Thus, the Danes in principle would not have needed Venice as a hub. And even once the Danish monarchy did choose Venice, the real ransoming was conducted via Livorno. Yet, far from being a superfluous detour for letters and money from Denmark to North Africa, Venice was important as a contact point. From there, ransoming could then be organized via Livorno. Merchants in Venice knew their business partners in Livorno

much better than the merchants in Copenhagen did. It is likely that the Danes chose a merchant family in Venice as their principal partners precisely because of the lack of Danish involvement in Mediterranean trade at that time.⁵³ Yet, the choice was an excellent one that fulfilled all self-set goals. The Danes chose a reliable channel in a city that still was in many aspects a cornerstone of Mediterranean trade and commercial flows.

- 25 By following step-by-step how the ransoming was actually organized, we can better understand how the system worked. A difficult but still fairly typical case of ransoming for the *Sklavenkasse* was the case of a ship from Flensburg under the command of Peter Weinschenck that had been captured by the Algerians in 1721. On 14 November 1721 Johannes Pommer wrote from Venice to inform the board of the *Sklavenkasse* that “Turkish” corsairs had taken thirteen ships from all nations and that among them was a ship from Flensburg, called *Emanuel*, with a crew of sixteen sailors. He included a list of the names that he had been able to gather, since he knew he would soon be authorized to ransom them. The *Sklavenkasse* confirmed receipt of this letter on 10 January 1722.⁵⁴ That year the institution had serious financial problems and many captured sailors to buy back and thus was unable to give an immediate redemption order. On 24 January the *Sklavenkasse* wrote to the city of Flensburg and requested alms-collections since its funds were depleted.⁵⁵ Flensburg started collecting money and was able to send several thousand Reichsthalers in the following years. The money was not sent to Copenhagen but to Hamburg. This was where the principal banker of the *Sklavenkasse*, Adolf Sontum (d. 1732), was located since no direct financial transfers between Copenhagen and Venice were possible. The payments were made in bills of exchange and such remittances were possible only between Hamburg and Venice. The *Sklavenkasse* also turned to other partners in Amsterdam (Treschow and Dreyer) and London (John Collet), but payments through them were made only occasionally in order to benefit from better exchange rates.
- 26 On 21 February 1722 the *Sklavenkasse* sent Pommer a list of the names provided by Flensburg. The city also demanded more information on the prices demanded for the individuals.⁵⁶ Pommer forwarded this to his partner in Livorno, the Dutch merchant Friedrich Brogh (d. 1732), who also acted as consul there.⁵⁷ He, in turn, approached a Jew named Solyman (d. 1723), who lived in Algiers. In 1718–1720 Solyman had been the object of much distain from the *Sklavenkasse*, which did not want a Jew making profits from a Christian affair.⁵⁸ However, finally it had been forced to give in after Brogh explicitly lauded Solyman’s conduct in ransoming the slaves.⁵⁹
- 27 Solyman obtained the prices rather quickly, sent these to Brogh in Livorno, who then forwarded them to Pommer. Pommer wrote on 3 July 1722 to the *Sklavenkasse* in Copenhagen, and his letter was answered on 18 July. We do not know the prices, but the correspondence indicates they were high. Even though the *Sklavenkasse* had issued a moratorium on ransoming in January 1722 to force the Algerians to reduce prices, pressure from Flensburg, the most powerful city of the Duchies of Slesvig and Holstein, combined with the substantial sums that had already been collected, forced the *Sklavenkasse* into action. Thus, it ordered that the captain and three sailors be ransomed for the lowest price possible. They were to be freed and sent to Livorno, where each would get ten Reichsthalers to be able to go back home, most likely by land but, if cheaply possible, also by sea.⁶⁰ The payment was to be advanced via a letter of exchange from Pommer to Brogh, who would then send the money in specie to Solyman in

Algiers and insure it. On 11 December 1722 Pommer announced that three men had been freed, including the captain. The *Sklavenkasse* answered Pommer on 4 March, thanked him for the success, ordered that the fourth man be ransomed and added another name. The latter had been expressly demanded by Flensburg. The *Sklavenkasse* also expressed great worries about the fact that the one sailor not yet freed was a young boy; implicitly this meant they feared he might be converted to Islam and circumcised.⁶¹ On 10 September 1723 and 12 November Pommer wrote that he had been able to free the newly demanded man, but not the young boy. The *Sklavenkasse* answered on 4 December 1723 and confirmed his attached invoice of his latest expenses by giving order to Sontum in Hamburg to pay Pommer.⁶²

- 28 Unfortunately we cannot provide details of every component of the final cost. The first three ransomed men, among them the usually expensive captain, cost a total of 5,771 Reichsthalers; the fourth man ransomed in 1723, an ordinary sailor, cost 1,372 Reichsthalers. This was extraordinarily high for a sailor, which can only be explained by the explicit demand to ransom a precise individual. This put the *Sklavenkasse* in the worst possible bargaining position. We can suggest some hypotheses regarding the single cost components. The dispatch of letters over long distances certainly entailed a rather negligible cost. The involvement of Adolf Sontum in Hamburg, Johannes Pommer in Venice, Friedrich Brogh in Livorno and Solyman in Algiers, however, was costly. Yet, knowing that Pommer took a commission of just 1 percent for the letters of exchange, we may suppose this was not too expensive. Even adding the costs of the currency exchanges, these may also not amount to much. The insurance of the shipping of money in specie from Livorno to Algiers and the passage back with the freed sailors was certainly more expensive. The profit of Solyman in Algiers is unknown, yet this was probably quite fair. The French and English consuls always stood ready to do this business and therefore he could not act like a monopolist. Also, all redeemed slaves were questioned after their return about their liberator and the sums he had employed to redeem them. Some control was therefore possible from Copenhagen and it was exercised. From other cases we know that three-quarters or four-fifths of the end sum were usually given to the slave masters in Algiers and the rest had to be used for the additional costs.⁶³ Given that this business occurred in the pre-modern world from one periphery in the far European north to the other periphery at the southern end of the Mediterranean, this charge seems rather modest. This may have been partly thanks to the use of Venice as the transaction location. In the network just described, the *Sklavenkasse* never lost money via fraud or misappropriation.
- 29 The remaining crew of the Flensburg ship was entirely ransomed over the next years. Two sailors were able to escape, but the money saved was offset by extremely high prices for the other crew members (over 1,000 Reichsthalers for the ship boy and between 1,200 and 1,500 for most of the remaining sailors). Continuing money flows from Flensburg as well as the influence of the city within the composite Danish monarchy forced the *Sklavenkasse* to prioritize the ransom of the Flensburgers, which resulted in high prices. The last Flensburgers were ransomed in 1726. This was an extraordinarily long time, but it was due only to the lack of financial means, not to an inefficient system. In 1737–1738, the *Sklavenkasse* was able to ransom entire crews in less than one year after the capture with exactly the same infrastructure.⁶⁴ The choice of a merchant house in Venice as the essential link to do the ransoming proved a very

good one and consistently helped the Danes in their task of liberating their sailors in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Conclusion

- 30 This paper has added another little strand to the broad and constantly growing revisionist literature that differentiates, elaborates and relativizes the image of a decaying Venetian Republic in the eighteenth century. The city of Venice emerges as home to well-connected and capital-endowed German merchants. One of these comes to light with his activities in the ransoming of Northern European slaves, a rather small affair in quantitative and monetary terms but highly visible due to the complexity of the business. The traditional center of these activities was Livorno, a fact confirmed by the way the German merchant in Venice acted when he got involved in the ransoming. Venice was in this regard just a communication and financial link between Copenhagen and Livorno.
- 31 But was this negligible? This can be doubted. The first half of this article highlighted some problems with the direct ransoming of Northern Europeans via Livorno.⁶⁵ This probably should not be generalized. Livorno remained the emporium of the Mediterranean, and no Hamburger or Dutchman who ever wished to do some ransoming would have contemplated replacing it with Venice. Since from 1600 onwards there had always been a direct connection between Hamburg and Amsterdam and Livorno, the risk for the Dutch and Hanseatics probably was never too great. Yet, for a country at the periphery like Denmark, solidity and accountability were of crucial importance, given the lack of precise information about the Mediterranean. This the Pommers of Venice were able to deliver. We know that the *Sklavenkasse* never lost any money due to insolvency or corruption in the Italian peninsula. The Pommers obviously were able to keep an eye on their partners. Venice, at least with regard to ransoming, comes to the fore in the first half of the eighteenth century as a place where informed and reliable merchants operated and were able to provide complex services for small charges. This can certainly be generalized on a larger scale. After 1746 Venice was no longer needed by the Danes, since peace treaties with the Barbary powers from that year onwards guaranteed Danish ships safety throughout the Mediterranean. Yet, when the need for ransoming subsided, trade and shipping between Denmark and Venice increased constantly, to become rather substantial in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ In this connection, the German merchant houses of Venice were again to play a substantial role, thus continuing and enlarging a connection, which groundwork had been laid in the first half of the century with the business of ransoming.⁶⁷

NOTES

1. . This “business” was often dominated by Livornese Jews: Renzo Toaff, *La nazione ebrea a Livorno e a Pisa. 1591–1700*, Florence, Olschki, 1990, p. 397-400. According to recent research their strong position in this regard eroded during the 18th century: Luca Lo Basso, *A vela e a remi: Navigazione, guerra e schiavitù nel Mediterraneo (secc. XVI-XVIII)*, Genoa, Philobiblion, 2004, p. 158-165. However, I cannot corroborate this decline from my research, as I could identify the Jews also in the mid-18th century as the best and most sought ransomers: Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen und Türkenpässen. Nordeuropa und die Barbaresken in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, p. 681-683.
2. . I “guesstimate” that altogether 50% of all ever captured North Europeans were ransomed. For Southern Europe even a “guesstimation” is at the moment impossible, yet, the rate was certainly lower since Southerners were often captured and generally came from poorer countries: Magnus Ressel, “Protestant Slaves in Northern Africa during the Early Modern Age”, in *Schiavitù e servaggio nell’economia europea Secc. XI-XVIII (= Atti delle Settimane di Studi e altri Convegni 45)*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2013 [forthcoming].
3. . The still most important historian of Venice and Venetian problem with Mediterranean corsairs, writes that “we await a fuller study of the period between 1525 and 1570” (Alberto Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice, 1580–1615*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, p. 18). Braudel sees the Venetian insurance rates for voyages to Syria going upwards only at the beginning of the 17th century (Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, vol. II, p. 880). We may assume that the neutrality of Venice between the Christian and Muslim world had some mitigating effects for the treatment of their merchant fleets from Muslim side, at least until the end of the 16th century.
4. . Giuliana Boccadamo, “I ‘Redentori’ napoletani: mercanti, religiosi, rinnegati”, in Wolfgang Kaiser (ed.), *Le commerce des captifs. Les intermédiaires dans l’échange et le rachat des prisonniers en Méditerranée, xv e-xviii e siècle*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2008, p. 219-230; Gennaro Varriale, “La capital de la frontera mediterránea. Exiliados, espías y convertidos en la Nápoles de los Virreyes”, *Estudis. Revista de Historia Moderna*, n° 38, 2012, p. 303-321.
5. . Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean...*, op. cit., p. 1165-1185.
6. . The term was coined by Wolfgang Kaiser, “Introduction”, in Wolfgang Kaiser (ed.), *Le commerce des captifs...*, op. cit., p. 13. Further substantiations of the watershed are given by: Michael Fontenay, “Course et piraterie méditerranéennes de la fin du Moyen Age au début du xix e siècle”, in Michel Mollat (ed.), *Course et piraterie*, Paris, Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes, 1975, p. 103-106; Salvatore Bono, *Corsari nel Mediterraneo. Cristiani e musulmani fra guerra schiavitù e commercio*, Milan, Mondadori, 1993, p. 20-21.
7. . Robert C. Davis, “Slave Redemption in Venice, 1585–1797”, in John Martin, Dennis Romano (eds.), *Venice reconsidered. The History and civilization of an Italian city-state, 1297–1797*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 454-487; Andrea Pelizza, “Il riscatto degli schiavi a Venezia”, *Storicamente*, n° 6, 2010, URL: http://www.storicamente.org/05_studi_ricerche/summer-school/pelizza_storia_schiavi.htm [last visited: 8.3.2013].
8. . Magnus Ressel, “Protestant Slaves...”, art. cit.
9. . Magnus Ressel and Cornel Zwierlein, “The institutionalization of North European ransoming. Hanseatic ‘Sklavenkassen’ and English ‘Algiers Duty’ compared”, in Nikolas Jaspert and Sebastian Kolditz (eds.) *Gefährdete Konnektivität. Piraterie im Mittelmeerraum*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2013 [forthcoming].

10. . An example of a Dutch company based in Livorno that did some ransoming for the Germans and Dutch: Marie-Christine Engels, "Schiavi, commercio e baratto con Cala e Stora: il ruolo degli Olandesi all'inizio del Seicento", in Wolfgang Kaiser (ed.), *Le commerce des captifs*, op. cit., p. 283-290.
11. . Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen...*, op. cit., p. 148-187; Magnus Ressel, "Der Freikauf Lübecker Seeleute aus Nordafrika und die Gründung der Lübecker Sklavenkasse (1580-1640)", *Zeitschrift für Lübeckische Geschichte*, n° 91, 2011, p. 142-155.
12. . Andrea Addobbati, *Commercio Rischio Guerra. Il mercato delle assicurazioni marittime di Livorno (1694-1795)*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007, p. 17-71.
13. . In contrast, the Dutch merchants in Venice concentrated more on the maritime trade: Maartje van Gelder, *Trading Places: The Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 67-74.
14. . On Jewish ransoming in Venice and Livorno around 1600: Moisè Soave, "Malta e gli schiavi ebrei", *Corriere israelitico*, n° 17, 1878-1879, p. 54-57, 81-82, 101-103, 125-127, 147-149, 172-173, 195-197, 222-223; Renzo Toaff, "La 'Cassa per il riscatto degli schiavi' ebrei del Granduca nella Livorno del seicento", *Studi livornesi*, n° 1, 1986, p. 45-46; Bashan Eliezer, "Rachat des captifs dans la société juive méditerranéenne du xive au xixe siècle", in Shmuel Trigano (ed.), *La société juive à travers l'histoire*, t. 4, Paris, Fayard, 1993, p. 468; Marco Lenci, "Le confraternite del riscatto nella Toscana di età moderna: il caso di Firenze", *Archivio Storico Italiano*, n° 167, 2009, p. 269-297.
15. . "E del 1591, che segui quella inaudita Carestia, quanti poveri famelici detta Nazione pietosissima, non sazzio? Ben lo testimoniano i molti Memoriali, che fra le vecchie scritture, (rimaste dopo l'incendio), nel suo Archivio tuttavia esistono, sino di liberar poveri Carcerati, e Schiavi dalle mani de Barbari, Et di dotar povere Donzelle, oltre tante altre opere pie.", in Georg M. Thomas, G. B. Milesio's *Beschreibung des Deutschen Hauses in Venedig (= Abhandlung der I. Classe der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften XVI. Band II. Abtheilung)*, Munich, Verlag der K. Akademie, 1882, p. 28.
16. . On this institution see Fn. 8.
17. . Hermann Kellenbenz, "Der Niedergang Venedigs und die Beziehungen Venedigs zu den Märkten nördlich der Alpen", in Hermann Kellenbenz (ed.), *Kleine Schriften I: Europa, Raum wirtschaftlicher Begegnungen*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 1991, p. 162-163; Marie Christine Engels, *Merchants, interlopers, seamen and corsairs the 'Flemish' community in Livorno and Genoa (1615-1635)*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1997, p. 84-91.
18. . Jonathan Israel, "The Phases of the Dutch straatvaart (1590-1713)", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, n° 99, 1986, p. 15-16.
19. . Henry Simonsfeld, *Der Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venedig und die Deutsch-Venetianischen Handelsbeziehungen*, vol. II, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1887, p. 145-162.
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25. . Sources and further literature on this case of fraud: Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen...*, op. cit., p. 181-184.
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27. . We have no clear proof of such losses, yet, it is clear that Broecke was in 1632 very active for the redemption of the Hanseatics and not soon afterwards encountered serious financial difficulties: Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Società mercantile olandese, Nr. 21, fol. 14v; Marie-Christine Engels, *Merchants...*, op. cit., p. 211-218.
28. . Carl Wehrmann, "Geschichte der Sklavenkasse", *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, n° 4, 1884, p. 168; Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen...*, op. cit., p. 188-189.
29. . On him: Johan E. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578-1795*, Haarlem, Loosjes, 1903, vol. I, p. 314.
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61. . Ibid., fol. 208-211.
62. . Ibid., fol. 254-256.
63. . Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen...*, op. cit., p. 397.
64. . Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen...*, op. cit., p. 583.
65. . Merchants of Livorno may at times have been a bit problematic with regards to these special funds also in the 18th century; some partners of Pommer in Livorno went bankrupt and some misappropriated money between 1717–1719, see: Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen...*, op. cit., p. 344-350.
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67. . This is the result from my ongoing research and shall be published in the future. Strong hints in this direction can already be found in: Ludwig Beutin, *Der deutsche Seehandel...*, op. cit., p. 155-169.

RÉSUMÉS

Entre 1600 et 1750, et plus particulièrement entre 1610 et 1640, des navires de l'Europe du Nord furent capturés par les corsaires barbaresques. C'était la conséquence logique de l'arrivée massive à partir de la fin du xvie siècle de navires et marchands de l'Europe du Nord en Méditerranée et de l'expansion simultanée de la course nord-africaine en Atlantique. Les Nord-Européens commencèrent à racheter leurs frères réduits en esclavage et, pour ce faire, ils eurent recours à des moyens assez complexes. La monarchie danoise, qui pénètre en Méditerranée relativement tard, commence ses rachats seulement à partir de 1700. L'institution danoise préposée aux rachats, la *Sklavenkasse*, s'appuie sur des contacts commerciaux à Venise pour racheter ses captifs, ce qui en fait un cas singulier dans la mesure où la plupart des acteurs de l'Europe du Nord organisaient alors les rachats en passant par Livourne. Cet article explore les mécanismes de rachat des Danois et montre également l'importance et la capacité de Venise en tant que centre commercial dans l'Europe du xviii^e siècle.

The capture of Northern European ships by Barbary corsairs occurred mainly between 1600 and 1750, with most captures taking place between 1610 and 1640. This was a natural result of the intense penetration of Southern European waters by Northern European ships and merchants starting in the late sixteenth century and the simultaneous extension of the range of North African corsairs into the Atlantic. Northern Europeans began ransoming their brethren from the first captures onwards and used quite complex means to achieve this aim. The Danish monarchy was a latecomer to Southern European waters and therefore began ransoming only from 1700 onwards. The reliance of the Danish ransoming institution, the *Sklavenkasse*, on business contacts in Venice to do the buying-back makes this a unique case; most other Northern European actors organized ransoming via Livorno. In this paper, the mechanisms of Danish ransoming are highlighted in order to show the importance and capacity of Venice as a commercial center in eighteenth-century Europe.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Venise, déclin vénitien, nazione alemana, rachat, corsaires barbaresques, Danemark, époque moderne

Keywords : Venice, Venetian decline, nazione alemana, ransoming, Barbary corsairs, Early Modern time, Denmark

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