Switching sides?
Renegades as mediators in seventeenth-century Dutch diplomacy with North Africa
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Until fairly recently, diplomatic relations with Islamic states or conducted by non-Christian
diplomatic mediators were relegated to the periphery of diplomatic historiography, but for
early modern Christian diplomatic theorists these were topics of intense debate. ¹ The
staunchly Catholic lawyer Conrad Braun, for instance, formulated a series of very strict ideas
in his De legationibus (1548). He excluded heretics, Saracens, Jews, and others who did not
profess the Christian religion from being considered envoys. ² Yet by the second half of the
sixteenth century both the practical reality of diplomacy in a religiously fragmented Europe
and the intensifying diplomatic relations between Christian and Islamic polities meant that
theorists had to confront cross-confessional diplomacy. Around 1600, the Huguenot jurist
Jean Hotman and his contemporary Alberico Gentili defended the idea that differences in
religion should not form an obstacle to diplomatic relations. ³ In making their point, both
theorists used not only the traditional classical examples, but also contemporary cases
figuring relations with North African corsairs. Their work can be read as a testimony to
increasing theoretical acceptance of cross-confessional diplomatic practice.

The culmination of early modern diplomatic theory is arguably Abraham de
Wicquefort’s L’ambassadeur et ses fonctions (1680), intended as a guide for working
diplomats. A practiced - though disgraced - ambassador himself, De Wicquefort as a matter
of course integrated Ottoman diplomacy into his comprehensive work. Not only that, but De
Wicquefort even discussed renegades as diplomats. In the chapter dedicated to the question
whether princes could employ strangers as their representatives, De Wicquefort uses the
renegade as the epitome of the stranger. He points out how - having changed religion and
switched political allegiance - renegades in the service of Muslim rulers were sent back on
missions to their countries of origin. He gives a series of examples, including this one:

There cannot be any thing more bold, than the example of Abraham Strotzen, who has
made a figure at the court of Constantinople under the name of Ibrahim Bey, as first
interpreter of Soliman and Selim II, Emperors of the Turks. He was a Polander, and a
renegade, and nevertheless Selim sent him in the year 1569 to Sigismund the August,
king of Poland (…). He had a publick audience, and afterwards several private
conferences with the king, who did not treat him as his subject, but as the minister of
a sovereign prince, whose character he respected. ⁴

De Wicquefort’s amazement, bordering on abhorrence, at this practice is palpable. Even in
France, he continues, where “the laws (…) are very severe against that kind of criminal”,
converted compatriots were received as ambassadors. Although he considers European
relations with Islamic states part of diplomatic common practice, De Wicquefort is clearly

¹ For a traditional, eurocentric view on early modern diplomatic history, see Mattingly, Renaissance diplomacy;
² Brunius, De legationibus, 35-37. Braun also deamed unappointable those who were deaf, blind, seditious,
arsonists, despoilers of churches and ravishers of vestal virgins. See Behrens, “Treatises on the ambassador” and
Mattingly, Renaissance diplomacy, 212.
³ Hotman, De la charge, 79v; “I am, therefore, very strongly of the opinion that the rights of embassy ought not
to be disturbed on account of religious differences”; Gentili, De legationibus libri tres, 90.
⁴ De Wicquefort, The ambassador, 81.
uncomfortable with converts to Islam as envoys. He uses these cases rethorically, to drive his point home: strangers, even the ultimate strangers, can be accepted and treated as diplomats when sent back to their fatherland. In this paper I want to move from diplomatic theory to diplomatic practice and discuss something that De Wicquefort did not dream of addressing in his book. I want to argue that converts to Islam could act as diplomatic mediators for their Christian fatherland. Like De Wicquefort, modern historiography has mostly concentrated on the way renegades contributed to their new Islamic homeland. Their diplomatic, military, maritime or technical expertise is supposed to have had a modernizing influence on Islamic societies. Here I want to explore the opposite, the way in which - after conversion - renegades as diplomatic mediators assisted their country of birth. I will do so by focusing on the period between 1609-1610 and the 1640s, a critical phase in Dutch - North African diplomacy.

For the Dutch, relative newcomers to the Mediterranean world, converts to Islam proved crucial in building and maintaining a consular and ambassadorial network in the Islamic Mediterranean. During the early phase of the Dutch Revolt, between the 1560s and 1580s, William of Orange stated that he welcomed aid from anyone, even a Muslim, while Dutch rebels sported slogans such as “Better a Turk than a Papist”. These were obviously tropes in anti-Spanish propaganda, but gradually the Protestant Republic started to form closer alliances with Mediterranean Islamic polities. When the Dutch Republic gained de facto independence from Spain in 1609, relations very quickly became more concrete: the Dutch signed a treaty with the Moroccan sultan Mulay Zaydan in 1610, received Ottoman capitulations in 1612 and concluded treaties with the Ottoman regencies Algiers and Tunis in 1622. The dual motives behind these contacts were a shared hostility towards Catholic Spain and, for the Dutch, the drive to protect their developing commercial presence in the Mediterranean.

The States General, the ruling body of the Dutch Republic, were fully aware of the dangers the Mediterranean waters could pose to Dutch trading vessels, and of the role renegade corsairs played. They regularly received letters from captured sailors and their bereaved families - especially from Holland and Zeeland, the two provinces most active in maritime trade. Thus, in an attempt to protect their subjects, the capitulations granted to the Dutch in 1612 by Sultan Ahmed I contained extensive guarantees against corsairing acts from Algiers and the other Ottoman subsidiaries. In practice, however, this did little to increase the safety of Dutch mercantile vessels and their crew. At the same time, their consuls in Tunis and Algiers kept the States General updated on the role Dutch converts to Islam played in modernizing and expanding the North African corsairing fleets. It is therefore not surprising that in the 1620s the States General declared renegades to be “odieus” and determined that they should be punished just as the Ottomans punished those who abjured Islam, that is

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6 Mout, “Turken in het nieuws”.
7 Heeringa, *Een bondgenootschap*, 81-119; Van Krieken, *Kapers en kooplieden*. Especially the Moroccan treaty, signed a year after the conclusion of a truce with Spain, was meant to maintain pressure on Spain from Moroccan harbours, García-Arenal and Wiegers, *A man of three worlds*, 71-88.
8 The Dutch started to become a significant presence in the Mediterranean from the early 1590s onwards. Continuous complaints about the unsafety of Mediterranean commerce would lead to the formation of the *Directie van den Levantschen handel*, a cooperative of merchants aiming to organise and cover the costs of convoys to protect their merchantmen, in 1625. The *Directie* also had a stake in Dutch-Mediterranean diplomatic matters. See, for the *Directie’s* formation, chapters V and VI of Heeringa, *Bronnen* I.2.
9 The sultan vowed to free any Dutch, enslaved by the Algerian corsairs, and to restitute their property. Yet the sultan’s guarantees had little impact on North African matters. See De Groot, “Ottoman North Africa”.
10 Heeringa, *Bronnen* I.2, 689.
brought to death by burning.\textsuperscript{11}

Yet renegades visited the Dutch Republic, corresponded with the States General and proved to be crucial in establishing and maintaining diplomatic relations with North African polities. The period between 1609, when the Dutch started to build their own network of representatives abroad, and 1640s, when Dutch Levantine trade slumped and the need for good relations with North Africa temporarily decreased, was one of learning the diplomatic ropes in a cross-confessional Mediterranean context. The Dutch quickly found out that, in seventeenth-century North Africa, negotiating treaties and then having them respected were two different things. In Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, Dutch consular and - to a lesser extent - ambassadorial presence did little to ensure that capitulatory rights or treaties were recognized, while the Sultanate of Morocco went to a period of fierce internal strife, that weakened Moroccan commitment to treaties. The embeddedness of Dutch renegades in North African power structures made them the ideal mediators in these difficult situations. Based on a broad variety of sources, such as letters by renegades and official diplomats, travel descriptions and the occasional image, I will question the predominant idea that conversion entailed a definitive break with a convert’s Christian past. Subsequently, I will explore three cases that show how renegades were instrumental in shaping Dutch - North African diplomatic relations.

**Modern renegade historiography**

To say that renegades in the early modern era suffered from bad press is to state the obvious. The recent boom in studies on the representations of renegades, in the wake of the seminal work done by Nabil Matar, have thrown light on an abundance of anti-renegade tropes and rhetoric in literary sources, which were often part of a larger anti-Islam polemic.\textsuperscript{12} Whereas Tunisians and Algerians celebrated the renegades’ contribution to the prosperity of their cities, even decades after the converts had died, in their countries of birth they were dubbed opportunist deniers of the Christian religion and held responsible for the attacks on and enslavement of fellow countrymen.\textsuperscript{13} In contrast to the abundance of representational literature for certain European regions, documents produced by renegade corsairs themselves are rare. Keeping documentation was a risk in a profession that hinged on maintaining a murky, untraceable identity. One Dutch corsair, who used the Moroccan harbour Salé as operating base, boasted that he and his crew sought to destroy traces of their activities at sea by throwing shipping logs, accounting books and other records overboard.\textsuperscript{14}

The abundance of representational sources might explain why modern renegade historiography still contains echoes of early modern negative ideas. Renegades have been characterized as opportunists, villains and even pre-modern terrorists.\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, mostly in non-specialist literature, there has been the tendency to herald renegades as anarchists avant la lettre, who renounced Christendom as part of pre-modern social resistance.\textsuperscript{16} In a more nuanced form, the idea of the renegade as an early modern freethinker can be found in Lucetta Scaraffia’s work. She sees the renegade as the maker of completely free and individual religious choices; as an early modern exponent of modern individual identity.\textsuperscript{17} Both the positive and negative approach tends towards a-historical (even

\textsuperscript{12} See the work by Matar. Also, for the English case, Burton, *Traffic and turning*; Dimmock, *New Turkes*; Vitkus, *Turning Turk*.
\textsuperscript{13} Matar, “Turning Turk”.
\textsuperscript{14} ‘t Begin, midden en eynde der see-rooveryen, [A3r]. Also, Van Wassenaer, Historisch Verhael, XIII, 31v.
\textsuperscript{16} A very explicit example is Lamborn Wilson, *Pirate Utopias*.
\textsuperscript{17} Scaraffia, *Rinnegati*. For a more nuanced approach, Dakhlia, “<<Turcs de profession?>>”.

teleological) interpretations, which risk isolating the renegades from their collective social and political contexts. The archetypes they produce are curiously static, banishing the renegade to a condition of permanent deviance.

The important study by Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar, *Les chrétiens d’Allah*, sought to get away from sensational representations by adopting a quantitative approach, based on Inquisitorial sources. These sources of course have their own bias. Inquisitors were intent on determining motives and sincerity of conversion, while renegades frequently stressed apostasy under duress. Conversion, its motives for and moment of, again become the focal point. In recent years, studies on conversion in the Mediterranean have shifted focus: instead of attempting to ascertain the converts’ sincerity and motives, conversion is now considered not just a religious, but also a social practice. What still permeates these approaches, though, is the idea that apostasy constituted a break with the renegades’ religious, political and social past, offering the convert an opportunity to escape a suffocating, even hostile, environment. To me, this seems to take away from the renegades’ ability to cross and recross borders. Palmira Brummet recently underlined the need to view dragomen, translators, converts and renegades as “not-so-liminal crossers of frontiers”, who reflect or embody “the porosity of physical, ethnolinguistic, religious, and political borders”. In line with her words, I want to argue that we need to liberate the North African renegade from his (and in fewer cases her) position of liminality and marginality. At least in the Dutch context, conversion to Islam did not necessarily mean the severing of ties with the renegades’ compatriots and fatherland.

Close encounters

As Dutch trading and shipping with the Mediterranean increased after 1590, so did the number of Dutchmen (and to a lesser extent women) who converted, voluntary or involuntary, to Islam. The signing of the Twelve Years’ Truce with Spain in 1609 made the step to become a renegade corsair more attractive: the many Dutch privateers hunting for Spanish ships now lost their livelihood. The life of Jan Jansz van Haarlem, one of the most famous Dutch renegades, can illustrate this transition. Jansz started as a privateer in the service of the States General, but around 1618 he took service with the Dutch renegade De Veenboer/Soliman Rais, who operated out of Algiers and always sailed with a crew consisting only of compatriots. Jan Jansz took on the name of Moerad Rais and, despite an earlier marriage back in Haarlem, married a Muslim girl. His career must have taken off: already by the end of 1618, the Dutch consul in Algiers reported to the States General that Soliman Rais had retired as captain, leaving Moerad Rais in command. The consular reports record numerous occasions when Moerad Rais took Dutch ships, selling off the cargo, and selling the crew as slaves.

18 Bennassar and Bennassar, *Les chrétiens d’Allah*. Also Bennassar, “Conversion ou reniement?”.
19 For focus on conversion and motives, Bono, *Corsari*; Scaraffia, *Rinnegati*. For a critique, Rothman, “Becoming Venetian”.
22 The work by S. Pappalardo on the Cicala brothers - one Christian, one Muslim - does point to similar forms of close contact in the Italian context.
24 The sobriquet Peat Farmer or “De Veenboer” might be an indication of a former profession or of links with the peat-rich North East of the Dutch Republic.
Exact numbers of Dutch renegade corsairs are difficult to come by, but one Dutch eyewitness in Algiers confirmed in 1613 that the Algerian fleet consisted of 35 ships, of which eight were commanded by captains originally from the Northern Netherlands. About ten years later, the Dutch ambassador to Algiers Cornelis Pijnacker wrote to the States General that between 1625-1626 a total of more than fifty rais participated in corsairing expeditions, eight of whom were originally from the Low Countries. Pijnacker sent a list of their names to The Hague, including Seffer Rais a.k.a. Thomas de Gauwdief (the Pickpocket) from Harlingen, Regeb Rais from The Hague and Seliman Buffoen alias Jacob den Hoerewaerdt (the Brothelkeeper) from Rotterdam. Apart from their place of birth, the names of these renegades also indicates low social status or even previous criminal careers in their mother country. For them, a career on the North African Coast must have been an attractive prospect. Although the States General tried to prevent compatriots from being forced to convert, the treaties with Tunis, Algiers and the Ottoman capitulations contained clauses that allowed for and even regulated voluntary conversion. The Algerian treaty included the provision that no Christian Dutchman could use Algiers as a corsairing basis, but “se si faccia Turco, faccia come piaccia.”

Predictably, Dutch sailors became the victims of Dutch renegades in numerous antagonistic encounters. For instance, on 17 April 1635, a renegade corsair on a Salentine ship, captured a Dutch vessel and enslaved its crew, killing some in the process. Surviving crew members from Rotterdam recognized him as a native of the neighbouring town Den Briel, where his mother still lived. With Dutch seamen and ships under threat from converted compatriots, no wonder that the Amsterdam chronicler Nicolaas van Wassenaar did little to hide his satisfaction when he could report in 1624 that the famous Dutch renegade Samson had died. Triumphanty he described how Samson’s crew had thrown his body overboard, where it was torn apart by hungry fishes: a fitting fate for a godless soul, who had captured so many Dutch ships, had driven Dutch traders to bankruptcy, and had cut the throat of many a poor sailor. A more peaceful form of contact was the renegades’ recruitment of compatriots as crew, which could result in veritable renegade geneologies. Simon de Danser, a corsair who probably did not convert, recruited Soliman Rais, who was then succeeded by Moerad Rais. The latter continued this practice, preferring an all-Dutch crew.

Sociability among compatriots, whether converted or not, seems to have been natural, especially once the maritime environment was exchanged for the North African mainland. A Haarlem-born seaman, who resided for six months in Algiers in 1620, quickly discovered he shared his town of birth with Moerad Rais and frequently visited the renegade’s home. Another intriguing example of friendly contact can be deduced from a drawing made on location in Tunis between 1661 and 1663, which strictly speaking falls outside the chronological limits of this paper. The painter Reinier Nooms sailed with the fleet of vice-

26 Van Gelder, “Een verlochend Christen”.
27 The translation of the Algerian treaty contained the clause: “Gli mochachi [sic] Fiamengi non si faranno Turci per forza, ma si tornano Turci con sua libera volunta, che sta facto buono” and “…che non diano licenza a qualunque Fiamengo venendo in qua (i.e. Algiers) et volendo andar de qua in corso per mare, ma se si faccia Turco, faccia come piaccia.”, Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 984-985. For the clauses in the Ottoman capitulations, re-issued at the succession of Osman in 1622, see Van Wassenaar V, c.19r and the translation provided by De Groot in his The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic, 257-258. A Dutch dragoman needed to be present to ascertain that conversion was voluntary. For Tunisian clauses offered by the dey in 1615, in addition to the 1612 capitulations, see Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 668-670.
29 Van Wassenaar, Historisch verhael VIII, 108v-109r, December 1624. In contrast: in 1682, ships in Algiers were still called Samsoone in his memory, Matar, Europe through Arab eyes, 23.
30 De Vries, Historie van Barbaryen 65-66.
31 Noord-Hollands Archief, Oud-notarieel Haarlem 1570-1840, no.1617 - 369, 216r.
admiral Michiel de Ruyter to the Mediterranean as ‘embedded artist’ on a punitive expedition against North African corsairs. Nooms made a series of sketches of important harbour cities, seen from the sea, with great eye for defensive structures and other military details. One of his sketches, though, shows an entirely different scene: an expedition on the North African mainland. In the foreground the artist has drawn himself, while sketching the ruins of Carthage. Next to him stands a crew member with a gun, but Nooms has put down his own weapon, to be able to sketch the ruins and perhaps to underline the more peaceful nature of the event. But it is the group in the background I want to call attention to: its members are identified in the legend in the upper left corner of the drawing. Nooms has drawn a company of Dutch rowers from De Ruyter’s longboats and next to them stands the renegade Bairam, also known as Jan Willemsen from Amsterdam, who apparently is in the process of accompanying his compatriots on a tour of the Roman and Punic ruins.32

Back to the Dutch Republic

That fellow countrymen gravitated to one another in foreign settings is not surprising. What is, perhaps, less well known is that conversion did not hinder renegade corsairs in returning to their fatherland, the Dutch Republic. These visits bear no resemblance to the “rancorous vendetta” Italian renegades seem to have vented on their birthplace, as described by Robert Davis.33 When Moerad Rais docked his ship in the Zeeland port of Veere in November 1623, he was seeking shelter from a heavy storm and needed to take in food and water. When news of this event reached his wife and children in Haarlem, they traveled to Veere as quickly as they could, in order to beg him to leave his new career behind him and return to a normal family life. Many other families followed their example, in the hope of persuading their loved ones, all members of Moerad’s crew, to come home.34 While no renegade decided to abandon the ship, this episode does indicate how renegades could remain in touch with their families.

32 Reinier Nooms’ drawings are preserved in the Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem, part of the collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Shipping logs of the De Ruyter fleet bear witness to frequent contact with Dutch renegade corsairs and converted slaves, but do not mention this Jan Willemsen.
33 Davis, Christian slaves, 42-43.
34 De Vries, Handelingen en geschiedenissen, 57-58.
Some twenty years later, Moerad’s Haarlem-born daughter even joined a Dutch embassy to Salé to resume contact with her renegade father.\textsuperscript{35}

In stark contrast to the renegades’ family members, the authorities in the Dutch Republic were not keen to see ships from the North African coast anchoring in the ports of Holland and Zeeland. After the Veere episode, the States General decided that every renegade who refused to reconvert to Christianity should be executed. Their decision, however, was never put into practice, and neither Moerad Rais nor his crew appear to have been much alarmed by it. In fact, only three years later he visited the Dutch Republic again. Early in the year 1626, two of his ships entered the harbour of Rotterdam, while one arrived in Amsterdam. Moerad Rais by that time had risen to the rank of Admiral of Salé, commanding sixteen ships.\textsuperscript{36} Together with his second-in-command Matthijs van Bootel, he had been looking for prey off the Northern French coast when they were attacked by Dunkirk corsairs. Heavily damaged, and probably also attempting to sell their booty, they sought the protection of Dutch ports.

Moerad Rais’ visit in 1626 even became much longer than he and his companions had bargained for. As temperatures dropped, the renegade’s ship in Amsterdam became trapped in the ice, forcing the crew of converted Christians to wait out the freeze. The chronicler Nicolaas van Wassenaar, a surgeon by profession who was well-connected to the Amsterdam Admiralty, describes the way the crew treated their injured colleagues: “They did not fetch barbers for their wounded. They stuck those that died on board under the ice of the IJ harbour”. The city council stepped in and had the wounded renegades taken to the local hospital. Van Wassenaar clearly condemns the renegades’ lack of care for their own, but he shows no surprise or concern at their presence in the Amsterdam port. Several of the crew members seem to have stayed on in the Republic, even joining the Dutch war fleet.\textsuperscript{37}

Even after renouncing Christianity, then, renegades could and did maintain close ties with their compatriots, family members and fatherland. Conversion did not entail a one-way crossing of the religious frontier, but rather could serve to draw closer the Islamic Mediterranean and the Protestant Dutch Republic. As the following three cases will show, converts to Islam could also engage in direct contact with the Dutch Republic’s highest political and diplomatic echelons.

Renegade letters - Xabano Flamenco in Tunis

In the early phases of Dutch diplomatic contact with North Africa, several renegades wrote letters to the States General in The Hague. How did letters from renegades came to be discussed in the plenary meeting of the ruling body of the Dutch Republic? And what do these letters tell us about the position of renegades in Dutch diplomacy in the Mediterranean? In 1618, Xabano Flamengo wrote and offered to mediate between his master, the Tunisian Yusuf Dey, and his fatherland, the Dutch Republic.\textsuperscript{38} Tunis was in name an Ottoman


\textsuperscript{36} Van Wassenaar, \textit{Historisch verhael XI}, 77r.

\textsuperscript{37} ONA Rotterdam, 10 and 16 October 1627, 188/46/69: in 1627 three ‘Turks’ (Oleyp Turck (gunner), Cassum Turck (sailor) and Hamet Benijche Turck (sailor)) joined the crew of captain Cornelis Cornelisz de Bagijn. All three made their last will in October of that year: while one signed his name in Arabic, another of the ‘Turks’ wrote his own will in German. Their adventure ended badly: that same year De Bagijn’s ship was captured by the Spaniards and the three Muslims imprisoned in Duinkerken; one of them executed on the charges of sodomy, ONA Rotterdam 190/20/31, 24 November 1629.

\textsuperscript{38} NA, Lias Barbarije, written on 28 June 1618.
subsidiary, but Yusuf Dey was the *de facto* ruler between 1610 and 1637. Although he formally recognized the capitulations granted in 1612, a marginal Dutch diplomatic presence meant that Tunisians continued to prey on Dutch ships. To remediate the situation, the States General had appointed Wijnant de Keyser as consul for both Algiers and Tunis in 1616. De Keyser chose Algiers as his base, delegating a substitute to Tunis. Offended, Yusuf Dey refused to acknowledge the substitute-consul and sent him away. To enforce commitment, the Dutch government began to send warships to the Mediterranean, which led to a conflict with Tunis in 1618. Right in the middle of this precarious situation, the letter of Xabano Flamenco arrived.

The renegade began by explaining that his young age had prevented him from offering his services sooner. But now, he wrote, his “great observance and continued affection for the fatherland made it impossible for him to withhold his offer of his services”. If the States General were willing, he would gladly place his increasing competence in the service of their cause. He informed them that the dey was offended by both the Dutch naval actions against Tunisian ships and the delayed arrival of official Dutch representatives. What is interesting is that in his letter Xabano makes no reference to a Christian past or his conversion, but only focuses on his own knowledge of the Tunisian power structures. He went on to explain that the States General’s consul in Algiers gave them insufficient information regarding the Tunisian situation and did little to protect Dutch interests. Instead, he himself, with great effort, had been able to free certain Dutch shipmasters.

The young renegade’s letter came at a time when negotiations with North Africa were reaching a critical phase, as it became clear that the 1612 capitulations were failing to have the hoped for effect on Ottoman North Africa. Merchants and politicians in the Dutch Republic, together with the Dutch ambassador Cornelis Haga in Istanbul, were trying to reach a better agreement with the Algerian diwan and the Tunisian dey. It is unclear whether Xabano wrote this letter on his own or the dey’s initiative, in an attempt to increase pressure on the Dutch to send better representation. Another possibility is that Xabano acted on the order of Fendri Shaban, a convert of Amsterdam origin and close collaborator of Yusuf Dey. What is clear, though, is that his letter alluded to a problem with Dutch diplomatic representation in Algiers to which the States General had already been alerted by another renegade.

**Renegade letters - Soliman Rais/de Veenboer in Algiers**

As we have seen, the States General were uncomfortable with the renegades’ presence in the Dutch Republic, primarily because it could cause tensions with potential Christian allies. In North Africa, however, the situation was completely different. Here renegades proved useful contacts, assisting Dutch consuls and ambassadors in a variety of roles. As one of the first Dutch diplomats in North Africa, the consul Wijnant de Keyser greatly relied on the renegade Soliman Rais. Appointed to Algiers in 1616, De Keyser lacked knowledge of the region and had no special linguistic skills. Within months of his arrival, he found himself in jail as retaliation for a Dutch attack on Algerian ships. After his release, it was Soliman Rais, who kept him informed of Algerian affairs, but also provided him with up-to-date knowledge on Ottoman and Dutch Mediterranean matters.

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42 NA, Lias Barbarije, written on 28 June 1618; read in the assembly in The Hague on 8 September 1618.
The renegade’s information was vital to the consul’s position and hence De Keyser repeatedly reported news he received from Soliman to the States General in The Hague. For instance, in April 1617, after a trip with his corsair fleet during which they docked at Chios, Soliman reported to De Keyser that a Dutch fleet had reached Istanbul and that “Capiteyn Baça” (kapudanpaşa Halil Paşa) had become grand vizier. As Soliman pointed out, Halil Paşa had been consistently favourable to the Dutch and was a good friend of ambassador Cornelis Haga. The renegade was convinced that his appointment would mean the speedy arrival of Ottoman instructions to the Algerians to settle with the Dutch. The renegade advised the consul to keep his calm and wait for an answer from the diwan. Soliman backed up his advice with the news that on Chios he had spoken with the newly appointed Ottoman vice-roy of Tunis, who was also convinced of successful Algerian-Dutch negotiations. He added that as soon as peace was a fact, he himself would go into commercial shipping and leaving his corsairing career behind. De Keyser, shaken from his recent imprisonment, did his utmost to convince his principals that his best course of diplomatic action was to follow the renegade’s advice. He bolstered his case by pointing out that Soliman had stopped harming Dutch shipping interests. Within months, though, the relationship between consul and renegade deteriorated.

On 31 October 1617, the States General discussed a letter written by Soliman Rais in Algiers on 2 July of that year. Although Soliman Rais claimed to write on behalf of himself and of the Algerian diwan, the letter’s content and earlier reports by consul Wijnant de Keyser suggest it was written on the renegade’s own initiative and supported by a group of Algerian-based Dutch renegades: it was drafted for Soliman Rais by one Slemen, the former scribe of the famous corsair Simon de Danser, during a meeting between several other Dutch corsairs. Again, as in Xabano Flamengo’s letter, there are no direct references to a Christian or Dutch past. Instead, everything is focused on the Dutch diplomatic presence in Algiers. The letter, in fact, was an outright and detailed attack on the States General’s own appointee, De Keyser. Soliman Rais denounced the consul’s lack of assistance to Dutch traders, accusing him of having become their oppressor due to his “blinding avarice”. De Keyser’s task was to protect Dutch traders from corsairing, but apparently, from someone who certainly had first-hand experience, he was doing a lousy job.

A dispute over the way De Keyser had treated two Dutch shipmasters had triggered Soliman’s letter. The renegade explained the cases to the States General in great detail, underlining how their own consul had not only failed to protect the two shipmasters, but also mistreated them out of self-interest. Soliman placed himself squarely on the side of the Dutch shipmasters, and thus of Dutch commercial interests in general. Even to the pragmatic, commercially minded members of the States General, the renegade’s profession of support must have seemed like something of a volte-face. They had received information from their consul that Soliman had stopped harassment of Dutch ships and was even considering a career in trade, but they were fully aware of his previous actions and current position in Algiers. When he converted to Islam and started his North African career is unclear, but by 1617 Soliman

44 Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 722, De Keyser to States General on 1 April 1617. The Dutch fleet under Admiral Quast had instructions to carry Haga’s two dragomans with the fermans first to North Africa and then to The Hague, De Groot, “Ottoman North Africa”, 134-135.
46 Ibidem, 721. This is right at about the time Soliman Rais was getting ready to hand over his command to Jan Jansz/Moerad Rais.
47 Transcription in Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 740-741. The letter was written on 2 July 1617.
48 See De Keyser’s report, 16 June-8 July 1617, Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 738.
49 “…maer is een onderdrucker derselven [negocian ten] geworden door zijn verblinde ghirycheyt…”, Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 740.
50 Heeringa, Bronnen I.2, 740-741.
was among the richest and most influential corsairing captains in Algiers, even rising to the position of admiral of the Algerian fleet in 1618. The renegade himself knew he had to put some effort into convincing the States General of his good intentions.

In a paragraph meant to illustrate his earlier attempts to assist the consul, Soliman explained how he and other (unnamed) Dutch renegades had liberated De Keyser from his imprisonment immediately after “we Turks” had returned from a corsairing expedition. Here Soliman used the term “Turk” not as a denominator of a specific ethnic, political or religious identity, but rather as a reference to his profession as Algerian-based corsair. After having understood that De Keyser had arrived in 1616 not to support the traders, but to fill his own pockets, Soliman had decided to defend not just the shipmasters in their quest for justice, but also “our entire Dutch nation with all my resources and blood, here on land and at sea (…)”. Even though the “Torkxsche nation” would not be able to bear it, Soleiman had decided to support “our Dutchmen as long as God Almighty grants me life”. After having denounced their own recently appointed representative, having established himself as a loyal seeker of justice and defender of Dutch interests, and having positioned himself on the side of the “Dutch nation”, Soliman proceeded to ask that another consul be appointed, indicating that he thought himself a good alternative to De Keyser.

By announcing himself as a consular candidate, despite having “turned Turk” in both the religious and professional senses of the word, Soliman Rais positioned himself right in the middle of Dutch - Algerian diplomatic affairs. He also showed himself to be well-connected to the Dutch highest circles. His letter, in fact, was addressed to both the States General and Johan van Oldebarnevelt, the most influential politician from the province of Holland. To make sure it arrived safely, Soliman sent two copies: one with a Dutch mercantile vessel and one with a Dutch naval commander, which means he had access to both Dutch mercantile and naval communication channels. The files of the States General contain various letters from the shipmasters’s principals - well-positioned traders from Holland - regarding the incidents in Algiers and in all probability they were instrumental in having the renegade’s letter submitted to and discussed in the States General’s meeting in October 1617.

Although ultimately he did not convince the States General to be appointed in his place, the renegade’s letter was taken seriously, coming as it did at a time when they were in the process of trying to stabilize relations with Algiers. After discussion in The Hague, De Keyser was admonished and a few months later, on 21 December, the States General even decided to order him to leave Algiers. Somehow De Keyser ended up staying for over a decade, but Soliman’s letter must have contributed to his bad reputation back home. Several years later, in 1622, the extraordinary ambassador Cornelis Pijnacker was quite successful in brokering a treaty with both Algiers and Tunis, which at least for a while stabilized relations.

Renegade letters - Moerad Rais/Jan Jansz van Haarlem

No traces of further correspondence between The Hague and the renegades Xabano Flamenco and Soliman Rais are known, but letters by Moerad Rais can give insight into the long-term trajectory of relations between a renegade and his fatherland. During his long career, Moerad

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51 Heeringa, Bronnen 1.2, 764, 753, 755.
52 Heeringa, Bronnen 1.2, 741.
53 Heeringa, Bronnen 1.2, 761.
54 See e.g. Resoluties 1617, no.1649 (p.259), 5 November 1617.
55 Resoluties 21 December 1617.
56 Heeringa, Bronnen 1.1, 745. Around the end of 1618, Soliman Rais seems to have lost standing among the Algerian rais, retiring soon afterwards.
Rais went from an aggressor of Dutch shipping to becoming a protector, adviser, commercial broker and diplomatic mediator. After starting out in Algiers as Soliman Rais’ successor, his activities developed in the playing field between the kingdom of Morocco, the corsair republic of Salé and the Dutch Republic.

Salé had developed out of the collapse of Moroccan central government in the early seventeenth century and the settlement of Moriscos expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614. Between 1627 and 1637, it vacillitated between formal allegiance to sultan Mulay Zaydan (16108-1627) and functional independence, becoming a separate city-state after the sultan’s death in 1627. From 1631 until 1641, it became both a basis for attacking Spain and pocket of resistance against the sultan. In this context of crumbling central authority and political instability, Moerad Rais operated as a delegate of sultan Mulay Zaydan and increasingly as an agent of the Dutch.

The first sign of Moerad Rais’ dedication to the Dutch cause came in the early 1620s. Even before his return to the Republic in the winter of 1623, the renegade had stopped capturing Dutch ships, instead using his powers to free captive Dutchmen. In the autumn of 1622, the States General’s ambassador Albert Ruyl traveled to North Africa on a mission to liberate slaves. His first stop was Salé, where he entered into difficult negotiations with the Salentine caïd, the local ruler. Little progress was made until on 14 December “one Jan Jansz van Haerlem” arrived, inspiring the ambassador with the hope that “our people [i.e. the captives] could have his help”. The very next day, despite bad weather and a dangerous high tide, renegades under the command of Moerad Rais brought 15 Dutch captives on board the ambassador’s ship. “Captain Jan” himself presented them to Ruyl, who wrote to the States General that “many have attested and affirmed to me that this Jan Jansz provides for Dutchmen”. In April 1623, news reached The Hague that there were no longer any Dutch captives, because Moerad Rais was freeing them all. Other nations’ ships and seamen could not count on similar clemency, proof that Moerad Rais had decided on a conscious strategy to improve his relations with the States General and their representatives.

To achieve his goals, in August 1624 Moerad Rais presented himself to sultan Mulay Zaydan, at the time involved in an extensive civil war. Arriving at the sultan’s military encampment, the renegade requested permission to use Salé as his basis to safeguard Dutch affairs. Perhaps seeing in Moerad an instrument to represent sultanic power, Mulay Zaydan named him admiral of the Salentine fleet and gave him a permit to protect the Dutch. To enforce his own position, a few months later Moerad Rais used various Jewish middlemen to order large quantities of weapons and ammunition in the Dutch Republic. By mid-December of 1624, Moerad Rais had acted as witness for a Dutch shipmaster, declaring to the Salentines that all his cargo was Dutch and therefore inviolable. The States General used his testimony to plead the Dutch case with the sultan. Such actions were usually undertaken by consuls, an indication that the States General now recognized him as their informal representative.

The States General directly engaged his services in 1627, when they wrote the renegade to request his assistance in returning a Dutch ship, its cargo and a captive ship...

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57 The harbour’s main purpose was serving as an operating base for revenge against Spain and as a centre of the corsair trade, Cory, “Sharī‘īan rule in Morocco”, 462, 476.
58 Castries, Sources III, 320. Moerad Rais would later deliver another 32 captives to Ruyl.
59 Castries, Sources III, 244-245”, 13 April 1623. Liberating the Dutch sailors, Moerad Rais left the Scotsmen among the crew of a Dutch ship in captivity.
60 Castries, Sources IV, 10-11. As reported by Moïse Pallache, brother of Samuel Pallache.
61 Castries, Sources IV, 42, 18 November 1624.
62 Castries, Sources IV, 268, 13 December 1624.
Moerad Rais wrote back to them on 12 August 1627. Written in Dutch by a practiced scribe, the letter is signed by “your good friend Moeraette Res” in a second hand. Moerad Rais underlined his commitment to the States General’s cause, promising that he would “… stand by the fatherland until death. But I cannot do more than I do, because these people here are rebelling against the king. What the end will bring, God only knows”. Distinguishing three different parties in the final part of his letter, Moerad Rais distanced himself from the Salentines (“these people here”), who both harmed Dutch interests and rebelled against the Moroccan sultan Mulay Zaydan, while clearly identifying the Dutch Republic as his “fatherland”. Again, as in the other two letters, there are no references to a Christian or Dutch past and the correspondent signs with his Islamic name.

With Morocco in the grip of unrest and rebellion, observance of the 1610 treaty proved problematic, if not impossible. The immediate cause behind Moerad Rais’ letter was the violation of the treaty by Salentine corsairs who had captured a Dutch vessel. In his reply Moerad Rais assured the States General of his support, stressing that they would continue to enjoy his “favour and assistance and honour” in maintaining the Dutch - Moroccan treaty. That these were not just empty words, became apparent when three years later, in April 1630, the Dutch ambassador Jan Wendelsz arrived in Salé. His mission was to free all Dutch captives in Salé, Safi, Tunis and Algiers, and to transport the Salentine ambassador to the

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63 See Besluiten Staten-Generaal 1626-1630, 15 February 1627. Moerad Rais was at sea during spring and summer of 1627, which is why the letter remained unanswered until August.

64 National Archives (NA), States General (SG), Lias Barbarije - 7106 (1596-1644). A partial transcription and French translation can be found in De Castries, Les sources inédites IV.

65 “[ik zal] het vaderlant noch voor staen tot der doot toe. Maer ick en can niet meerder gedoen als ick en doen, want dit volck van hier die rebelleren tegen den Coninck. Wat het eynde wesen sal is Godt bekent.”, NA, SG, Lias Barbarije - 7106 (1596-1644), 12 August 1627. For Dutch representatives in North Africa, see Schutte, Repertorium der Nederlandse vertegenwoordigers. For foreign envoys in the Dutch Republic, see his Repertorium der buitenlandse vertegenwoordigers. Both are digitally available via www.historici.nl.

66 National Archives (NA), States General (SG), Lias Barbarije - 7106 (1596-1644). A partial transcription and French translation can be found in De Castries, Les sources inédites IV.

67 See for the decline of Moroccan central authority, Cory, “Shari’iian rule in Morocco”.

68 “…faveure ende bijstant ende eer genieten…”, National Archives (NA), States General (SG), Lias Barbarije - 7106 (1596-1644), 12 August 1627.
Dutch Republic back home. When they asked in Salé to see the Dutch captives, they were told that there were none: Admiral Moerad Rais had made sure that they were always set free.69

The only reason ambassador Wendelsz did not encounter the renegade himself was because he was on a corsairing expedition. Both his predecessor Albert Ruyl and his successor Anthonis de Liedekerke did have fruitful meetings with Moerad Rais. In 1640 De Liedekerke arrived in Morocco under orders of the States General to establish a treaty with sultan Muhammad al-Shayk al-Ashghar ibn Zaydan, with the additional assignment to free the crew of a captured ship. Amsterdam merchants trading with North Africa had been pushing for a new treaty since the accession of Muhammad al-Shayk in 1636.70 By this time Moerad Rais’ career had taken another turn: he had become governor of Al Walidiyya (Oualidia?).

As the fleets of ambassadors Ruyl and Wendelsz before them, De Liedekerke’s ships made Salé their first North African port of call. Arriving at the start of December, the ambassador immediately set out to organize a rendez-vous with the renegade, sending out messages on 9 December.71 Ten days later he received word back.72 Only two days later, Moerad Rais himself arrived on board, with his own entourage of 18 servants in a richly decorated sloop. He set about assisting De Liedekerke, promising to provide his embassy with enough water and food to reach Marrakech for their meeting with the sultan. Did he provide De Liedekerke with political information, to facilitate negotiations with Muhammad al-Shayk? We don’t know and after this episode Moerad Rais returned to Al Walidiyya, disappearing into oblivion.

After the 1640s

During the first phase of direct diplomatic contact between the Dutch Republic and North Africa, the Dutch States General and their relatively inexperienced representatives came to rely on renegades. Dutch involvement with the Mediterranean languished in the late 1640s and 1650s, but then picked up again. The question is whether renegades continued to play such a crucial role in these later stages. There are only snippets of information to be found, but these seem to suggest that little changed.

Take, for instance, the many missions of vice-admiral Michiel de Ruyter in the 1660s. His journeys were partly intended as displays of Dutch naval power, partly as diplomatic missions. De Ruyter was experienced in North African affairs, having sailed almost yearly to Morocco to trade between 1642 and 1652. His orders included the clause to capture and kill any Dutch convert, except for those who “because of their youth or other reasons had been forcibly converted”. In practice, however, De Ruyter dealt with them depending on the situation. When he needed to, he negotiated with them when they represented the Islamic polities. Such was the case in Tunis in 1662, when he found a renegade from Enkhuizen on the other side of the table. That same year the renegade Den Noorman conducted negotiations for Algiers.73 But he also used them as informants. After finally having concluded a treaty with Algiers in November 1663, he secretly invited certain pro-Dutch renegades on board to discuss the recently concluded Dutch-Algerian treaty, asking them whether they thought

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69 Castries, Sources IV, 268: Journal of Antoine de Keyser, secretary to Jan Wendels. At the time of their arrival, Moerad Rais and his fleet were out to sea.
70 Castries, Sources IV, 463-464, 470-471.
72 Actually Moerad Rais sent back two letters: one for the ambassador and one for his refound daughter Lysbeth, who was on board De Liedekerke’s ship.
73 Brandt, Leven en bedryf, 231-232, 245.
Algiers would respect the terms. He clearly valued their opinion and used it to set a further plan of action.

Ambassador Thomas Hees, who resided in Algiers in the late 1670s, formed longer lasting bonds with converted compatriots. Hees recorded in his diary almost weekly get-togethers and dinners with Dutch renegades. One of them, an Amsterdam-born corsairing captain, developed the habit of dropping by the ambassador’s house, often unannounced and drunk, which does not seem to have hindered their relationship. The corsair frequently brought Hees gifts, such as brandy, French sausages and once even a hat - undoubtedly all booty. Hees’ primary translator was Ali de Kuijper, also from Amsterdam, with whom Hees had very friendly relations. De Kuijper accompanied him to the diwan and explained the intricacies of the current Algerian power relations. His role was not limited to providing linguistic help or political information: when the negotiations for peace reached a critical stage, Ali de Kuijper went to Bâbâ Hasan, the dey’s son-in-law and actual Algerian leader, to plead Hees’ case. Both De Ruyter’s and Hees’ involvement with renegades point to their continuing involvement in diplomatic matters.

Conclusion

Representations and studies of representations have overemphasized the renegade as deviant and marginal. It has caused us to lose sight of the mediating roles they could and did play between Christian and Islamic polities. Not just, as De Wicquefort described, as diplomats sent out by Islamic states, but also - in a recrossing of political borders - as representatives of their native country. In the States General’s attempt to establish stable relations with North Africa, renegades were crucial. Their willingness and ability to assist their fatherland facilitated negotiations, kept policy makers back in The Hague informed and helped attain one of the most important Dutch goals in diplomatic relations with North Africa: the safeguarding of Dutch ships and liberation of Dutch captives.

During the first phase of Dutch - North African diplomacy, renegades like Soliman Rais and Moerad Rais, in Algiers and Salé respectively, had established their own connections with local and central North African authorities. Their knowledge of the situation on both sides of the religious, political and ethnolinguistic frontiers made them ideally situated to operate as mediators, at a time when Dutch official diplomats had little or no experience in North African diplomacy. Several questions remain unanswered, such as what made it worth the renegades’ while not to switch sides, or rather to cross and recross borders? And is the Dutch case of continuing contact between renegades and their fatherland an exception? Certainly the Dutch interests in the Mediterranean were of a very specific nature: they operated mainly out of commercial interests and although they made no direct territorial claims, their fraught relations with Habsburg Spain formed an important, often even decisive, diplomatic factor. At the moment I have more questions than answers, but I look forward to our discussion at the end of the month.

74 Brandt, *Leven en bedryf*, 259. They did not, unless Dutch naval presence in the Mediterranean was increased.
75 NA, Hees diary, part II, 15.
76 Ibidem, 123.
77 NA Hees Diary, part III, 138. Another of Hees’ informants was Canarij, a renegade from the Canary Islands, see part I, 185. Mixing pleasure with business, they also frequently ate together and in the summer went on trips to the surrounding countryside.
78 NA, Hees Diary, part III, 138. He also accompanied Jacob de Paz, the Jewish merchant appointed by the States General to assist Hees, to the Diwan.