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***Freed, but ‘free’? Degrees of dependence experienced by former Christian captives upon their return to Christian lands (16th-17th centuries).***

As scholars have argued, one of the major aspects differentiating the Early Modern Mediterranean bondage from the Atlantic slave trade was the likely possibility for the captives to be freed after a given time. However, this liberation did not necessarily imply to become “free” in the way we usually understand the term. Hence, the aim of this paper is to analyse different degrees of dependence experienced by former captives and slaves after their release.

In particular, this paper will focus on cases of former Christian captives who settled in the territories of the Hispanic Monarchy during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Special attention will be paid to various situations of economic dependence. Dependence could come from impoverishment but also lead to more extreme situations.

We will discuss two cases among these extreme fates. First, this paper will tackle the case of imprisonment for debt of the former captives who were unable to reimburse their ransom. This situation could paradoxically entail longer detentions than those experienced in the Barbary Coast. Secondly, the paper will also examine the mechanism developed in the North African presidios, where captives who were unable to immediately reimburse their ransom to the governors were forced to work for free during a certain time. This mechanism, in practice, implied frequent abuses and became a form of forced labour.