CrossMark

The Historical Journal, 63, 5 (2020), pp. 1160–1180 © The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0018246X20000096

COMPETITIVE IMPERIALISM IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN

JULIE KALMAN
Monash University

ABSTRACT. *Historians of empire are well aware of the importance of finding moments and spaces of connectedness between empires. The question of how to do so meaningfully remains open. This article brings to light a significant moment of imperial connectedness, through imperial contest. It tells the story of the humiliating expulsion of the British consul John Falcon from the strategic Mediterranean port of Algiers, during the Napoleonic wars. Both France and Britain sought to establish an informal imperial presence in the regency of Algiers, for access to the grain that both needed – France for its southern regions and armies, and Britain for the supply of its Mediterranean base in Gibraltar. The consuls of both powers were obliged to deal with a Jewish trading house that acted as middleman, both in trade and in diplomatic relations in the regency: the House of Bacri and Busnach. As the two powers competed, and sought to shut one another out, they attributed failures and frustrations to this trading house. Through French and British perceptions of Falcon's expulsion, and both powers' understanding of the role of the trading house in events, this article offers a picture of imperial connection, bringing together middlemen, diplomacy, and international relations.*

On 23 April 1803, John Falcon, the British consul in the regency of Algiers, wrote to the home secretary, Thomas Pelham. Falcon reported that, the previous day, 'a most extraordinary circumstance seemingly trivial and of small importance in its origin but which in its consequences has been extremely disagreeable' had occurred.[1] Two of his Christian servants had hidden two Moorish women in his house in the cellar, far from the inhabited rooms and where Falcon himself did not commonly go. At eleven in the morning, the Algerian police chief, accompanied by his officers, entered Falcon's home. The men went straight to the cellar, and demanded that the room be opened. Falcon did not have the key, and the servants had fled, so the door was forced and the women discovered. His vigorous protests notwithstanding,

School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Menzies Building, 20 Chancellors Walk, Monash University, Clayton, VIC 3800, Australia julie.kalman@monash.edu

[1] Falcon to Pelham, 23 April 1803, London, The National Archives (TNA), FO 3/10, p. 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Falcon was duly expelled by the ruling dey, Mustapha Pasha. Falcon placed the blame for his expulsion squarely on the heads of two Algerian Jews, Naphtali Busnach and Joseph Bacri. They had, he told Pelham, drawn on 'every expedient' in pursuit of their goal: to have the hapless consul expelled from the regency.[2] Proceedings were witnessed and recorded by the delighted French consul, Charles-François Dubois-Thainville.

It is an accepted wisdom that the histories of France and Britain have walked in lockstep. Like squabbling siblings, for much of their respective pasts, the two countries have looked to the other across the Channel to think about and define themselves. This is equally true of their respective imperial endeavours, where much of the history of one cannot be understood without the other.[3] Two decades ago, Antony Hopkins complained that historians of empire continued to observe imperial history as being 'largely the history of the nation-state beyond its borders'.[4] At much the same time, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler published a ground-breaking essay calling for a new approach to the history of imperialism that would bring comparative and connected histories to light. The national approach, they argued, had 'blinded' scholars 'to those circuits of knowledge and communication that took other routes than those shaped by the metropole-colony axis alone'.[5] Comparing rhythms of rule would allow us to see how 'whole bodies of administrative strategy, ethnographic classification, and scientific knowledge were shared and compared in a consolidating imperial world', and how the actions of 'imperial elites' were not necessarily determined from a metropolitan centre.[6] But the question of what to compare, and how to find meaning from comparison, has remained. More recently, Simon Potter and Jonathan Saha have picked up this question, noting that while, in the interim, there had been increased attention to 'connections, mobility and networks' within the British empire, notwithstanding Cooper and Stoler's call, scholars continue to observe the accepted spatial – that is, national – 'frameworks that continue implicitly to inform much historical research'.[7]

[2] Ibid., p. 24.

[3] See Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of empire: lives, culture, and conquest in the East, 1750–1850* (New York, NY, 2005), p. 6. John Darwin has argued that empires, fundamentally, are about connectedness. John Darwin, 'Globe and empire', in Maxine Berg, ed., *Writing the history of the global: challenges for the 21st century* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 197–9, at p. 199. See also Simon Potter and Jonathan Saha, 'Global history, imperial history and connected histories of empire', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16 (2015), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/577738.

[4] A. G. Hopkins, 'Back to the future: from national history to imperial history', *Past & Present*, 164 (1999), pp. 198–243, at p. 203.

[5] Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between metropole and colony: rethinking a research agenda', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), pp. 1–56, at p. 28.

[6] Ibid.

[7] They sought to address this in a special edition of the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16 (2015).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This article brings to light a history of imperial connectedness. It takes as its starting point what Potter and Saha, drawing on Stoler, call the history of comparison itself. How did contemporary actors in the great project of imperialism compare their actions to those of their competitors? What did 'agents of empire', as Stoler labelled them, think to compare, and what factors motivated them to do so?[8] Implicit in this formulation is contest. If imperial powers were watching one another, and comparing and evaluating their respective practices, this was often in order to compete for prestige and resources. Contest could also override comparison in times of war, and war is the setting for this article, which brings together Thainville and Falcon as 'agents of empire' and representatives of France and Britain, in the strategic Mediterranean port of Algiers, during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. It tells the story of Falcon's great humiliation in this port, and the way events were understood, both by him and by his French counterpart.

What this approach uncovers is not a history of 'strategies of rule', or management, as Stoler anticipated,[9] but of intense contest between these two powers in the face of uncertainty and overwhelming need. As Joshua Meeks has demonstrated, competition in the Mediterranean during the revolutionary wars was a contest of military might, but it also played out diplomatically, through 'conversation and negotiation'.[10] Individuals enacted this contest, but agents of empire were not the only actors. As John Falcon's accusations suggest, figures on the periphery could also play significant roles. This article demonstrates how imperial designs and desires in the metropole could be shaped by intimate interactions on the ground far away. In the case of this story these peripheral figures are two inter-related Jewish trading families, the Bacris and the Busnachs. For four decades, they were perhaps the best-known middlemen in the Mediterranean.[11] Together with John Falcon and Charles-François Dubois-Thainville, Naphtali Busnach and Joseph Bacri give us a big microhistory. Through the story of their daily interactions in Algiers, we access a focal point of the history of competitive Franco-British imperialism in the Mediterranean of the Napoleonic wars.

The vital place of intermediaries for Europeans in the Ottoman empire has been widely acknowledged.[12] These are Stoler's people, 'who moved within,

[8] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Tense and tender ties: the politics of comparison in North American history and (post) colonial studies', *Journal of American History*, 88 (2001), pp. 829–65, at pp. 864, 862.

[9] Ibid., p. 847.

[10] Joshua Meeks, *France, Britain, and the struggle for the revolutionary western Mediterranean* (Cham, 2017), p. 4.

[11] There is a vast literature on middlemen minorities, and I draw this term from there. See, for example, Ivan Light and Steven Gold, *Ethnic economies* (San Diego, CA, 2000). Francesca Trivellato is critical of the tendency of this literature to 'take for granted the homogeneity of such groups': see Francesca Trivellato, *The familiarity of strangers: the Sephardic diaspora, Livorno, and cross-cultural trade in the early modern period* (New Haven, CT, 2009), p. 267.

[12] Ian Coller, *Arab France: Islam and the making of modern Europe, 1798–1831* (Berkeley, CA, 2011), p. 30. See also Colette Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb. Naissance d'une historiographie*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

between, and outside of imperial boundaries', and who could also reshape them.[13] The transnational historian Pierre-Yves Saunier calls them 'connectors': 'intermediaries, go-betweens, and brokers'. Saunier claims that these figures have been difficult for historians to capture: living, as they did, 'in-between large social and political constructions', their traces can be hard to discern.[14] In the Ottoman empire, Armenian, Greek, and Jewish minorities were traders, interpreters, and guides. In the regency of Algiers, where this story takes place, the lack of any significant Christian population meant that, in terms of minorities, Jews alone occupied this space. The most prominent were Falcon's 'Jews': Joseph Bacri and Naphtali Busnach, middlemen *par excellence*. Through their trading house, the House of Bacri and Busnach, the two families governed much of the regency's trade, including the export of Algerian wheat. For Falcon and Thainville, every diplomatic action went through Naphtali Busnach or his uncle Joseph Bacri. Consuls wrote regularly to their minister in the metropole and, in this correspondence, Joseph and Naphtali, often simply referred to as 'the Jews', are everywhere.

This period falls within Christopher Bayly's 'imperial meridian', a phase he identified in British imperial history where domestic developments were imposed forcefully on Britain's imperial possessions. An 'altogether sharper sense of national identity' required financial stability, and the imposition of new racial categories on external subjects that could help to override class and regional divisions within Britain itself.[15] David Todd has drawn on Bayly's work to propose the idea of a similar, if less coherent, imperial meridian in French history, dating from the Restoration of 1814, and stretching to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.[16] For Todd, in the case of France, periphery worked on the metropole. This was a period of imperial disappointments for France, including 'the seizure of Algiers in 1830, the economic decay of the French West Indies in the 1840s, imperial chaos after 1848, and the disastrous outcome of the Arab Kingdom policy and Mexican expedition in the 1860s'.[17] These failures were significant factors in the collapse of successive regimes in France itself. This article is set in this in-between period, relatively neglected in the historiography of imperialism. It builds on Bayly's and Todd's important theses, showing how they can be enriched by a history of

coloniale (Paris, 2011), pp. 21–4, 43–8; Julie Kalman, *Orientalizing the Jew: religion, culture, and imperialism in nineteenth-century France* (Bloomington, IN, 2017). On the role of Jews as go-betweens in the Ottoman empire, see also Daniel Schroeter, *The sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi world* (Stanford, CA, 2002), p. 121; Thomas Philipp, 'The Farhi family and the changing position of the Jews in Syria, 1750–1860', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 20 (1984), pp. 37–52.

[13] Stoler, 'Tense and tender ties', p. 864.

[14] Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational history* (Basingstoke, 2013), p. 36.

[15] Christopher Bayly, *Imperial meridian: the British empire and the world* (London, 1989), p. 250.

[16] David Todd, 'A French imperial meridian, 1814–1870', *Past & Present*, 210 (2011), pp. 155–86.

[17] Ibid., p. 185.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

comparison. Actions taken by France and Britain during these respective meridians were also governed by the other country.

Just as the period is a neglected one in the historiography, so, too, is the region. The Indian and Atlantic oceans have been fruitfully conceptualized as spaces of imperial overlap, criss-crossed by mercantile and imperial networks, and where boundaries were spaces to be traversed, rather than observed. As Potter and Saha put it, the oceans have become 'scholarly frameworks', spaces that enabled imperial 'convergence, encounter and exchange'.[18] The focus on these two oceans underscores the overwhelming concentration of the scholarship on India and the Americas. Yet the Mediterranean can also be conceptualized as one such space. It requires us to see the sea between lands in British imperial history, and to take it into account in the period preceding 1830 for France.[19] And it requires us to remember that the subjects of our study did not know where the imperial future lay.[20] The Mediterranean Sea might not have become a theatre of outright war during this period, but the Mediterranean and the shores that bordered it were nonetheless important strategic points, and France and Britain both dedicated significant resources to their capture, protection, and exploitation.[21]

I

The events described in this article took place in the regency of Algiers. Within the Mediterranean, during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Algiers became a key strategic point. Its port city of the same name played a central role in French and British ambitions in the Mediterranean. The regency was a semi-independent province in the westernmost reaches of the Ottoman empire, best understood as a tributary state, with an elite that was largely imposed from the centre and expected to pay tribute to the latter, but which sought to act independently from it where possible. It was ruled by a dey. As a tributary state, the regency of Algiers was, as James McDougall has put it, 'broadly comparable in the nature of its prerogatives, and its ability to have them respected, to other such states elsewhere'.[22] It was an important source of wheat, as well as other primary products, including wool, wax, hides, and other grains.

America, Spain, Denmark, the Batavian Republic, and Sweden all maintained a diplomatic presence in the regency, but it was France and Britain, in particular, who competed the most intensely for diplomatic and imperial ascendancy in

[18] Potter and Saha, 'Global history'; see their extensive review of the literature.

[19] An important exception to this is Coller, *Arab France*.

[20] See Cornel Zwierlein, *Imperial unknowns: the French and British in the Mediterranean, 1650–1750* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 5.

[21] Piers Mackesy, *The war in the Mediterranean, 1803–1810* (Cambridge, 1957), p. viii.

[22] James McDougall, *A history of Algiers* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 45. See also John Haldon, *The state and the tributary mode of production* (New York, NY, 1993), p. 180.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Algiers, by means of their respective consuls. The British Victualling Board, created in 1683, was responsible for the supply and provisioning of food and water for all vessels of the British navy. A naval yard with victualling capabilities had been established in Gibraltar in 1739. Supplies of grain, meat, and other products from the Barbary states were vital for Gibraltar, as well as for Malta, when this also became a point of supply in 1801.[23] Barbary grain was equally vital for France. It fed the Midi, as well as France's revolutionary armies in Egypt, and later in Italy. In the regency itself, there was lucrative coral fishing along the Algerian coastline.[24] France had held concessions since the seventeenth century, and had built a fortified trading post on the Algerian coast. (A later, partisan admirer of the concessions called them 'the permanent symbol and the safest guarantee of good relations between France and the regency'. They accustomed 'our ministers and diplomats' to understand France as having a predominant and unique role to play in the regency.[25]) Britain coveted both the fishing rights and the trading post, and stole them at great cost in 1807.

In London and Paris, ministers and bureaucrats understood the importance of Algiers in the war. In July 1799, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, minister for external relations, wrote a report for the executive directory, outlining why France must negotiate peace with Algiers, after the regency had been forced by the Porte to declare war following Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt. Algiers was, as Talleyrand put it, 'of extreme importance to our interests in the Mediterranean'. Because of the ongoing war, France's southern regions were now deprived of the Barbary grain on which they relied, provisions were no longer reaching Malta, communication with Egypt was difficult, and the concessions from which France had been 'benefiting for more than a century, and so coveted by the English, from whom we took them away, could fall back into their hands'. French warships, moreover, had been deprived of 400 leagues of coastline, which had instead become the 'exclusive refuge' of France's enemies.[26]

For Britain, the regency held equal importance. In 1798, the naval commander Sir George Johnstone Hope visited Algiers to gather military intelligence. He reported to Admiral John Jervis, commander of the Mediterranean fleet, that the iron of trade was hot and that it was time to strike in the regency. A British monopoly over Algerian trade would not only be highly lucrative, it would also ensure the supply of Minorca.[27] In London, an 1804 report

[23] Caitlin Gale, 'Beyond corsairs: the British–Barbary relationship during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars', (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 2016), p. 51. See also David Bayne Horn, *The British diplomatic service, 1689–1789* (Oxford, 1961), p. 35.

[24] On coral fishing in the Mediterranean, see Trivellato, *Familiarity of strangers*, pp. 226–7.

[25] Paul Masson, 'A la veille d'une conquête: concessions et compagnies d'Afrique (1800–1830)', *Bulletin de géographie historique et descriptive*, 24 (1909), pp. 48–124, at p. 49.

[26] Cited in Henri Dehérain, 'La mission du commissaire-général Dubois-Thainville auprès du dey d'Alger', *Revue de l'histoire des colonies françaises*, 14 (1926), pp. 75–100, at p. 80.

[27] TNA, ADM 1/399, 28 Feb. 1799.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

offered 'some observations on the political importance of maintaining a cordial and amicable intelligence with the Barbary states more particularly with that of Algiers'.[28] In the case of a British war with Algiers, much desired by France, the author stated

> we should not only be shut out of a variety of ports on the coast of that state which are convenient resorts for our cruisers for refreshments etc and whence considerable supplies of every sort of provisions may be had for Gibraltar and Malta and other stations we may have in the Mediterranean but those ports would be converted into stations for the enemy's privateers and cruisers which joined to those of the regency would render the navigation of the Mediterranean very dangerous for anything less than squadron.[29]

French and British actions with regard to the regency fit into what David Todd has called a project of 'informal domination', or informal imperialism: the desire to exercise influence over a territory that was under neither nation's sovereignty.[30] Antony Hopkins calls this 'a means of increasing the flow of resources by cutting costs or by annexing rents, and by amending or introducing appropriate property rights', as opposed to colonialism, which he characterizes as the 'formal, organisational means' for achieving this same result.[31] There is often slippage between the two terms in the scholarship. In this article, 'imperialism' is used in the sense of both Todd's and Hopkins's definitions. But this was mercantile imperialism also. In Cornel Zwierlein's formulation, applied to an earlier period, mercantilist imperialism involved the 'nationalization of economics', its organizing logic 'the distinction between the trade of "our" nation and that of others'.[32] During the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Algiers was a site of informal, mercantile imperialism. This imperialism, in this time of war, was also profoundly competitive, as France and Britain, and their allies and enemies, all competed for preference, and preferential access to exports, while also seeking to block their opponents, in an extension of the war being fought across Europe and in its surrounding seas.[33] Algiers was useful, but it was just as important to maintain good relations with the regency, so as to shut the enemy out. In much the same spirit, in 1802, shortly before he departed for the Mediterranean, Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson wrote of Malta, 'It must never belong to France – England does not want it.'[34] Algiers was central in both French and British reckoning in the early nineteenth-century Mediterranean.

[28] TNA, FO 3/10, 20 July 1804, p. 305.
[29] Ibid., pp. 307–8.
[30] David Todd, 'Transnational projects of empire in France, c. 1815–c. 1870', *Modern Intellectual History*, 12 (2015), pp. 265–93, at p. 265.
[31] Hopkins, 'Back to the future', p. 205.
[32] Zwierlein, *Imperial unknowns*, p. 20.
[33] Horn, *British diplomatic service*, p. 35.
[34] Nicholas Harris Nicolas, ed., *The dispatches and letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, 7 vols. (London, 1844–5), v, p. 36. Later, of course, in 1803, Nelson stated what Chris Bayly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In Algiers, consuls represented these competing empires. Much of the scholarship of consular studies has focused on postings in the north African states of Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers, and Morocco, because of the unique demands of these positions for both French and British consuls. British consuls on the so-called Barbary coast were treated differently from most other consuls in the British service. They were managed by the Home Office, separated from the main branch of the British consular service, which was under the direction of the Foreign Office. In the sense that they essentially worked as diplomats, undertaking political as well as the normal economic duties of the 'merchant-consul', they did, indeed, have different responsibilities from the standard posting for the average British consul.[35] French consuls in north Africa, too, played a more extensive role than their confrères elsewhere. It was only in the Ottoman empire, in fact, that French consuls had 'a truly political role to play'.[36] In the Barbary regencies in particular, part of the consul's responsibilities was to negotiate treaties, and this required the establishment and maintenance of good relations with the dey and his entire ministry, or divan. Members of the Bacri and Busnach families were always on hand to lend money to buy gifts, and to give diplomatic advice.

For the consuls of both nations, the broadening of their responsibilities was due to their isolation, both from the ambassador in Constantinople, and from their minister in Paris. Consuls along the Barbary coast were distanced from the metropole. Corsairing and piracy, but also, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, war, interrupted the passage of mail. As a self-described pioneer in British consular history, Desmond Platt might have taken the licence of setting his own terms of reference somewhat too far when he described consuls as 'lonely, fragmented, distant, and unable to communicate among themselves', but this does evoke a sense of the particular challenges that consuls in north Africa could face.[37] With no instructions arriving from the metropole, these consuls, who often had a very detailed and long-standing knowledge of the world of their posting, were forced to adapt, on their own initiative, to changing circumstances and diplomatic expectations – to create diplomatic policy 'on the hoof'.[38]

called 'the new doctrine': that Malta was 'the most important outwork to India, and that it will give us great influence in the Levant and indeed in all the southern parts of Italy'. Cited in Bayly, *Imperial meridian*, p. 103.

[35] Hilda Lee, 'The supervising of the Barbary consulates, 1768–1836', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 23 (1950), pp. 191–9, at p. 197.

[36] Jörg Ulbert, 'A history of the French consular services', in Jan Melissen and Ana Mar Fernandez, eds., *Consular affairs and diplomacy* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2011), pp. 303–24, at p. 308.

[37] D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella service: British consuls since 1825* (London, 1971), p. 1.

[38] C. R. Pennell, 'The social history of British diplomats in North Africa and how it affected diplomatic policy', in Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte, eds., *The diplomat's world: a cultural history of diplomacy, 1815–1914* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 347–79, at p. 348.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thus, foreign consuls in Algiers had a wide remit. They needed to maintain good relations so as to prevent the regency's corsairing ships from attacking their merchantmen. This required the regular offering of gifts to the dey and his divan, as well as fending off demands for money and threats of war. Consuls were also required to maintain almost constant trade negotiations, a process in which Naphtali and Joseph played a central role.[39] The French consul reported directly to Talleyrand. His British counterpart, Falcon, reported to the home secretary. It was Falcon who experienced the great indignity of being expelled from the regency, and around whom this story takes place.

II

John Falcon had previously been secretary to Richard Masters, the former British consul.[40] His appointment as consul in 1799 was not received well by the regency, and the dey Mustapha made 'repeated representations that he had rendered himself obnoxious during his [previous] residence at Algiers'.[41] Thainville reported to Talleyrand that Falcon had spoken out strongly against the system in Algiers, and had 'debased' other national representatives. He had made himself powerful enemies.[42] It took the threats of Admiral Lord Keith, the commander of Britain's Mediterranean fleet, to have the British consul received.[43] As his expulsion suggests, the less than good beginning of Falcon's consulship was to set the tone for his posting. The two women found hiding in his house were questioned, and stated that they had been there for three days. During that time, as Thainville reported them saying, they had received 'respects' from the consul and his secretary.[44] One of the servants, who had been captured, gave the same evidence. Falcon immediately sent his interpreter to Mustapha to 'express the utmost sorrow' at what had happened. He received an 'ambiguous' response from the prime minister.

[39] See Fredrik Kämpe, 'Competition and cooperation: Swedish consuls in north Africa and Sweden's position in the world, 1791–1802', in Tim Berndtsson et al., eds., *Traces of transnational relations in the eighteenth century* (Uppsala, 2015), pp. 37–51, at p. 37; Guillaume Calafat, 'Les juridictions du consul: une institution au service des marchands et du commerce? Introduction', in *De l'utilité commerciale des consuls. L'institution consulaire et les marchands dans le monde méditerranéen (XVIIe–XXe siècle)* (Rome and Madrid, 2017), pp. 143–53; Silvia Marzagalli, 'Etudes consulaires, études méditerranéennes: éclairages croisés pour la compréhension du monde méditerranéen et de l'institution consulaire à l'époque moderne', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 93 (2016), pp. 11–23.

[40] It was not uncommon for consular secretaries to be promoted in this way. See e.g. Sara ElGaddari, 'His Majesty's agents: the British consul at Tripoli, 1795–1832', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43 (2015), pp. 770–86, at p. 777.

[41] Sir Robert Lambert Playfair, *The scourge of Christendom: annals of British relations with Algiers prior to French conquest* (London, 1884), p. 229.

[42] Thainville to Talleyrand, 5 floréal 11 (25 April 1803), Paris, Archives du Ministère des affaires etrangères (AMAE), 8CCC/36, p. 368.

[43] Playfair, *Scourge of Christendom*, p. 230.

[44] Thainville to Talleyrand, 5 floréal 11 (25 April 1803), AMAE, 8CCC/36, p. 368.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Falcon imagined, as he reported, that that would have been the end of it, except that 'the Jew Busnach' had not yet been consulted.[45] A few hours later, he received a new message. Now he was told he must leave the country, immediately. Falcon protested: 'By His Majesty's orders I had come to Algiers, and until I received His Majesty's permission I should not quit it.'[46]

At dawn the following day, a party of police officers entered his house. They told Falcon that they were there by order of the dey, to take him forcibly on board an English merchant ship docked in the port. Falcon sought to meet with Mustapha, but was refused access. Instead he sent a message by his dragoman. Drawing himself up to the greatest possible height of British outrage, Falcon protested 'this most flagrant insult to His Majesty in the person of his consul'. He had, he stated, been completely ignorant of the 'flagitious' conduct of his servants, and thus incapable of preventing it. He was ready to deliver them up to justice. His protestations were in vain, and he and his family were the victims of a very public humiliation, as he explained to Pelham:

> the opportunity was deemed too favourable by the Jews to be let slip, the dey persisted, and I was this morning with my family and very few of my effects forcibly conducted through the street by a number of the dey's soldiers on board the vessel where I now write this, and orders were given to the master not to permit me or any of my family to return on shore on any consideration whatsoever.[47]

(Or, as Thainville saw the same events, Falcon was 'taken to the marina amidst the booing of the people, and treated like the lowest of scoundrels'.[48])

Nevertheless, however much Falcon's dignity might have been bruised in the regency, he believed that his honour as a representative of his country remained intact. He had, as he explained, only been expelled because he had never become 'a creature of the Jews', and 'the impossibility of detaching me from my duty had made them use every expedient in order to get me out of the country'.[49] Four days later, writing from Alicante, Falcon expanded on the involvement of 'the Jews'. They were the ones who had persuaded Mustapha to have him expelled.[50] (As Richard O'Brien, the enslaved ship's captain who became US consul put it, in characteristically colourful terms, 'the Jews did not want a Falcon, they wanted a turkey buzzard'.[51])

In June, now in Gibraltar, and clearly having had time to reflect, Falcon widened the conspiracy. The French had probably instigated his removal, enacted by the Jews. The two had acted in concert: Busnach and Bacri had

[45] Falcon to Pelham, 23 April 1803, TNA, FO 3/10, p. 23.
[46] Ibid., p. 24.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Thainville to Talleyrand, 5 messidor 12 (24 June 1804), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 12.
[49] Falcon to Pelham, 23 April 1803, TNA, FO 3/10, p. 24.
[50] Falcon to Pelham, 27 April 1803, TNA, FO 3/10, p. 28.
[51] Richard O'Brien, 10 Jan. 1801, Atlanta, GA, National Archives and Records Administration, State Department consular despatches, Algiers series, M23, roll 6, vol. 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assisted the French and Spanish trade, by declaring that certain vessels loaded at Marseilles, Genoa, Leghorn, Barcelona etc had cargoes belonging entirely to them, and getting certificates to that effect from the English agent at Algiers, which certificate when exhibited to any of His Majesty's officers prevented all future search and insured the transit of enemies' property.

When Falcon put a stop to this trade, 'it was determined by the Jews and French to get me removed from Algiers'.[52] Even if they were not 'at the bottom of this plot', the French government would 'certainly' take pleasure in news of his removal.[53] Falcon was right about that much. Thainville, who served in Algiers right throughout the Napoleonic wars, followed the events surrounding Falcon's – and, by extension, England's – humiliation with barely contained glee, and Talleyrand wrote back to confirm that Thainville's letters had been placed before Napoleon, and that he 'read the details with much interest'.[54]

III

The two families at the centre of these events were traders and businessmen who involved themselves in everything that middlemen in the Mediterranean could do. Joseph Bacri, Naphtali Busnach, and their families were most probably descended from Jews who had come to settle in the Maghreb with the Romans. Following the Arab invasion and settlement, these Jews Arabized, developing a dialect based on Arabic, called Judaeo-Arabic, and adopting many practices of the new rulers.[55] The Bacris and Busnachs still spoke the dialect. They also spoke the lingua franca, the conglomerate of Mediterranean romance languages used around its shores as the main language of trade.[56] In 1593, after Ferdinand I, the grand duke of Tuscany, delivered the *Livornina*, their ancestors had had the good sense to take up the duke's invitation. Ferdinand hoped to develop his port of Livorno; to that end, he invited Jews, Turks, and Moors to settle there, in the hope that they would establish trading businesses. In order to make the invitation attractive, Ferdinand promised that those Jews who settled in Livorno would be protected from the papal inquisitors, still active in Italy.[57] Unsurprisingly, many Jews, and particularly recent refugees fleeing the Inquisition, took up this invitation. So, too, did long-established families of Arab Jews from the Maghreb, such as the ancestors of the Bacris and

[52] Falcon to Earl Camden, 24 Jan. 1805, TNA, FO 3/10, pp. 333–4.

[53] Falcon to Pelham, 7 June 1803, TNA, FO 3/10, p. 37.

[54] Talleyrand to Thainville, 27 germinal 12 (17 April 1804), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 31.

[55] On the Jews of north Africa, see Lucette Valensi, *Juifs et musulmans en Algérie, VIIe–XXe siècle* (Paris, 2016); and Jacques Taieb, *Sociétés juives du Maghreb moderne (1500–1900). Un monde en mouvement* (Paris, 2000).

[56] The most recent, thorough work on the lingua franca is Jocelyne Dakhlia, *Lingua franca* (Arles, 2008).

[57] On the *Livornina*, see Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan culture, and eighteenth-century reform* (Stanford, CA, 2014), pp. 20–3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Busnachs, as well as others. Some generations later, their descendants followed another opportunity and moved back to Algiers. Their stay in Livorno was important, because they were able to return to Algiers at this time as 'Livornese' Jews, allowing them to adopt European dress (although they were still subject to Algerian law and, particularly, punishment).

This did not mean, necessarily, as Richard Ayoun has explained, that they were Livornese in the way we would ordinarily understand this description. To be 'Livornese' could simply denote residence in Livorno, and/or official inclusion in that city's Jewish community. Thus Jews who were originally indigenous to Algiers could become 'Livornese'.[58] These Livornese Jews were prominent in trade in Algiers, making use of their contacts around the Mediterranean. They were one part of a loose community of Jews in the regency, made up of different groups: the original inhabitants, present in the region since Roman times, the descendants of those who fled the Iberian peninsula, and those who had come, or returned, from Livorno.[59]

Ottoman authorities, of course, understood the place of religious minorities differently from western Europe. Rather than impose Islam by force, they accommodated religious diversity through the pact of Omar, which established the principle of *dhimmi*. The purpose of *dhimmi* was to define the status of non-Muslim minorities in the Muslim state. Jews, and the many branches of Christianity in the Middle East, were seen as people of the book: monotheistic people who had received divine revelation, but before the coming of Islam. They occupied a middle ground between savagery and full enlightenment.[60] Thus they were subject to certain measures geared towards ensuring separation and subordination, but at the same time they enjoyed communal autonomy. Relations with their neighbours did sometimes devolve into violence and, indeed, Naphtali Busnach was murdered by a janissary in 1805.

The story of the House of Bacri and Busnach begins in 1774, when the patriarch David Cohen Bacri established the trading company in Algiers.[61] By 1782, the business was prospering. David Cohen Bacri brought his five sons into the business: Mordechai, Salomon, Joseph, Abraham, and Jacob. In 1798, the brothers made their nephew, the son of an unnamed sister, a partner. This was Naphtali Busnach. He worked closely with his uncle Joseph. Busnach became a trusted adviser to the dey Mustapha. According to all the consuls (and commentators since), the relationship of intimacy and trust that

[58] Richard Ayoun, 'Les juifs livournais en Afrique du Nord', *Rassegna mensile di Israel*, 50 (1984), pp. 650–706, at pp. 650, 652. See also Richard Ayoun and Bernard Cohen, *Les Juifs d'Algérie. Deux mille ans d'histoire* (Paris, 1982).

[59] Ayoun, 'Juifs livournais', p. 663.

[60] On Jews and *dhimmi* status, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: a history of the Judeo-Spanish community, 14th–20th centuries* (Berkeley, CA, 2000), pp. 2–3. On Jews and *dhimmi* status in Algiers, see Valensi, *Juifs et musulmans*, pp. 25–6.

[61] Maurice Eisenbeth, 'Les juifs en Algérie et en Tunisie à l'époque turque (1516–1830)', *Revue africaine*, 46 (1952), pp. 114–87 and 343–84, at p. 373.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Busnach built with Mustapha was unprecedented. So, according to the same sources, was his power. In 1803, at the time of Falcon's expulsion, Busnach was the head (*mokadem*) of the Jewish community in the city of Algiers, making him a secular and religious authority who could enforce both rabbinic judgements and local decrees. The *mokadem* was given the power to determine taxes, and enjoyed the privilege of being able to farm the 2 per cent duty on the export of ostrich feathers, tobacco, and wool, three lucrative concerns.[62] But the *mokadem* also represented the community to the dey, and he acted as the dey's agent. For foreign representatives such as Falcon, and his great adversary, Thainville, every transaction with the dey and his divan went through Naphtali Busnach.

IV

John Falcon loathed this arrangement and, once away from the regency, he sought revenge and redress for his humiliation. Following his departure from Algiers, he spent some months travelling around the Mediterranean, stopping at various ports. At times, he travelled in pursuit of Nelson, recently appointed commander-in-chief of the British fleet in the Mediterranean. At others, he stayed in one place, awaiting instructions from the same. Falcon hoped that Nelson would agree to take him back to Algiers. Nelson had sailed on the *Victory* almost a month after Falcon's expulsion, around 20 May 1803. He arrived in Gibraltar in early June, and was waited on, 'immediately', by an anxious Falcon, who communicated events in Algiers to his lordship.[63] Nelson had much before him. He had to deal with diplomacy, particularly in Sicily and the Ionian islands, off Greece's west coast. He had to contain the French. He had to establish routes of supply and communication, and organize the protection of British merchant shipping. And he was working on a shoestring. Nonetheless, in early 1804, Nelson agreed to appear off Algiers, accompanied by his entire fleet. He was fully prepared to declare war on Algiers, and very keen to destroy the regency's corsairing fleet. 'We had better be at open war', he wrote to his friend Lord Minto (formerly viceroy of the short-lived Anglo-Corsican kingdom), 'than insulted as we have been'.[64]

Falcon was confident that the appearance of the fleet off Algiers would put an end to his troubles. But, even though Nelson wrote a threatening letter demanding Falcon's reinstatement, Mustapha steadfastly refused to allow this. Falcon saw Busnach behind this: 'It appears the dey still supposes his majesty will not make war against Algiers…these ideas are undoubtedly instilled into him by the different consuls through the medium of the Jew Busnach.'[65] Nelson

[62] On the *mokadem*, see Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish faith: the civilizing mission in colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2010), p. 13.
[63] Falcon to Pelham, 7 June 1803, TNA, FO 3/10, p. 37.
[64] Nelson to Minto, 11 Jan. 1804, cited in Nicolas, *Nelson*, v, p. 367.
[65] Falcon to Charles Yorke, 18 Jan. 1804, TNA, FO 3/10, p. 89.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

agreed. 'The two Jews mentioned by Mr Falcon', were, he knew, 'entirely in the French interest', and, he added, in a letter to Evan Nepean, secretary to the Admiralty,

> how far our government would go in insisting on the banishment of these Jews, it must determine: all I wish and submit to their Lordships with great respect is, that if the business is left to me, my orders may be decisive.[66]

In April 1803, when Falcon was summarily expelled, Britain and France were at peace, having signed the treaty of Amiens twelve months before. This state of (shaky) entente did not reach the regency, where life continued much as it had done for the previous nine years of war. Even the consuls maintained a state of jealous enmity – a reminder that dates are never absolute markers of change. As far as the regency was concerned, what mattered was its own diplomacy: with whom was it at war? Whom was it threatening with war? Britain had, for some time, been in the latter category. Mustapha was angry with Falcon, feeling that he had been tricked into agreeing to release prisoners who had been taken by corsairs when they were sailing under English colours.[67] The final straw for the dey was a copy of a letter Falcon wrote to his brother regarding the matter, which found its way into *The Times*. Mustapha saw the letter as a personal attack. Falcon had written,

> I leave you to judge what must have been my feelings at seeing myself surrounded by 266 persons, who attribute to me their return to the world, to their wives and children, and to all that was dear to them. I have had hard fighting, but I have succeeded, without costing the government one farthing.[68]

At the same time, Mustapha had been trying for some time to force England to reimburse 180,000 piasters, claimed by Naphtali and Joseph, for several boats that had been taken and confiscated by English corsairs before peace had been settled at Amiens in 1802. An ambassador had even been sent to London from Algiers to recoup this money (Abraham Bacri, one of the brothers, accompanied him.) The ambassador's efforts were unsuccessful. Mustapha had been demanding that Falcon leave for some time, leading up to his humiliating expulsion.

Nelson's threatening letter was a first attempt to get British–Algerian relations back on an even keel. A series of others followed, over the course of 1804, and Thainville observed events closely. The Bacris and Busnachs remained at the centre of the same events. Following the failure of Nelson's attempt, as Thainville reported to Talleyrand, the English withdrew, shamefully,

[66] Nelson to Nepean, 22 June 1803, cited in Nicolas, *Nelson*, v, p. 94.

[67] Algiers was a corsairing port. Although, as James McDougall notes, corsairing was 'marginal' after the seventeenth century, with just a short resurgence during the chaos at sea created by the Napoleonic wars, the idea of corsairing continued to loom large in the polemic and popular imagination. McDougall, *History of Algiers*, p. 45.

[68] Falcon to Michael Falcon, 3 April 1801, TNA, FO 3/9, p. 29.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from Algiers. In June, they sent a second letter, very different from the first. This one announced that Falcon was ill in London (Thainville notes here that he was in fact known to be in good health), and that Nelson sent new envoys: Macdonald – the consul from Tripoli – as well as Captain Richard Goodwin Keats, the highly experienced naval commander, who was a close colleague of Nelson. Mustapha now refused to give up the slaves. Keats

> complained energetically about the refusals he experienced; he spoke at length, with much anger, on the lack of consideration the Algerians had for the English; he reproached them very bitterly for their ingratitude, and went so far as to say that Algiers owed its existence to nothing other than London's constant opposition to France's plans to destroy it.

Mustapha, in a rage, responded that George III 'had cheated him constantly. Tell him', he added, pulling out his knife, 'that he can send his ships against me, and that I am ready to receive him.' The English withdrew. The next day, they had 'long conversations' with the Jews, took on some provisions, and sailed. In code, Thainville commented that Richard O'Brien, the former American consul (and who, Thainville claimed, had spied for Bacri and Busnach), had been asked by the Jews to

> assure the English that if they stopped insisting on Falcon's return, they could count on getting all they desired. On the basis of these assurances, Admiral Nelson decided on the undertaking which has just covered them in shame for a second time.[69]

Macdonald returned some weeks later, now asking only and 'very humbly' for the slaves from two Neapolitan ships taken with British passports, and two loads of provisions, one for Gibraltar and the other for Malta, making assurances that his government would soon send a new consul to Algiers. Mustapha demanded the new consul, and the 180,000 piasters owed to Busnach and Bacri, after which he would consider their claims. Macdonald returned to London with this message.[70] The fourth act 'of the shameful play that they have been performing here for more than a year' took place a couple of months later, in September. This time, Captain Donnely requested the crew and cargo of just one boat that had been taken. He had 'long discussions' with Busnach, and sailed the following morning.[71]

Act five took place in January 1805. This was, in the words of a happy Thainville, 'the supplementary step to all the humiliations that they have come seeking here over the last two years'. The London government was covered in shame. This time, Mustapha stated that he was prepared to drop several of his demands, to show proof of his good will. The sole claim he maintained was that the 180,000 piasters owed to Bacri and Busnach be paid. The

[69] Thainville to Talleyrand, 5 messidor 12 (24 June 1804), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 49.
[70] Thainville to Talleyrand, 21 messidor 12 (10 July 1804), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 69.
[71] Thainville to Talleyrand, 17 fructidor 12 (4 Sept. 1804), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 97.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

British envoys had more 'long conversations' with Joseph and Naphtali, as a result of which Keats promised that he would write, as soon as possible, to request that the British government reimburse the money.[72] After all, as Thainville wrote in code, Bacri and Busnach asked 'no more than to provision the English'.[73]

But whereas Thainville saw Bacri and Busnach at the centre of England's efforts to maintain Falcon (or another consul, if need be) in Algiers, Falcon remained convinced that his expulsion was entirely due to the wishes and actions of the same men. Back in London, he wrote, more than once, that Busnach had worked with Thainville to conspire to have him removed from Algiers. In his official reflections on his time in the regency, he argued that, thanks to their 'great ascendancy over the dey', Busnach and Bacri were

> capable of aiding the French in getting possession of the country, nay they undoubtedly would do so if it were their interest and this the government of France is well convinced of…If that spirit of domination in France be not yet extinct Algiers by means of Busnach and Bacri would be a tempting and most easy conquest…the Jews Busnach and Bacri could put the French in possession of the country without firing a gun.[74]

Both consuls remained utterly convinced that Naphtali and Joseph had full power to determine the destiny of the nation they served, in the bitter contest for imperial supremacy.

This imperial contest was for national glory and dignity as much as for trade rights and concessions. On the ground, there is an extent to which it was performance. Napoleon clearly understood this, and suggested as much, when he instructed Thainville to apply himself 'to making the difference that exists between France and England well and truly felt: England can send a few ships: but France, in a moment, can send an entire army'.[75] Falcon was busy, too, with the hard work of diplomacy. His instructions from London were 'as much as possible to impress his highness the dey with a true sense of the treacherous intentions' of the French. In a recent conversation with Mustapha, he felt that he had successfully brought the dey around to doubting the sincerity of the French towards him. 'But', as he reported, 'the instant I quitted his presence, Busnach presented himself, assured His Highness the French had not any sinister views whatever upon this country and that he would forfeit his head should his assertions prove false.'[76]

The two consuls watched one another. Both Falcon and Thainville had spies who would recount the details of private conversations. They intercepted one

[72] Thainville to Talleyrand, 20 nivôse 13 (10 Jan. 1805), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 164.
[73] Thainville to Talleyrand, 21 messidor 12 (10 July 1804), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 69.
[74] John Falcon, 'Reflections upon Algiers. The duty and situation of the English consul. 1803', TNA, FO 3/10, p. 79.
[75] Talleyrand to Thainville, 29 messidor 10 (18 July 1802), AMAE, 8CCC/36, p. 183.
[76] Falcon to Duke of Portland, 5 Sept. 1801, TNA, FO 3/9, p. 105.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

another's mail and forwarded it. They reported on one another's activities, particularly their failures, with great pleasure. And each was completely convinced that Bacri and Busnach were working closely with, and for, the other, to their own disadvantage and detriment. So when Napoleon insisted that the dey must send presents to France, allow the consul to hoist the French flag over his house, and enter the palace wearing his sword – all impossible demands – Thainville found himself caught between the reality of what he could ask for and Napoleon's rather extraordinary commands. Falcon reported to Pelham that 'the Jews', this time in concert with the prime minister, were telling the dey one version of the story, while conniving with Thainville on another. Falcon said that, if peace had somehow been agreed between France and the regency, then the Jews must have 'cooked' a report for the French government.[77] But Thainville understood the eventual arrival of Falcon's replacement, Richard Cartwright, in 1805 as the result of a plot, equally cooked up by the Jews, this time in concert with the British.[78] In code, he complained that he had done his best to prevent the return of a British agent to Algiers, 'but the underhandedness of the English and the pusillanimity of the Jews…destroyed all my efforts in the end'.[79]

V

This is a history of perceptions. Foreign representatives and their governments understood the Bacris and Busnachs to be powerful, and it is this fact that is important. It is impossible to know whether the Bacris and Busnachs were as powerful as Thainville and Falcon made out. The two families were certainly striking in their disdain for the structures of power around them. They were single-minded in the running of their business. They were not in awe of nations, empires, or their leaders. Nor were they in awe of power itself. In one sense, they had good reason. Another Bacri brother, Jacob, visited Napoleon in the latter's private apartments. Napoleon designated the Bacris suppliers to his armies, as well as his intermediaries and his trouble-shooters. On 23 December 1800, he wrote to Talleyrand setting out in some detail the required supplies for his army stranded in Egypt: 2 million bottles of wine, brandy, and liquors, sheets, medicines, and oil; on their return, the ships were to carry rice, coffee, indigo, and sugar. 'Several people', he noted, 'are offering to take on this venture, but I prefer the House of Bacri, if it is available.'[80]

[77] Falcon to Pelham, 9 Dec. 1802, TNA, FO 3/9, p. 343.

[78] Falcon himself went on to become paymaster-general at the Cape of Good Hope, and lived to the age of eighty, dying in Hertfordshire in 1846.

[79] Thainville to Talleyrand, 20 nivôse 13 (10 Jan. 1805), AMAE, 8CCC/37, p. 163.

[80] *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III*, 32 vols. (Paris, 2006), VI, p. 544.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In 1802, Algerian corsairs were making repeated attacks on vessels, including French ships, and this enraged Napoleon. He sent a list of instructions to Talleyrand. Napoleon wished the dey Mustapha to understand that he would not accept that pirates were attacking French ships. Talleyrand was to instruct Thainville, to demand that all sequestered boats be reinstated, enslaved French citizens freed, and instigators punished. And, apparently to ensure that Mustapha had properly understood the depth of Napoleon's rage, the first consul added a note to Talleyrand's report. A furious scrawl instructed Talleyrand to

> send someone to find the Bacris; and tell them that the first consul is very displeased; that if the *raïs* who allowed himself to mistreat a Frenchman is not given capital punishment, the first consul will know how to get revenge. Inform them that a letter should come from them.[81]

Falcon reported the power of the Bacris and Busnachs repeatedly in letters to Sir George Shee, undersecretary of state for the Home Office. 'The Jews' were the 'absolute masters' of trade in Algiers. Their 'infamy, insolence and pretentions' were 'beyond conception', and Britain's only chance of establishing trade in the regency was to destroy them. They were the 'sworn enemies' of England.[82] For years after the events of his expulsion, Falcon continued to rehearse this narrative. Indeed, reports on the power of the Bacris and Busnachs continued throughout the war, into the years of peace, and beyond, during the French invasion and colonization.[83]

But the refusal of the Bacris and Busnachs to respect power structures did not necessarily mean that they were powerful. There were situations that they could not better or overcome. The most striking example of this is their financial relationship with France. The House of Bacri had agreed in 1794 to sell wheat to France on credit. As wheat continued to cross north to Marseille, and despite the best efforts of the two families, the debt remained unpaid, and, indeed, it only grew. It took several changes of regime and the better part of two decades for the debt, which ultimately amounted to 7 million francs, to be paid in 1820, to remaining family members and their creditors.[84] Their

[81] Napoleon to Talleyrand, 12 messidor 10 (1 July 1802), AMAE, 8CCC/36, p. 167.

[82] Falcon to Shee, 28 June 1802, TNA, FO 3/9, p. 297.

[83] See Kalman, *Orientalizing the Jew*, pp. 117–18. Patricia Lorcin has shown that ideas of malign Jewish power in the regency continued into the late nineteenth century: Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial identities: stereotyping, prejudice and race in colonial Algeria* (London, 1995), pp. 185–6.

[84] The exact money trail is impossible to follow, but Pierre Deval stated repeatedly that the debt had been disbursed. Of the 7 million francs owing, he claimed that Michel Busnach (the brother of Naphtali) received 2.5 million, and Jacob, now the last remaining Bacri brother, 2 million, plus a further 1.5 million, to be paid out to creditors in Algiers. The balance was kept by France, to pay off the house's creditors there. See, for example, a letter from Deval to the Count de la Ferronays, 28 Feb. 1828, AMAE, 2MD/3, p. 28. The full story of the debt is told in Kalman, *Orientalizing the Jew*, pp. 91–118.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

failure to prevent the regency from declaring war on France in 1798, to the great detriment of their business, is another example. So were Naphtali's murder at the hands of a janissary in 1805, and the repeated sequestrations placed on members of the two families in France and its Italian territories.

Thinking about the Bacris and Busnachs in terms of their relationship with structures of power, or other models of the same in other places and times in Jewish history, locks us into a cycle of seeking to determine how powerful they actually were, a question that simply cannot be answered categorically. It is rare that their voices can be heard unmediated. Thainville would report his conversations with them, purportedly verbatim, but, given that this correspondence must be read as part of the performance of his role as consul, it is entirely possible that these were edited to put him in the best light. For the most part, the Bacris and Busnachs come to us by way of these consular letters, as well as a precious handful of letters that they themselves wrote, to various ministers in Paris, when the French government placed the family and their assets under sequestration. It was French and British perceptions, at all levels, of what Naphtali Busnach and the Bacris could do that determined the behaviour of the French and British, and thus imperial design and contest. Both Falcon and Thainville anticipated difficulty, and understood difficulties that arose, through the lens of their conviction that Bacri and Busnach enjoyed inordinate power in the regency. Each was convinced that Joseph and Naphtali were working for the other, frustrating their imperial ambitions, what their respective nations might be able to achieve, and the endless imperial contest, as it played out in Algiers.

VI

The history of the Napoleonic wars in the Mediterranean is traditionally told as a rollicking tale of great men and their ships, or their armies. C. Northcote Parkinson's *Britannia rules: the classic age of naval history, 1793–1815*, delivers what the title promises. Occasionally, such works are written in the first person plural, perpetuating the idea of conflict. Alexander Allardyce complained, in his publication of Admiral Keith's memoirs, that the states along north Africa's coast were 'giving trouble' as usual, 'throwing obstacles in the way of provisioning our ships'.[85] Jean Tonnelé assumed that he had the reader on side when he stated that 'The battle of Aboukir was a veritable disaster for us.'[86] These are histories of commanders and rulers, in which the commoner, whether staffing the boats or populating the coastlines, is largely invisible. Yet, for all their imbrication in their time, these authors recognized the significance of both the period and the theatre. As Piers Mackesy pointed

[85] Alexander Allardyce, *Memoir of the honourable George Keith Elphinstone, K.B., Viscount Keith, admiral of the Red* (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 315.
[86] Jean Tonnelé, *L'Angleterre en Méditerranée* (Paris, 1952), p. 68.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

out, in just one such history, the Mediterranean was never a major theatre of the Napoleonic wars.[87] Nonetheless, at strategic points in the Mediterranean, of which Algiers was one, France and Britain competed.

In this same Mediterranean there were other actors who also played a role in determining events and outcomes. It is at the level of the consular correspondence that we find Joseph Bacri and Naphtali Busnach. When we place the letters of different, competing consuls alongside one another, then Joseph and Naphtali tell a different story of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in the Mediterranean. They take us outside state to state – or, in this context, state vs state – relationships on the ground, and offer a focal point for this contest. The shared obsession and conviction on the part of both the French and British consuls that the two were not only inordinately powerful, but also working for the cause of the other, give us insight into how interactions on the ground could not only nuance our understanding of state to state relations, but also offer a view of the imperial contest – connectedness – from the outside in. We can see 'all levels of life and work that affected the process of decision-making':[88] how, in the regency of Algiers, the contest was determined by circumstances – or perceptions of those circumstances – on the ground. Each power devoted precious resources in war to blocking the other. Each was convinced that they needed to destroy the other's influence so as to access precious resources, but both were limited by the sense of what they could not achieve: France could not block the appointment of a new British consul; Britain could not prevent Falcon's expulsion, nor insist on his return. As middlemen in what Joshua Meeks called 'the negotiable spaces', away from centres of power, the Bacris and Busnachs made clear French and British perceptions of the limits of their power.[89]

The Bacris and Busnachs shine light on the imperial contest between France and Britain in Algiers, but they also mediated it. They were not national players, but played for very different stakes. The way in which they both hindered and helped French and British national projects in Algiers, and, importantly, the ways in which they were perceived to be doing so, throw these projects – and the contest – into sharp relief. Through the contest, France and Britain were busy defining themselves. The insight of Sir Lewes Roberts, a ship's captain and merchant with the Levant Company in the seventeenth century, holds true: 'imperial power was grounded first and before the use of any cannons or swords on *the mere knowledge of their nation* abroad'.[90] As France and Britain competed in this far-off place, they came to know themselves as imperial powers. It is in this sense that this story engages with the work of Bayly and

[87] Mackesy, *War in the Mediterranean*, p. viii.
[88] Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte, 'Introduction: the diplomat's world', in Mösslang and Riotte, eds., *Diplomat's world*, pp. 1–22, at p. 20.
[89] Meeks, *France, Britain, and the struggle for the revolutionary western Mediterranean*, p. 2.
[90] Cited in Zwierlein, *Imperial unknowns*, p. 113, emphasis in original.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Todd. The sense of national identity was formed not only in the metropole but also on the periphery, in imperial projects and failures, as well as in the contests that took place there.

The Bacris and Busnachs were not typical. We cannot extrapolate from them to generalize about trading Jews, or even about traders more generally. Arguably, no other middlemen in the Ottoman empire held the same significance for would-be imperial powers. Nonetheless, their example should encourage us to seek the stories that come to us from the correspondence of those on the ground. We should descend to their level, and follow their interactions with all sorts of figures on a daily basis. We should be prepared to find Jews in these stories, too, or to find that they give shape, a name, and a personality to an otherwise anonymous figure such as the dey Mustapha. In the micro-story of the unfortunate John Falcon's humiliation, the histories of international relations, diplomacy, and connected imperialism in this time and place are brought together. At the level of the intimate, of daily exchanges in the regency with a significant go-between, national narratives were given shape and imperial projects were formed.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press