B3. Barbary Coast Pirates and the Republic of Salé, 17th Century

From the 16th-19th centuries, piracy was endemic along the ‘Barbary Coast,’ stretches of the southern Mediterranean and North Africa’s northern Atlantic Coast, named ‘Barbary’ by Europeans because of the Berber inhabitants of the area. In these areas – partly Ottoman-controlled, others Moroccan – Muslim pirates carried out raids against European shipping and coastal areas. They captured both material goods and human beings. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of European Christians were captured and enslaved.

In the 17th century, some of these pirates operated out of Salé and Rabat, adjoining Moroccan cities along the Atlantic Coast of northern Africa. Many of these pirates were ‘Moriscos,’ Spanish Muslims who had been expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614. Many were angry at being driven from their homes by Christians. They took the opportunity to get revenge and regain financial security by plundering Spanish ships and land, taking captives and seizing goods. (Unlike pirates in other parts of the ‘Barbary’ coast, these pirates focused mainly on attacks against Spain.) From about 1624 until 1668, Salé formed an independent republic before being once again incorporated into Morocco.

Assignment: Imagine you are living in Salé in 1628. Write 2 diary entries, each at least one double-spaced page long. Choose names for your characters that are authentic. Also, include at least 5 facts or factual details drawn from the history/ geography of the area. (Be sure to look up additional information in addition to the information found in this reading.) Underline the pieces of information you include in each of your diary entries.

-- In one diary entry, you are a pirate whose family was forced out of Spain in 1614 when you were a child. (Look up the expulsion of Muslims from Spain.) What are your goals as a pirate? How do you feel toward your captives? What is your city like, and why are you proud to be part of it?

-- In another diary entry, you are a Spanish captive who is brought to Salé to work as a servant in the home of a family who had been driven out of Spain in 15 years earlier. How do you feel about your new life? What would you miss the most about your previous one? What do you have in common with the family in whose home you work, and in what ways are they different from you?