The Moriscos in France after the Expulsion

Notes for the History of a Minority

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The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain did not pass unnoticed among those living at the time, not only in Muslim countries but also in Christian ones like France, which would come to play, very unwillingly, a secondary role in the tragedy.

Cardinal Richelieu, in his memoirs, mentions the event in the year 1610. In four pages he offers us the view of an outsider who, though he was not yet leading the country – he would become the all-powerful prime minister and favourite of Louis XIII from 1624 to 1642 – seems to have been very well informed and aware of the Moriscos’ history (although he would inflate, like

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1 Luis F. Bernabé Pons, “Notas sobre la cohesión de la comunidad morisca más allá de su expulsión de España,” *Al-Qanṭara* 29–2 (2008), 307–332, esp. 7–8. We can illustrate the concern of the Ottoman authorities for the fate of the exiled Moriscos with this description of an embarkation of Moriscos at Agde under the supervision of an Ottoman ambassador: “All these Moriscos are naturally sly, using all sorts of frauds, tricks and subversions: they put no trust in strangers and show little charity to one another. The Sieur d’Augier was well aware of this at Agde, where the largest embarkation took place. Hachy-Ybrahim Mutafaracca, the deputy ambassador of the Grand Turk in France, arrived there in early August to observe the conditions under which the said Moriscos were being deported; and having witnessed the embarkation of four thousand of them, and learned of the good treatment that they all had received from the officers of His Most Christian Majesty, he departed for Barbary to give orders for their reception there” (“Tous ces Morisques sont naturellement subtils, usans de toutes sortes de fraudes, de supercheries et trahisons: ils ne gardent point la foy aux estrangers, sont peu charitables entre eux-mêmes: ce que le sieur d’Augier reconût assez à Agde où le plus grand embarquement s’est fait: et où au commencement du mois d’Aoust arriva Hachy-Ybrahim Mutafaracca député Ambassadeur du grand Turc en France, pour apprendre l’estat de l’embarquement desdits Morisques, lequel ayant veu embarquer quatre mil d’iceux, et appris le bon traitement que tous en général avoient receu des commissaires de sa Majesté très chrestienne, il s’en alla en Barbarie donner ordre à les y faire recevoir”): in Pierre D’Avity, *Les estats, empires, royaumes et principautez du monde* (Geneve: J.A.&S. de Tournes), 1665, 145. See also Gerard Wiegers, who notes “the growing tendency in the Ottoman policies noticed by al-Hajarî in Paris: to consider them [the Moriscos] Ottoman subjects in need of and entitled to protection”: in “Managing Disaster: Networks of the Moriscos during the Process of the Expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula around 1609,” *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 36–2 (2010), 151.
many others, the number of the expelled, placing it at 800,000). For Richelieu, what took place in 1610 was “the most rash and barbarous advice that the history of all previous centuries has recorded”: he refers, of course, to the Expulsion of the Moriscos, who, he claims, were cast out of their native country after having been abused, despised and treated as slaves. He compares this Expulsion or transmigration to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, concluding that the fate of the Moriscos was even more cruel: for whereas the Jews had asked to be allowed to return to their own land, the Moriscos were being expelled from theirs:

We can count more than eight hundred thousand of these people, so that this transmigration was no less than that of the Jews from Egypt; there being however these two differences between the two, that in the first case the Hebrews forced the Egyptians to let them leave, while in the second the Moriscos were forced to depart; in the first, the Hebrews left a foreign land in order to sacrifice to God and arrived in a fertile one that had been promised to them, while in the second the Moriscos left their native land to pass into an unknown one where they would have to live as strangers, and in great danger of abandoning the true worship of God.

In a climate of hostility between the two powers, this would be an occasion for France, “which is famed in all the world as a refuge for the afflicted,” to show its generosity and piety by welcoming those who professed the Catholic faith and facilitating passage to Islamic lands for those who preferred to cleave to their ancestral religion.2

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2 “Le plus hardi et le plus barbare conseil dont l’histoire de tous les siècles précédents fasse mention”; “On fait compte de plus de huit cent mille de ces gens; de sorte que cette transmigration ne fut pas moindre que celle des Juifs hors d’Égypte; y ayant toutefois ces deux différences entre les deux, qu’en celle-là les hébreux contraignirent les Egyptiens de les laisser aller, en celle-ci les Morisques sont contraints de sortir; en celle-là les Hébreux s’en vont d’une terre étrangère pour sacrifier à Dieu, et passer en une abondante qui leur étoit promise; en celle-ci les Morisques sortent de leur pays natal pour passer en une terre inconnue, où ils doivent vivre comme étrangers, non sans grand hasard d’abandonner le vrai culte de Dieu”; “[la France], qui est réputée par tout le monde l’asile des affligés”: “Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu,” edited by M. Petitot in Collection des mémoires relatifs à l’Histoire de France, XXI (Paris: Foucault), 1823, 231–234: [231] “Nonetheless before this year [1610] is over, I cannot help but mention that it produced in Spain the most rash and barbarous advice that the history of all previous centuries has recorded, one that gave France the opportunity to give proof of both its humanity and its piety.”