Sixty years ago, Fernand Braudel intuited in his epochal study of the Mediterranean in the age of Philip II that the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires were intimately interdependent, but scholars have been slow to follow up on his suggestion. As a phenomenon that straddled the boundaries between these two empires in the early modern Mediterranean, the Expulsion of the Moriscos from the Iberian Peninsula between 1609 and 1614 and their subsequent dispersion across Europe, North Africa and the Ottoman Empire represents a research topic of particular interest in this context. Nevertheless, to this day, the study of the Moriscos’ plight before and after Expulsion continues to be the exclusive concern of historians of the early modern Iberian Peninsula, with little engagement by historians from other related fields. In a world where the nation-state framework for the study of history still reigns supreme despite advances in theory of history of empires and migrations, the Moriscos, especially in their diasporic manifestations, figure as an elusive trans-national and trans-imperial phenomenon which historians outside the field of “Spanish” history have been slow to claim as a subject of research.

Studies of relations between the Moriscos and the Ottomans, the key imperial rival of the Spanish Habsburgs and the polity that Moriscos were accused of secretly supporting as an insidious “fifth column” before their Expulsion from Spain, are particularly few and far between. Until recently, most of what
was known about Ottoman-Morisco relations concerned early contacts between Spanish Muslims and the Ottoman-sponsored Barbary corsairs in the Western Mediterranean following the fall of Granada, as well as mostly abortive plans on the part of the Ottoman Sultans Süleyman (1520–1566) and Selim II (1566–1574) to provide more decisive military support for the embattled Moriscos as part of the Ottoman bid for military and religious supremacy in the Western Mediterranean. This research was later expanded to include the epoch of Sultan Ahmet I (1603–1617), during whose reign the Expulsion transpired, and demonstrated that the Ottoman sultan aimed to ease the hardships of the refugees by sending letters to different European sovereigns asking for the Moriscos’ safe passage as well as by ordering tax breaks for the refugees who decided to settle in Tunis, Algiers and Anatolia. In recent years this information has been supplemented by further documents, both imperial commands and records from the imperial registers of important affairs which document a more extensive Ottoman engagement than previously surmised with the plight of the Spanish Muslims, despite the ultimate failure to provide substantial armed assistance.

