

ARNOLDO SOLER

CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES D'ESPAGNE A TUNIS

ET SA CORRESPONDANCE

1808-1810

THÈSE POUR LE DOCTORAT

PRÉSENTÉE A LA FACULTÉ DES LETTRES DE PARIS

PAR

GASTON LOTH

ANCIEN ÉLÈVE DE LA FACULTÉ DES LETTRES

PROFESSEUR AU LYCÉE DE TUNIS



TUNIS

SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME DE L'IMPRIMERIE RAPIDE

rue d'Alger, vis-à-vis de la Résidence Générale

—
1905

To the President of the Supreme Junta of the Government in Madrid

Tunis, October 9, 1808.

Soler supposes that the President received some of the letters that he has addressed, by different vessels, Mahon, Marseilles, Alicante, to Don Pedro Cevallos. - I await, he says, new orders. I have made known to the Minister of State that the Spanish corsair *Il Buen Vassalo*, armed in Mahon, commanded by the owner Francesco de la Torre, captured and took to Sfax, a port of the Regency, the following boats:

The English tartane *Oloferna*, captured on June 28;

Another English tartane captured on July 2, without its crew, nor its messages;

An English brigantine, *Galateo*, taken on the 3rd;

A English bombardier, *Calypso*, taken on the 4th;

The aforesaid Spanish corsair having left again, took, jointly with a French corsair, two boats bound for Malta carrying the banner of Jerusalem.

I also delivered the advice that another polacre, bearing the flag of Jerusalem, taken on July 27, has arrived, and that the Spanish corsair *El San Sébastian*, armed in Mahon, commanded by the owner Miguel Soliveras, also brought to Tunis a Sardinian bombardier which was taken the 18th of the same month, on its departure from Malta.

In accordance with the intentions of the Government and in completion of the obligations which fell to me, I gave a copy of the dispatches found on these prizes, by asking for precise orders on the conduct to observe in similar circumstance with neutral boats.

p44 While I proceeded, at the Consulate, with the public auction of the goods which composed the cargo of the captured English boats - which for lack of new policies I regarded as enemies and prone to confiscation, according to the instructions contained in your preceding letters – there arrived directly from Malta an English boat bringing news of the suspension of hostilities between Spain and Great Britain.

The English consul communicated to me at once the information that he had received and at the same time claimed the ships and the English goods captured and brought here by the Spanish corsairs. ⁽¹⁾

Considering that I was not to give a solution to this business, without authorization from the government of which I have the honor to depend, I answered the English consul in this manner, adding that, in prudence, until the time when receive the orders of Your Excellency, I would retain the cargo of the English boats, ready however to immediately conform to whatever would be required of me on this subject.

(1) The initiative of rapprochement with England came from the insurrectionary Junta of Asturias. On May 30, 1808, two commissioners of the Junta, Don Andres Angel de Vega and the Viscount of Matarossa, Count of Toreno. left Dijon for London. Arriving in Falmouth on June 6, the Spanish deputies were directed by carriage to London with an English naval officer. They have an interview with the secretary of the admiralty, Mr. Wellesley Pool, and, a little later, with Canning.

On June 12. Canning wrote to the deputies: "The king orders me to ensure Your Lordships that Its Majesty sees with the most active interest the loyal and courageous determination of the principality of Asturias, against the atrocious usurpation by France, to sustain a fight in favour of the restoration and independence of Spanish monarchy. His Majesty is also disposed to grant any type support and assistance to an uprising so magnanimous and so worthy of praise. The king orders me to declare to Your Lordships that His Majesty is ready has to extend his support to all the other parts of the Spanish monarchy which to show themsleves animated by same spirit as the inhabitants of Asturias."

On June 15, a discussion on this subject opened at the English Parliament. Sheridan made a speech in favour of the Spanish insurrectionists.

Finally. on July 1, a solemn declaration of His British Majesty restored the old alliance between Spain and England. It is this declaration of which the English consul in Tunis has informed Soler.

The peace treaty and alliance was signed on January 9, 1809. In virtue of this diplomatic act, England engaged itself to assist the Spaniards with all its capacity and not to recognize another king of Spain and of the Indies besides Ferdinand VII and his legitimate heirs and successors recognized by the Spanish nation. It committed moreover to provide subsidies to Spain for the duration of the war.

V. Toreno: Op.cit., vol. I, p.183-186, and particularly vol. II, p. 276-277.

(pp. 46-48)

To the President of the Supreme Junta

Tunis, October 9, 1808.

The invariable system of this government, to seize the wealth that, by tolerance, it allows to accumulate in the hands of some people, provides it with an infallible means to carry out its projects whilst preserving some appearance of justice.

One of the most effective means is that relating to the revenues of the customs of Regency. Under the pretext of supporting some particular rich person, the bey cedes the customs to them by means of an annual price which is not less than 250,000 piastres, ⁽²⁾ basing its calculations on what the imports can give, in semblance of the political state of Europe.

p47 It is thus that for three years, until last September, the caïd of Sfax, Mohamed Djellouli, a distinguished subject that the bey does not fail to recognize, has been the customs officer. The interruption of the traffic of places like Marseilles ⁽³⁾ and Leghorn ⁽⁴⁾ with the Regency has reduced to almost nothing the duties charged for importation during the preceding years, so that the customs officer has born considerable losses of this sole chief.

Footnotes (p. 46) :

(1) Hadji Younès Ben Younès was a Tunisian notary, a right-hand man of the Minister of Justice, but not Minister of Justice himself, as Mr. Plantet says: Op cit., vol. III, p.481.

(2) That is to say 150,000 francs, the Tunisian piastre being worth 0.60 fr.

(3) This interruption was the consequence of the rigour with which the orders were applied relating to the continental blockade. The French Consul made known to the minister Champagny by a letter dated June 17, 1808 that the subjects of the bey are disposed to renew their relations with Marseilles as soon as they will no longer fear the confiscation to which they were exposed by the visit of an English corsair. On this point of he thus asks for a modification the imperial decree of December 17. (Plantet: *Corr. Beys Tunis*, vol. III, p. 174, 177, 181 etc.)

(4) Leghorn being in the hands of France, the situation was thus exactly the same. The Tunisian trade suffered much from it, because for many years the commercial relations between this port and the Regency were well developed. (See Paul MASSON: *Histoire des Etablissements et du Commerce français dont l'Afrique Barbaresque* (1560-1793), p.91.)

Envisaging that he was going to be ruined, he refused the bey to continue his charge of this tax farming, pleading as reason the suspension of the import trade and, moreover, the damage undergone because the fees which previously were obligatorily paid by the Tuscans, Genoese and Greeks of the Seven Islands ⁽¹⁾ were no longer being charged, since they now claimed to owe the 3% as French subjects ⁽²⁾.

The bey, seeing himself obliged to give the responsibility itself to perceive the incomes of the customs, thought at once of the means of which it could use not to have to suffer in its interests.

First was to declare to the French Consul that he could not recognize as French subjects the Greeks of the Seven Isles and that those would pay the customs duties like the subjects of the Great Lord, that is to say, like the Tunisians.

p48 ⁽³⁾ The consuls of England and France remarked to him that they did not have the authority to agree to such an innovation and that they had to await the orders of their respective governments.

The bey replied that he would not contravene any article of the peace treaties and that he would not collect more more than the established duty, namely 3% for Europeans, but evaluated at the current price that the goods had today and not while

conforming to the old tariff, whose fixed prices for each item were much lower than the current prices, which caused an unjust loss to the customs farmer.

Footnotes : (p47)

(1) Ionian islands.

(2) Letter of consul Devoize to the count de Champagny. Tunis, October 23, 1807. Devoize resists the claim of the bey and his chief customs officer to demand 10% duty to the Genoan imports. The Genoese have become French and must pay only 3%. (Plantet: Op.cit., vol. III, p. 172.) - The Minister approves this in the matter of the customs duties imposed on the Genoese. (Plantet: Op.cit., vol. III, p. 173.) - Shortly afterwards the customs officer desists from his claim to collect duty of 10% on goods coming from the Genoan river. (Plantet. Op.cit., vol. III, p. 176.) - It is then that he warns the bey of his refusal to take the customs farm and that he sees himself obliged to make them govern for his account.

(3) This tariff had been stopped on February 7, 1753. It was increased to the proportions indicated in the table below:

Merchandise	Price of the old tarif	Actual price in the Market serving as the new tarif
Coffee	50 piastres a quintal	200 piastres a quintal
Sugar	28 - -	100 - -
Cloves	100 - -	600 - -
Cochineal	12 - a book	45 - -
London Sheets ('Draps londrins')	75 - la pièce	225 - -
Wire	200 - -	600 - -
Iron in bars	12 - a quintal	30 - -
Spanish wool	180 - -	500 - -
Silk handkerchiefs	128 - a douzaine	21 - -
Nutmegs	5 - a book	14 - -
Grey paper ('Papiers gris'), 12 reams	20 - -	50 - -
Loaf sugar	358 - a quintal	115 - -
Sarsaparilla	1 p. ½ - a book	5 - -
Saffron	10 piastres -	40 - -
Sulphur in barrels	7 - a quintal	15 - -
Tartar	14 - -	40 - -
Verdet	100 - -	400 - -
Vermillion	320 - -	900 - -

Plantet: Op.cit., vol. III, p. 177-178.

And that is how the change of tariff was carried out, and, in the meantime, whether one could accommodate himself or not, orders were given so that the import duties in the Regency are collected in this way.

Being given the content of article 23 of our peace treaty, ⁽¹⁾ stipulating that the Spaniards will have to pay the same rights as the French or as the most favoured nation of Tunis, I believed that it was not my place to protest or participate in the discussion on this subject which the bey had with the consuls appointed above.

I limit myself to making known to you the intentions of the bey and the way in which they have been carried out, requesting you to address to me instructions on the conduct to maintain in a similar occurrence.

Footnotes : (p48)

This treaty was signed between Spain and Tunisia in January 1791. The article 23 says... The Spaniards will avoid, in Tunis, for the objects that they bring from Spain, the same duties which the French will avoid, with the distinction between the goods of Spain which will be imported on Spanish ships, for which one will have to pay as many percent of customs duty as is paid by the French merchants when they import objects which are not from France. In the same way one will have to pay the same as the French for the goods which are not from Spain and would be imported on ships of another nation. (Rousseau: Tunisian annals, p. 473) - For the conditions in which this treaty was signed by Spain, which made on this occasion a gift of 230,000 strong piastres to the bey, see Plantet: Op cit. vol. III, p. 167 and 177.

(pp. 50-51)

To Don Pedro Cevallos

Tunis, November 15, 1808.

I received a letter from the general consul of His Majesty in the Regency of Tripoli of Barbary, relating to the brigantine *Messaoud*, carrying the banner of the bey, captured and brought to Sfax by the Spanish corsair *Il Buen Vasallo*, owned by Franceseo de Torre, of which I had the honor to mention to you in my letter of last July 12.

Here are the contents of the letter from Tripoli: "In reference to your letter of last July 20, containing the arrest and conviction of the brigantine, sailing under the Tripolitanian banner and pass, which was taken by one of our corsairs, and under the terms of that of which you have shared with me, I informed the bey that the true owner had misled him, that he did not have his correct documents, that you had discovered it since, that you had found proof by the declaration of the captain himself and the Maltese sailors who were on board and, moreover, by all the documents that you found there. The result was a right judgment as a good prize. The prince had not recognized the truth of the fact and, in consequence, he wants everything to be concluded quietly after it was regularly passed.

"I think that you made known of this fact to our chief, to which I also explained why I had given to this brigantine a licence and a certificate."

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