

MOROCCO, "CRADLE" OF THE MISSION OF THE TRINITARIAN ORDER

Conference at the International Assembly of the Trinitarian Family 2023

It has been said and repeated, with good reason, that the format of this International Assembly of the Trinitarian Family is novel. It is so because of its itinerant form: in these days, this group of people belonging to different institutes or fraternities of the Trinitarian Family are going to make a journey that follows the same itinerary of one of the ancient redemptions of captives. In this way we recall a fundamental fact of our history, namely that our charism and mission have required us to be itinerant men and women on a journey. And on a journey that goes beyond the cultural and religious limits of the Christian, Western, European world. More than the geographical distance, more than the kilometres that separate the different cities we will visit, what has made the world from which we come and the world we will visit distant in past centuries (and perhaps still today) has been diversity, which has not infrequently been the cause of confrontation and hostility in the past. I believe it is very opportune, at this moment and in this Assembly, to recall the great call that the Holy Father, Francis, makes to Christians and to all people of good will, to build fraternity and social friendship.

This is the theme - as we know - of the encyclical "Fratelli tutti" (good background reading for this Assembly), where the Pope, taking into account precisely the journey that St. Francis made to the East, during which he met the Sultan, "**invites us to a love that goes beyond the barriers of geography and space**". We too must seek "**the essence of an open fraternity, which allows us to recognise, value and love each person beyond physical proximity, beyond the place in the universe where he or she was born or where he or she lives.**" (FT 1).

We are going to Morocco. Morocco is one of the places of the origins of the Trinitarian Order, on a par with Cerfroid, Rome and so many other places linked to the memory of our Founder and the early days of our Order and Family. We will recall the letter of presentation of Innocent III in favour of the nascent Order for the Redemption of captives, and the journey in which St. John of Mata brought such an exceptional document to its addressee. We will mention the milestones that make Morocco one of the main destinations of the activity of the Redeemers, precisely because it was a place of redemption of captives, and we will evoke how those journeys were made and how the redemptions were carried out. Finally, we will try to satisfy the desire of many of the participants in this Assembly by explaining something of the redemption of the image of the Rescued Jesus of Nazareth, the most typical Christological devotion of our Order - and one that marks many Trinitarian confraternities and brotherhoods in a special way - and whose origin was precisely in the redemption that the Discalced Trinitarians carried out in Morocco in 1682.

1. MOROCCO IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE TRINITARIAN ORDER

As we know, the Trinitarian Order was founded in 1193 by Saint John de Mata, with its first house in Cerfroid, in the diocese of Meaux. In 1198, after the election of Innocent III, the Founder presented himself to the Pope on at least two occasions, the first in May, obtaining a first bull of confirmation of the Order, which he placed under the tutelage of

the papacy, and the second in December, when he approved the Rule of Life of the Trinitarians.

Less than three months after the approval of the Rule, that is, on 8 March 1199, Pope Innocent III granted St John of Mata an exceptional document for the history of the Church and for the relations between Christianity and Islam. It is a letter entitled "Inter opera misericordiae", the text of which is known to us in its entirety because it is preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Archives (Vatican Register, volume 4, folio 148). The letter is addressed to Miramamolín, King of Morocco; Miramamolín is a term in classical Spanish which does not indicate the name of a person, but a title to refer to the caliph, and which comes from the Arabic "amir al-mu'minín" (= "Prince of the faithful" or "Prince of the believers") which still corresponds today to King Mohammed VI of Morocco. In this letter, entrusted to the Trinitarian religious to be delivered by hand, Innocent III praises their activity and recommends to the Muslim sovereign to favour the rescue of Christian captives, either by paying the corresponding money or by exchanging them for Muslim captives.

“Innocent, servant of the servants of God. To the illustrious Miramamolín (Miramolino), King of Morocco and his subjects: may they come to the knowledge of the truth and may they remain in it in good health.

Among the works of mercy which our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to his faithful in the Gospel, the redemption of captives occupies a place - and not the least - and we must therefore grant apostolic favour to those persons who are engaged in such works. Some men, among whom are the bearers of this letter, divinely inspired, have recently founded a Rule and an Order, by whose statutes they are to employ, for the redemption of captives, the third part of all their goods, both of those which they now have and those which they may obtain in the future. And as, in order to better accomplish their purpose, it is often easier for them to be released from the dungeons of captivity by commutation than by ransom, they are permitted to redeem heathen captives from the power of Christians, who are then to be commuted to free Christians. And since the work which we have set forth suits both Christians and heathens, we have determined to communicate this to you by means of an apostolic letter.

May He who is the way, the truth and the life, inspire you that, knowing the truth, which is Christ, you may hasten to Him as soon as possible. Given at the Lateran on the 8th March, in the second year of our pontificate”.

Tradition and good sense affirm that it was St. John of Mata himself who personally brought the letter to the Miramamolín. This was Abi Abdalah ben el-Manzur, called "en-Nazer Lidinilah" (=the defender of the Law of God), also known as "the Green" because of the colour of his dressing gown. He was proclaimed king on 17 January 1199, the day after the death of his father, Ya'qub al-Mansur (who built the Giralda of Seville). A few days after his proclamation he went on a campaign against the Ghumara or Ghomara tribe (the original native tribe of the Strait of Gibraltar), who had revolted. From there he went to Fez, where he had the citadel and walls rebuilt; Fez seems to have been his place of residence until 1202, when he went to Mallorca, which was still in the possession of the Almoravids, and conquered it, and also subdued Ibiza and Menorca. This Balearic campaign lasted until 1205. It is therefore quite possible that Saint John of Mata met the

Miramamolín in Fez, the city we are going to visit. But in Fez "the Old", which was founded in 808 by Muley Edris, a descendant of Muhammad, who made it the capital of his kingdom and moved his court there, which until then had resided in Ualili. The new Fez was founded in 1276 by Abu Yusef ben-Abd el Hakk. When Juan de Mata visited the Miramamolín, Fez was one of the most remarkable cities in the Muslim world for its universities and schools (the other main cities of medieval Morocco, which we will visit, were Marrakesh and Meknes). Marrakesh, founded in 1062, was enlarged and embellished at the end of the 11th century and 30,000 captives were made to work in it. At the end of the 12th century it was again enlarged by Yakub al-Mansur, who spent a lot of money and employed a multitude of Christian slaves. Llona supposes that it was in Marrakesh that the meeting).

Juan de Mata could well have arrived in the presence of the King of Morocco, taking advantage of the journey made there by King Sancho VII of Navarre. It was precisely in 1199 that this king went to Morocco to ask for help from the Miramamolín against the kings of Castile and Aragon, with whom he was at war, and he stayed there for some time. The power of Abi Abdallah ben Al Mansur, as head of the Almohad empire, included southern Spain and a good part of the Maghreb. Therefore, although Juan de Mata was able to see the Christian captives in other places, especially in southern Spain, it was certainly on this journey that he had the opportunity to experience first-hand the drama of captivity and very possibly carried out a redemption, which some tradition claims to be the first in the history of our Order. "In the kingdom of Miramamolín there are many Christian captives", said Pope Honorius III (successor of Innocent), and certainly they were very abundant when the Holy Founder visited Morocco, coming - especially - from the wars promoted in the Iberian Peninsula by Yaqub Al Mansur, remembering the great human booty made in the battle of Alarcos and in the later razzias that the Almohad troops made through Extremadura, the valley of the Tagus, La Mancha and the area closest to the city of Toledo.

2. Morocco, a destination for the redemption of captives in the Middle and Modern Ages

For obvious reasons, Morocco has been one of the main destinations for the redemptions of Christian captives by the Trinitarian Order, from the origin of the Order until the disappearance of the redemptive activity in its most traditional form, in the second half of the 18th century.

The French Trinitarians, in the Middle Ages, carried out redemptions in southern Spain and in the Holy Land, and from the 16th century onwards in Algiers, Tunis, the Ottoman Empire, and also in Morocco in the 18th century, in the cities of Meknes, Tangier, Fez, Mogador and Safi (Atlantic coast) where they ransomed all the French captives in Morocco in 1767..

The Trinitarians of the Spanish provinces redeemed in the south of Spain, Morocco, Algiers and Tunis. In the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, where we have abundant and precise documentation, the redemptions took place above all in Vélez de la Gomera, in Fez, in Tetouan, when they were in Morocco (the activity was more intense in Algiers and Tunis, where the Province of Castile had hospitals). Diego Vallejo and Miguel Díaz,

who were poisoned to death in 1642 for having converted a Jew from Tetuan to Catholicism.

The Trinitarians of the Portuguese Province ransomed mainly in the kingdom of Granada, in Algiers and in Morocco. The Portuguese made redemptions in Marrakech, Fez, Tetouan and Mazagan (Jadida, near Casablanca). It should be remembered that they founded the convent of Ceuta in 1568, occupying the Franciscan convent; it then passed to the Spanish Discalced. Ceuta was very important in the history of the redemptions, as was Tangiers, a city conquered in 1464 by Alfonso V of Portugal, who gave a sumptuous building to the Franciscans to found a convent; their mosque was turned into a church, dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua. In 1568, the Trinitarians requested and obtained this convent from King Sebastian, and the Franciscans left for Portugal. They wanted the convent for the redemption of captives. In 1574, the Portuguese Trinitarians exchanged the convent in Tangiers for that of the Dominicans in Ceuta. Therefore, they stayed in Tangiers for 6 years.

It is worth recalling a notable episode in the history of Portugal, which took place in Morocco and in which the Trinitarian Order played an obvious role. I am referring to the battle of Alcazarquivir, in 1578, in which King Sebastian died. The Portuguese Trinitarians were in charge of rescuing the numerous Christian captives, and were distributed throughout Morocco (there are reports that they were in Melilla, which was already under Spanish sovereignty). Four fathers were charged with rescuing the body of King Sebastian and 8 nobles. On 4 December 1578, Fr Roque del Espíritu Santo received the king's body in Ceuta, which rested in the Trinitarian convent until its transfer to Portugal in 1580, being buried in the convent of Belén. In those circumstances, some friars died in Morocco; some remained as hostages in exchange for captives, with two friars dying in Marrakech, one in Fez, two in Tetuan and one in Alcazarquivir.

As for the Discalced, we recall that in 1609 they began to separate the *tertia pars*, in accordance with the agreement of the second provincial chapter of the reform. They were strongly opposed by the Calzados and the Mercedarians, who did not want their status as redeemers of captives to be recognised. In 1617 the first redeemer, Fr. Jerónimo de San Juan, was elected. The first redemption took place in 1625, precisely in Morocco, in Tetouan, where 52 captives were rescued. The Discalced of the Spanish provinces made ransoms in Algiers and in Morocco, that is to say, in Larache, Tangier, Alcazarquivir, Salé, and above all in Tetouan.

It is worth remembering an ill-fated episode of founding hospitals for captives in Fez and Tetouan. Don Pedro Antonio de Aragón (Lucena 1611-Madrid 1690), who was viceroy of Catalonia and later of Naples, ambassador to Rome, etc., founded the hospitals of Fez and Tetouan, which he endowed with 40,000 reals per annum each. Friar Juan de San Agustín obtained from King Muley Ismail (1672-1727) permission to found the two hospitals, in which the Christian captives were cured. The friars bought the houses in property. The one in Fez was inaugurated on 28 January 1677, under the name of the Hospital of Jesus and Mary. President: Fr. Diego de San Bernardo, with Fr. Juan de Jesús y María and Brother Francisco de San Miguel, surgeon and expert in pharmacy. The one in Tetouan was inaugurated on 25.3.1677, Hospital de Nuestra Señora de los Afligidos. President, P. Juan Bautista del Santísimo Sacramento, P. Andrés de San José and Fray

Miguel. In the hospitals 2 masses were celebrated in the morning, in the afternoon there was a rosary and a talk... The Moors demanded so many taxes that they had to close the two hospitals in 1682, opening another hospital in Ceuta with their assets..

The Discalced Friars of the Austrian and Polish Provinces redeemed captives in the Ottoman Empire, and the Italians bought captives in Algiers, Tunis and the Empire, although there are reports of 3 captives bought in Morocco by the convent of Livorno (1766) and another 5 bought by San Carlino in 1764.

3. HOW A REDEMPTION OF CAPTIVES DEVELOPED (The Redemption of 1630, Seville-Gibraltar, Tetouan).

Since we are evoking the journeys of Redemption with our pilgrimage in the footsteps of the ancient redeemers of captives, it is good to tell how a redemption took place according to our itinerary. Often the starting point of the expedition was Seville, because this city was the economic capital of Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries, because it was the main city of southern Spain (in proximity to the places of redemption) and because the Real Convento de la Trinidad Calzada was one of the largest and most capable of the Order, where the Redeemers could comfortably arrange the heavy luggage they would take to North Africa. Moreover, many of the Redemption's bureaucratic formalities were carried out in Seville. Contrary to what one might think and what is often depicted, the payment of the captives was not made in cash, but in kind, in goods, whose commercial value was taken into account by both parties. In Seville, it was possible to buy directly (wholesale) or to receive consignments of goods that had been ordered, and it was possible to obtain exemption from customs duties, which was a frequent source of headaches for the redeemers.

When it came to Morocco, the Trinitarians used to return to Gibraltar, then proceed via Jerez to Seville, where the procession of captives was made and they were sent off, with alms and a certificate or *cédula*. The discalced men learned the form, and did practically the same thing; only in the redemption of 1669 did they go to Malaga, where they were sent off with alms and a certificate or *cédula*.

In order not to speak generically, we take into account a specific example, that of the Redemption of Captives carried out in 1630 by the Trinitarians of Castile and Andalusia, in which 85 captives were rescued in Tetuan, and whose itinerary coincides - in part - with ours. The three redeeming fathers met in Seville; they had previously bought part of the merchandise they were to take to Tetouan, consisting of cloth (coloured cloths from Nieva, 66 rods) and 192 dozen bonetes (about 2,300), which a muleteer was to take to Seville, weighing 59 arrobas (= about 700 kilos). In Cordoba they collected goods from the redemption of captives, in cash, which amounted to 20,000 reales, and weighed 95 arrobas (=1,092 kilos). In Seville they exchanged 43,000 reales de vellón (=copper) for silver coin. And they bought the main merchandise that was to be used to ransom captives: leaf tobacco from Santo Domingo, "as it is the merchandise that has the best outlet in Barbary and is the most profitable". In total, they bought 5,699 pounds of tobacco (about 2,600 kilos)..

On 15 March they went to the Customs Office to ask for a licence to take up to 6,000 pounds of tobacco out of the city, but the Administrator told them that he would not give them a licence until they paid the corresponding taxes. The redeemers exhibited the documents in which the kings exempted the redemption of captives from the payment of duties in ports, customs and portages. The Administrator demanded a bond, on account of express documents for that important consignment of tobacco.

On 23 March the 3 Redeemers left Seville and arrived in Gibraltar on the 26th. They asked the corregidor of the city to order four beacons of fire to be built on the Rock of Gibraltar so that Ceuta would know they were there and send them a ship to pass to Ceuta. The next day, the customs authorities examined all the merchandise they were carrying, and they paid the due amount to obtain permission to embark for Ceuta. Due to bad weather, they had to wait until 9 April, when they were able to sail to Ceuta.

After complicated negotiations over the number of captives to be ransomed and the price, the deal was that the men would be paid 2,000 reals each, and the children 3,000, paying one third in real coins, one third in bonetes and one third in tobacco.

On 4 June they arrived in Tetouan, after travelling by boat and on horseback. They visited quite a few of the captives who were to be freed; they were gathered in an orchard, and the friars saw them "loaded with chains and other different prisons". The Redeemers asked that their chains be removed "with the assurance that if they fled, it would be on the account of the said Redeemers; and if they died, on the account of Cid Abdullah". They agreed to buy 75 captives, who were in the hands of Muslims and Jews, giving the owners a certificate for the amount, as payment would be made in Ceuta, where the money and goods were located.

On the 25th, the payment of the ransom was made in Ceuta to Abdalá's emissaries: 20 arrobas of the best tobacco, 192 dozen bonetes, 105 pieces of caniquies (Indian cotton cloth), 211 pieces of pacharices (?) and 52,287 reales in cash. A total of 85 captives were ransomed (another 10 had been added at the last minute), and the total cost was 167,560 reales. On the 1st of July they finished the redemption; on the 6th they arrived in Gibraltar; (with them came 2 Moorish boys who came to become Christians): there they made a procession of the redemption to the main church, all wearing the Trinitarian scapular, and a loud request was made to pray for the benefactors of the redemption. On the 12th of July they arrived in Seville, staying at the Trinity, from where the solemn procession to the Cathedral departed. In other words, the journey that we make in a week, they made in four and a half months (they had arrived in Seville on 25 February).

4. THE RESCUE OF THE IMAGE OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

This is a **wooden sculpture** by an anonymous artist, probably made between 1620/1630 in a workshop in Seville, in the circle of Francisco de Ocampo or Luis de la Peña. Image with the cross on his back, with articulated arms. 173 centimetres; body made of pine wood, head and hands in cedar wood. Head covered with natural hair, on which is placed a crown of thorns..

The captivity of the image took place in Mamora, now called Mehdiya (16,000 inhabitants): Atlantic coast of Morocco, near the mouth of the river Sebu, eight kilometres from the city of Kenitra, 30 km from Rabat, 115 km from Larache and 120 km from Fez.

It was conquered in 1614 by the Spanish fleet under the command of Luis Fajardo; a Spanish fortress was built. From 1643 it was called San Miguel de Ultramar. There was a chapel, attended by Capuchin monks. The image of Jesus (according to the Capuchin hypothesis) came from the Capuchin convent in Seville.

On 30 April 1681, an army of 80,000 soldiers from the King of Fez, Muley Isma'il, under the command of Ali Benaudala, conquered Mamora, where 314 people lived. The governor of the square, Juan de Peñalosa y Estrada, made the surrender to the Moors; in the capitulation, the only condition he made was that the lives of the Spaniards be respected. The king of Fez consented; he took most of the population captive (250 soldiers, with women and children), although he released some Christians (13 to be precise). They also took as booty the images of the chapel, including that of Jesus of Nazareth; people and images were taken to Meknes; King Muley Ismael seems to have desecrated them, dragged them through the streets, threw them to the lions.

Pedro de los Angeles, a discalced Trinitarian, was in Meknes, dealing with matters for the redemption of the captives; he proposed to Muley Ismael to ransom the images, paying for them or exchanging them for Moors held captive in Spain. Muley agreed, but with the threat that if he did not keep his promise, he would be burned alive.

This was the 14th general redemption of the Discalced Trinitarians. Redeemers: Fathers Miguel de Jesús y María, Juan de la Visitación and Martín de la Resurrección. They left Madrid for Seville on 5 November 1681; they arrived in Ceuta on 1 January 1682. The redemption took place in Meknes, Fez and Tétouan, and 211 captives and 17 objects of worship (i.e. 15 images and 2 paintings) were ransomed.

Strictly speaking, the images were rescued in Meknes, and it was ordered that they be taken to Ceuta; the father president of the hospital in Fez was told to put them in crates with the utmost care; They were carried on the shoulders of Moors to the walls of Ceuta, and there "all the knights and soldiers of the square came out to the gate to receive them, and taking them on their shoulders with singular devotion and tenderness, in the form of a procession, accompanied by the whole city, they took them to the Royal Convent of the Discalced Trinitarians, where the Te Deum Laudamus was sung with all solemnity in thanksgiving.... ". This act took place on a very significant date for the Trinitarians, the 28th of January...". In the act of handing over the images, the redeemers handed over the agreed price to the Moors, destined for the King of Fez, and also a present of rich gold cloth (the total price stipulated was 3,000 pesos in Segovian cloth, at a rate of 2,000 pesos for the captives and 1,000 for the images). Let us say, in passing, that later, the governor of Tetuan told the king of Fez that the images had been ransomed at a low price, and that he asked to be compensated with the delivery of 15 of the Moors in Spain; this provoked a really difficult conflict, the details of which we will omit; The friars were obliged to buy 6 Moorish slaves in Ceuta and another 9 in Malaga; however, because of the deadlines imposed and other demands with which they tried to make more profit, a Trinitarian friar who lived in Meknes to look after the captives was mistreated, his house was ransacked and confiscated. The chroniclers rightly insist that this was one of the redemptions in which the redeemers suffered most.

Shortly after the reception of the images in Ceuta, they were taken to Algeciras, "to the house of a priest brother of the Redención", who sent them without delay to the convent

of the Discalced Trinitarians in Seville, where they remained until the end of July of the same year (1682).

The list of the images reads as follows: "the first of them is a life-size statue of Jesus of Nazareth, with a violet tunic; a sculpture of Christ crucified, of alabaster, one rod high; a sculpture of Christ crucified with the Virgin Dolorosa, of agate, three quarters high; two sculptures of the Infant Jesus, one half a rod high and the other two thirds high". Next, three images of the Virgin are mentioned, one of the Rosary with the Child (one rod high), another of the Immaculate Conception (three-quarters high), and the third a Virgin and Child, one-quarter high. There is also a painting of the Virgin and Child. There are 7 sculptures of saints: Saint Michael the Archangel, patron saint of the Mamora, life-size; the Guardian Angel, half a rod; Saint Francis of Assisi, life-size; Saint Diego de Alcalá, five quarters; Saint Anthony of Padua, half a rod; Saint Lucia, life-size; Saint Joseph with Child, one rod high. At the end of the list of rescued images, a tablet with a painting of Saint Ildefonso, a crown, two silver diadems, rosaries, missals, clothes and liturgical vessels are mentioned.

In August 1682 the sacred images arrived in Madrid. The General Minister of the Discalced, Fr. Antonio de la Concepción, arranged for the celebration of a solemn tríduo as atonement for the profanation suffered by the Moors; all the images were placed in the conventual church, showing them covered with the Trinitarian scapular. In the centre of the church and above the main altar was placed the image of Jesus the Nazarene.

On the first day of the tríduo (6 September) there was a very solemn procession through the streets of Madrid with the rescued images, carried on the shoulders of priests; the procession reached the Plaza del Palacio Real, where the kings were waiting. On the way back, the procession stopped in the Plaza Mayor, which was crowded with people, not only from Madrid, but also from other places; it was popularly said that there were more people to see the procession than to see the entrance of Queen María Luisa de Borbón, consort of Charles II.

After the festivities, the images were distributed among the Royal Family and several important people; Charles II received the image of the Archangel Michael (without the devil!); Queen Maria Luisa received the image of the Virgin of the Rosary; the Queen Mother, Mariana of Austria, the sculpture of St. Joseph. The other images were distributed among people who supported the rescue and among various convents of the Order. However, the image of Jesus was considered from the beginning to be the main one, and the convent of Madrid reserved it for itself; such was the devotion it aroused in everyone, that soon a new chapel began to be built, inside the church, to dedicate it to his cult; In October 1686, the Duke of Medinaceli, Don Juan Francisco de la Cerda, and his wife, Doña Catalina de Aragón, donated an adjoining plot of land for the adaptation; in 1689, when the chapel was finished, the image of Jesus was placed there and the services began to be held there.

Looking at the image of Jesus of Nazareth, what it represents (Christ in his redemptive Passion) and the story of his captivity and rescue in Morocco, brings to mind the drama of the captives. It seems to me very appropriate to end with this sentence, taken from a very interesting text, written in 1518 by Fr Diego de Gayangos, provincial of Castile, who rescued 600 captives in the kingdom of Fez in that year. Speaking of his encounter with some 60 Christian captives in Vélez de la Gomera, he expresses himself in this way:

“The first time they brought in sixty or so Christian men, tied by the neck with a rope, one after the other, and their hands tied; and they, the sad captives, with great sadness. And I tell you, Father, if I wept for my sins as much as I wept when I saw them brought into Velez, and their eyes lowered, and their eyes downcast and humbled, and the Moors with the greatest joy in the world... it seemed to me the way they brought Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, out of Jerusalem to suffer death for sinners”.