Bound to the Book: the role of religion in the Barbary slave trade (2017)

Abstract
This research essay concerns the Barbary slave trade of the Sixteenth to mid-Nineteenth century and examines to what extent religion governed its operation. This research shall be conducted by analysing the various primary accounts of slave-captives, explorers, and politicians. This analysis shall then demonstrate the various roles that religion played during the Barbary slave trade. These roles mostly regarded the harsh treatment of non-Muslims by Muslims. This was because appeals were made to the Qur'an, hadiths, and Islamic law to justify the enslavement, vilification, ostracisation, and abuse of non-Muslims. Even in instances where the Qur'an and Islamic law were ignored in regards to the treatment of non-Muslims, Islam as an ideology was still called upon in order to justify traditionally un-Islamic acts. This was because Islam was a quintessential part of the Barbary region’s culture, meaning the majority of these Muslims rigorously adhered to traditional Islamic teachings, while others adhered to Islam through personal interpretations rather than strictly by official doctrine. Some notable Christian responses to the
Barbary slave trade shall also be analysed. These responses included Christian-inspired appeals to assist enslaved Christians, Christian-based responses to rescued Christians, ex-Christians, and Muslims, and even willing conversions of some Christians to Islam. Much scholarship exists on the role of slavery in Islamic societies. However, the Barbary Coast's history of slavery deserves attention because it has generally only received brief mention when Islamic slavery is discussed, and until now there has been no comprehensive analysis of the role religion played in its midst.