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# Ransoming for the Faith: Medieval Perceptions of the Role of Mercedarians in Catalan Society

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RANSOMING FOR THE FAITH: MEDIEVAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE  
OF MERCEDARIANS IN CATALAN SOCIETY

by

Spencer Thomas Hunt

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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# RANSOMING FOR THE FAITH: MEDIEVAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF MERCEDARIANS IN CATALAN SOCIETY

Spencer Thomas Hunt, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2016

The Medieval advent of institutionalized religious ransoming marked a clear shift in popular concern for captive aid. The present study examines the Catalan based Order of Merced in an attempt to reevaluate the role of religious ransoming in Christian communities. This project reconstructs internal and external perceptions of the Mercedarian brothers and their chosen vocation of ransoming through an analysis of contemporaneous discourse about the order and patterns of lay engagement with the brothers. The first section utilizes published collections of papal and royal records. These documents, combined with the polemic and apologetic texts of the thirteenth-century Christian author Pedro Pascual, reveal distinct associations between the role of the Mercedarians and their mendicant and military contemporaries. The second section turns to unpublished records of donations and ransoming activities in the Order of Merced. The patterns of uncharitable practices, which these records reveal, suggest a Mercedarian social role beyond religious ransoming. Together, the observations from this project challenge the popular scholarly view of the Mercedarians as embodiments of a late medieval increase in Christian impetus towards charity. This study instead suggests scholarly adoption of a conceptual model which identifies the Mercedarians as evangelical pastors of the Christian faith in threatened communities allows researchers to more fully embrace the diverse nature of the brothers' medieval existence.

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## TRANSLATION NOTES

All the translations in this study are my own unless otherwise stated. Many of the names with appear in the records discussed have numerous modern equivalents and force the translator to either choose to leave them in the Latin or to translate them into any number of modern options. I have made an effort to reflect the actual existence of the historical figures who appear in this study by translating personal names out of the Latin and into a regionally appropriate modern romance language. Most names, therefore, appear in their modern Catalan equivalents. I have also provided the Latin or romance original of any extended quotation which appears in the study, so readers can see from where I derive most names. Place names, however, appear in modern Castilian where applicable. Although locations could change character under different names, the current primacy of Castilian in the nation of Spain makes Castilian place names more readily recognizable. Residual transcription or translation errors are mine alone.

The reader should also note that this study refers to the members of the Order of Merced as “brothers” or in the masculine. There is some evidence that women may have joined the order. Provisions for a female order, for example, existed in the earliest constitution of the Mercedarians. Internal and external Mercedarian documents, however, refer to the Mercedarians as brothers and do not mention any women as Mercedarian agents. The continued use of “brothers” to refer to the order is not meant, therefore, as pure short hand, but rather reflects the sisters’ absence in the historical record of ransoming.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACA – Archivo de la Corona de Aragón.

OdeM – Orden de Merced

ORM – Órdens Religiosas y Militares

## CHAPTER ONE

## THE CARITATIVE MODEL AND AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

In the early thirteenth century a Catalan confraternity developed around the vocation of ransoming their Christian coreligionists from Muslim capture. Led by Pere Nolasc, this group quickly grew in the realms of the Crown of Aragon and by 1235 had received papal recognition as a new religious order under the name Brothers of the house of Santa Eulàlia of Barcelona for the Redemption of Captives.<sup>1</sup> These brothers of mercy (*merced*), from which their colloquial name the Mercedarians derives, were neither the first nor the largest religious order to aid Christian captives. The first religious order to dedicate hospitals and labor to ransoming and otherwise aiding captives in the Iberian Peninsula was the Order of Santiago in the twelfth century. Most of the military orders had stopped operating captive-specific hospitals by the middle of the thirteenth century, leaving a void in religious captive care.<sup>2</sup> Along with their Occitan-based rivals, the Trinitarians, the Mercedarians played a vital role in filling this gap by offering institutionalizing Christian ransoming practices.<sup>3</sup> The Order of Merced, in particular,

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<sup>1</sup> The order's original name came from their House of Santa Eulàlia in Barcelona. James W. Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain: The Order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic Frontier* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> James W. Brodman, "Military Redemptionism and the Castilian Reconquest, 1180-1250," *Military Affairs* 44, no. 1 (February 1, 1980) 24-27.

<sup>3</sup> The Trinitarians were officially known as the Order of the Most Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives, but they were also referred to as Mathurins after the patron saint of their convent in Paris. In the first twenty-one years after its founding, the Trinitarian Order established more than 50 houses throughout the regions of modern France, Spain, and the British Isles. Comparatively, the Mercedarians only managed to establish 16 houses in their first twenty-seven years, almost exclusively in the realms of the Crown of Aragon. James W. Brodman, "The Trinitarian and Mercedarian Orders: A Study of Religious Redemptionism in the



was especially astute at spreading throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Historians, however, continue to debate the socio-cultural motivations that fueled the rise of these redemptive orders.

Many scholars have adopted an interpretive framework dominated by the religion and internal rhetoric of the redemptive orders. These scholars embrace the influential historian's, James Brodman's, analytical model which classifies the Mercedarians as part of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century caritative movement. Brodman argues that the caritative shift was "a popular and laic force," that "saw great religious importance in the alleviation of material and human suffering."<sup>4</sup> Brodman and subsequent scholars, therefore, have derived their understanding of the Mercedarians from the Order's charitable actions. The caritative model prioritizes the self-professed vocation of the Order of Mercy to deliver Christians from foreign captivity in order to carve out a social niche for the brothers. This model, however, provides a skewed view of Mercedarian function, ignoring how external observers perceived the Mercedarian role in society and how many lay members of the Catalan population interacted with the order. The present work attempts to provide a more detailed understanding of the cultural significance and social function of the Mercedarian Order in an effort to illuminate how a broader swath of medieval Christians experienced the brothers of mercy and their professed vocation.

The populations of the Iberian Peninsula, however, inherited concepts of captive aid from local ransoming practices which developed generations before any religious order institutionalized the process. When the Mercedarians started to develop in the east of the peninsula they were coming into a society that already had secular systems for ransoming and

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Thirteenth Century" (Ph.D., University of Virginia, 1974), 211, n 116; James W. Brodman, *Charity & Religion in Medieval Europe* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 150–62.

<sup>4</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 11–12, 115–18.

cultural impulses able to sustain the practice. Even if the Roman Catholic religion started to recognize captives as valid recipients of charity, it remains unclear how much the Aragonese-Catalan support for the Mercedarians reflected this religious shift as opposed to ransoming practices ancestral to the region.

The internal rhetoric and discourse on the Mercedarians has long provided the cornerstone for the caritative understating of religious ransoming, but is often incongruous with other coeval sources. Records of external discussions of the Order of Merced and documents of donations, ransomings, or other interactions with the brothers provide evidence of an expansive Mercedarian social role beyond that of a charitable outlet. Even the dual lay and clerical structure of the Order challenges monolithic conceptions of the group as charitable ransomers. We shall see in the current exploration of the Mercedarians that different parts of the Aragonese-Catalan society, as with most aspects of culture, experienced and understood the act of ransoming in distinct manners. Nevertheless, there was cohesion in this variety of perceptions as records of Mercedarian activities reveal consistent evangelical impulse behind ransoming concerns.

Framing this study around the records of the Mercedarian Order allows for an examination of the often overlooked economically poor captives. This portion of society occupied a distinct category of unfree status. The label captive, appearing as *captivus* in most of the documents, remained separate from servant or slave, *servus*, or hostage, *obsess/ostagium*. Mercedarian records almost exclusively employ the term *captivus* when referring to these whom they aid. These captives were held persons whose imprisonment was seen as temporary, even if most of them died without release. Actual daily existence for captives likely was very similar to

slaves, and captors often sold many people as slave laborers before they were ransomed.<sup>5</sup> Hostages also held a temporary status of being unfree, but they served a distinct social function from that of captives. A captive played an almost monetary role in society, earning wealth for the captor and often sold or ransomed before forced to provide labor. Hostages were guarantees placed against political or personal agreements. Often rulers exchanged hostages to enforce peace treaties, with the expectation that hostages avoid the servile existence of captives. Captives, by the division of these social functions, were the only groups that received aid in the form of ransoming.<sup>6</sup> Hostages were part of political deals and slaves were owned laborers.

Ransoming efforts remained limited to the elites before the Mercedarians and similar groups developed. The Mercedarian Order structured itself around the social division between *potentes* and *pauperes*, the powerful and the poor. The ransoming brothers marked a change in Christian practice from only ransoming the nobility or other *potentes* captives to a concerted effort to ransom the more numerous *pauperes* portions of society.<sup>7</sup> This shift to a concern for poor captives, which is discussed in more detail below, provides modern scholars with unique access into medieval perceptions of and on the *pauperes* social strata. The concern for the poor did not mean that the brothers of mercy never ransomed elite captives. Indeed, royal records

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<sup>5</sup> Jarbel Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 37-66.

<sup>6</sup> Adam J. Kosto, *Hostage in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8-11.

<sup>7</sup> Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors*, 119, 140-142; Yvonne Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 56, 71.

periodically show Kings of Aragon recruiting Mercedarians to ransom particular elites.<sup>8</sup> The present examination of ransoming practices, however, attempts to focus on Mercedarian ransoming of the poor. This focus on poor captives enables us to create an understanding of the role of ransoming which reflects the perceptions of a broader segment of Catalan society than elite discourse alone would yield.

*From Early Ransoming Practices to the Order of Merced*

Even before the appearance of redemptive religious orders, the Christian faith and Christian societies of Western Europe developed systems to aid captives. Early Christians inherited a religious concern for their captive coreligionists from their Jewish antecedents. As with many issues, however, the two religions diverged over time. Carolyn Osiek's study of the New Testament and early sources for Christianity, both polemical and apologetic, reveals a shift in Christian concern for captives as early as the second century A.D. Early Christian communities quickly adapted existing Jewish concerns for the manumission of coreligionists to address the patterns of persecution and variety of slave life found in the Roman Empire. Osiek argues that the variable nature of slavery and captivity in the Roman world led Christian concerns away from a focus on freeing Christian slaves en masse. Instead religious captives, "those who are imprisoned and condemned because they profess Christianity," became the primary recipients of aid.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Osiek also finds evidence that Christian

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<sup>8</sup> Regina Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragon durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIV," *Miscellània de Textos Medievals*, no. 4 (1988): doc. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Osiek, "The Ransom of Captives: Evolution of a Tradition," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 4 (October 1981), 365–86.

groups had a practice of using communal funds to help free these captives. Figures such as the first-century Ignatius of Antioch, who accepted martyrdom, or possibly sought such an end, even took active steps to block communal intervention on their behalf. Despite the apparent communal concern of these early Christian groups, the increasingly more empowered Christian societies of later centuries, especially in Western Europe, favored more personal ransoming obligations.

Most scholars agree that before the redemptive orders, the prevailing ransoming practices in Western Europe relied on very intimate and personal lines of support. Records of early medieval ransoming are very limited, reflective of both the records of the era and the frequency of ransoming. Often captors only sought ransom for wealthy captives; indeed, the funds for paying ransoms often had to come solely from the captives' families. Gone are references to community based funds going to help Christian captives. Instances of limited episcopal support or occasional royal intercession did occur, but little communal or institutional help existed before the religious orders. Moreover, studies of ransoming practices from this time have suggested that medieval Latin Christians prioritized captive aid along economic and military lines. This meant that soldiers and the elite could still expect help from their homeland while civilian and poor captives often received little support. Yet Latin Christendom was not entirely devoid of religious concern for captives. Christian writers continued to use language and rhetoric similar to that used to describe defenses of the faith in order to promote the ransoming of women and other groups. Indeed, women, at least at the discursive level, occupied a unique position in the hierarchy of captives. Religious and cultural values often motivated people to try to ransom their female coreligionists with increased expediency. These pressures were especially prevalent in

Jewish and Islamic culture, but were not absent from Latin Christian societies.<sup>10</sup> The continued prevalence of the theme of captive rescue in miracle tales and saints' lives also reveals a medieval valorizing of captive aid. Nevertheless, as Yvonne Friedman maintains, "the saintly paradigm [to aid captives] did not apply to nonclergy as an everyday moral commitment."<sup>11</sup> That is to say, although a value system existed to support expanded ransoming efforts in Latin Christendom, the actual practice seems to have relied on individuals' limited networks of support.

Christian ransoming efforts continued to shift as Western Christian concepts of charity adjusted to a changing political landscape in Europe. Between the early medieval waning of ransoming and the formation of the Mercedarian Order, Western Christian views on all forms of charity entered a period of dynamic change. As demographic shifts in the Latin West started to favor urban settlement for the first time, new variants of paupers challenged traditional concepts of the significance of poverty and the role of charity. Captives benefited from this shift as the concept of *pauperes Christi* (the poor of Christ), a term used to designate those worthy of charitable aid, came to encompass a larger portion of the population. Charity in the Early Middle Ages, when much of the western European population labored in subsistence farming, focused on aiding the temporarily poor or the voluntarily poor. This rural system, therefore, favored

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on the different religions' views towards ransoming women in the middle ages, see Yvonne Friedman, "Women in Captivity and Their Ransom during the Crusader Period," in *Cross Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period: Essays Presented to Aryeh Grabois on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Michael Goodich, Sophia Menache, and Sylvia Schein (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 75–87.

<sup>11</sup> Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, 57.

travelers, especially pilgrims who adopted poverty for their repentant journey, and religious.<sup>12</sup> Michel Mollat has thus suggested that only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries did medieval Europe develop a concept of the poor as a distinct segment of society as opposed to a transient state into which anyone could fall.<sup>13</sup> Increased numbers of urban poor forced Christian societies to grapple with commercial economies and the systemic groups who struggled to achieve subsistence therein. In response to these pressures new charitable groups such as confraternities and the mendicant friars burgeoned, incorporating the urban poor into the concept of *pauperes Christi* and openly aiding them.<sup>14</sup> The group that benefited the most from these urban changes was the working poor, who were direct products of the commercial economy. Captives, widows, and other traditionally marginalized groups also received more magnanimity as they too became part of the accepted charity recipients. This inclusion connected the concern for captives to the broader corpus of Christian rhetoric on the redemptive value of charity, thus soliciting more universal Christian support for the captured. The designation of *pauperes Christi*, therefore, supplied some of the fervor and much of the Christian context for ransoming acts. When the Mercedarians appeared they quickly employed the language of urban charity to discuss and bolster their ransoming cause.

Beyond the effects of developing concepts of Christian charity, the act of ransoming was perhaps most affected by Islamic and Jewish societies. The very nature of ransoming in the

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<sup>12</sup> James W. Brodman, *Charity and Welfare: Hospitals and the Poor in Medieval Catalonia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 1–27.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Welfare*; Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

Iberian Peninsula forced Christian communities to engage with Islamic and Jewish ransoming practices. Contrary to the practices of Latin Christians, Islamic and Jewish cultures explicitly advocated communal care and coordinated efforts to ransom captives. Jewish culture, born from the same Hebrew scripture as its Christian descendants, continued actively to direct its members to ransom their captive coreligionists. Talmudic tradition maintained an emphasis on ransoming captives as part of proper charitable action. Moreover, Jewish communities of the Middle Ages pooled resources to aid newly freed members to recover from the financial instability wrought from time in captivity.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Islamic culture possessed the practice of *fidā'*, in which non-Muslims were held for ransom or to exchange for Muslim captives. As Friedman summarizes in her study on crusader ransoming practices in the Levant, the *fidā'* ransom exchange in conjunction with peace treaties “was the honorable pretext for Muslim rulers to cease warfare” against the Christian adversary.<sup>16</sup> Friedman suggests that Christian exposure to this communal and explicit ransoming practice of Islamic culture during the Levantine crusades was the catalyst for the development of new communal institutions of ransoming in Latin Christendom. Furthermore, Friedman argues that the decisive Christian defeat at the battle of Hattin created so many captives and left such an indelible mark on the collective conscience of Latin Christendom that collective concern replaced much of the stigma which saw captivity as a sign of personal weakness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Friedman, *Encounters Between Enemies*, 185; Friedman, “Women in Captivity and Their Ransom during the Crusader Period.”

<sup>16</sup> Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, 86–8.



The Christian societies of the Iberian Peninsula are the outliers of Latin Christendom and this fact lends support to Friedman's theory. Unlike most of the Latin Christian world the Spanish kingdoms developed municipal ransoming systems earlier than and independently of these connected with the Palestinian crusades.<sup>18</sup> Town charters (*fueros* in Castilian and *furs* in Catalan) codified incentive systems and organized processes for ransoming captives. Some of these laws, such as the *fuero* of Viguera and the Val de Funes which dates to the late twelfth century, forced the heirs of captives to forfeit their inheritance if they failed to attempt to ransom their captive relatives.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the royal registers of Valencia show monarchs actively facilitating captive aid in their kingdoms. It was not unheard of for a monarch personally to pay for a subject's ransom or to help find an agent to oversee a particular ransom.<sup>20</sup> In 1267 King Jaume I appointed a new *exea* for the region "from the city of Valencia to Murcia."<sup>21</sup> This royal official was to oversee the extraction and safe conveyance of captives back into Jaume's realms, although there is no indication that the *exea* was to help fund the ransoms. At this point, in 1267, the *exea* was a life-long appointment, and while there is no indication that the office was

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<sup>18</sup> I use this term to refer to the peninsular societies which correlate to the same geographic area as the modern nation state of Spain, as well as the extended realms of the Crown of Aragon.

<sup>19</sup> James W. Brodman, "Municipal Ransoming Law on the Medieval Spanish Frontier," *Speculum* 60, no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 318–30.

<sup>20</sup> Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors*, 110–118. The kings of Aragon continued to play active parts in the ransoming process even after the creation of the Mercedarian Order, often directing the actions of the order to aid particular captives. See, for example, Regina Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragon durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIV," *Misscellània de Textos Medievals*, no. 4 (1988), docs. 37, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Ignatius Burns, S.J., *Transition in Crusader Valencia: Years of Triumph, Years of War, 1264-1270*. vol. 3 of *Diplomatarium of the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: The registered Charters of Its Conqueror James I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), doc. 740.

hereditary, the new official was to take over after his father, the current *exea*, died.<sup>22</sup> According to Friedman, these established systems of ransoming developed in the Iberian Peninsula precisely because the Christian societies of that region were born in a frontier position. These groups developed in a climate of intimate connection with Islamic society, which other parts of Western Europe only gradually encountered through the ultimately failed military campaigns in the east.<sup>23</sup> Indeed some laws from the Iberian Peninsula designated a portion of war spoils for communal use to ransom captives, giving particular preference to the captured militiamen deemed vital to sustaining settlements on the Muslim-Christian frontier.<sup>24</sup>

It is in this social context that the Mercedarian Order germinated. The Order of Merced, like most developments in history, was neither just an abandonment of the earlier ransoming systems in the Iberian Peninsula nor just a continuation of these systems. The religious order, instead, grew in connection and communication with already established ransoming practices. Later chapters will demonstrate how lay portions of the Catalan population shaped their interactions with the new order based on their experiences with these prior systems. The resulting lay donations caused Mercedarians activates to fulfil the same function as earlier systems, even though the Mercedarian Order did explicitly acknowledge this as part of their role. Changing views toward the poor and Catalan familiarity with ransoming, moreover, provided a receptive audience for the new religious group.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Ignatius Burns, S.J., *Transition in Crusader Valencia*, doc. 740.

<sup>23</sup> Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies*, 8–12, 239–52.

<sup>24</sup> Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 101–116. For a discussion of the importance on municipal communities to ransoming and a response to Yvonne Friedman's analysis see James W. Brodman, "Community, Identity and the Redemption of Captives: Comparative Perspectives across the Mediterranean," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 36, no. 1 (2006): 241–52.

The Mercedarians first appeared in the Catalan region and spread predominantly in the already ransoming-conscious Christian kingdoms of the peninsula. Later apocryphal narratives have obscured the history of the early years of the Mercedarian Order in legend, but recent studies have illuminated some of this past. James W. Brodman's attempts to reconstruct the life of Pere Nolasc from more contemporaneous records than these hagiographies suggest that the religious group started in the early part of the thirteenth century and had attestable followers by at least 1232. The order continued to grow at such a rate that it received official recognition from Pope Gregory IX three years later. Within a decade of papal recognition, the Mercedarians had houses in "fifteen or sixteen locales," mostly in Catalonia and lands recently acquired by King Jaume I. Royal patronage helped establish the Order of Merced throughout the regions of Mallorca and Valencia soon after their capture. Although not as explosive in growth as many of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century, the Order of Merced reached at least 200 members by 1317.<sup>25</sup> This new religious group provided a distinct system of institutional ransoming and access to new ransoming funds beyond the municipal systems. The Mercedarians also embodied a new concern for the captive poor by providing funds for ransoming paupers who often were beyond the aid of the previous ransoming practices.

The Order of Merced, from its creation, was one of the initial institutions to expand the practice of ransoming beyond the wealthy and the connected. For the poor, the new order offered access to an expanded pool of capital to use in recovering captured family members.

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<sup>25</sup> Brodman suggests that, based on the periods when more detailed information is available regarding member numbers, mercedarian houses in the thirteenth century only held three brothers on average. Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 17–19, 62. For another general history of the Mercedarians see the dated but still useful work Fr. Faustino D. Gazulla, *La Orden de Nuestra Señora de La Merced: Estudios Históricocríticos (1218-1317)* (Barcelona: Luis Gili, 1934).

Mercedarians used large portions of their alms from begging to augment ransoming sums and frequently forgave ransoming debts if the freed persons worked for six months begging on behalf of the order.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the redemptive orders also provided an unprecedented collection of skilled agents for the task of ransoming. Although inhabitants of the Spanish kingdoms had more avenues open for helping captives than most of their European counterparts, intervention by ransoming agents like the *exea* were still very limited. The Mercedarians, at least in theory, provided communities in the realms of the Crown of Aragon with a connection to skilled agents who conducted annual ransoming missions to Muslim lands. The main purpose of the Mercedarians chapter's general meeting each year was to consolidate the year's funds for ransoming and to appoint two brothers to undertake that year's redemptive mission. This annual practice was codified in the medieval constitutions of the order, even though other documents suggest that intermittent periods passed without any Mercedarian-run missions.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the Mercedarians were filling such a void in the ransoming systems helped them to expand along the exposed frontier regions of the Iberian Peninsula. The communities which were exposed to raiding quickly accepted aid in retrieving their lost members.

The Order of Merced benefited, additionally, from the positive reception of its members' mendicant lifestyle. Although the Mercedarians did not dedicate themselves as strictly to the evangelical poverty which defined mendicant orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans,

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<sup>26</sup> In the early fifteenth century an unskilled laborer could hope to make 750 sous a year, while the average price of ransoming for the same period was around 2722 sous. For more information on the costs and struggles of financing a ransom see Jarbel Rodriguez, "Financing a Captive's Ransom in Late Medieval Aragon," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 9, no. 1 (2003): 164–81.

<sup>27</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*; Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*.

the ransoming order embraced multiple aspects of the mendicant lifestyle. Partaking in the very activity for which the mendicant movement was named, the Order of Merced initially sustained its ransoming activities through itinerant begging. Even after records reveal a land-based income for the order, the Mercedarians continued to beg for alms and receive church revenue for burial fees, special masses, and other services.<sup>28</sup> One of the most heavily contested and highly sought after royal privileges for the Mercedarians was the right to continue begging in the realms of the crown of Aragon. Begging remained so vital to the operations of the redemptive orders that periods of monopolies on begging for captive aid gave the Mercedarians a key advantage over their Trinitarian rivals in the Aragonese-Catalan regions.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the earliest constitutions of the order provided for communal ownership of property, but dictated that new brothers should take a vow of personal poverty before entering the order.<sup>30</sup> These similarities to the mendicant orders created a connection in the popular consciousness between the Mercedarians and these more expansive groups. Modern scholarship has tended to refute the accuracy of equating the redemptive orders with mendicant groups, but most historians acknowledge the probability that popular perceptions associated the two groups with each other.<sup>31</sup> This brings us to one of the shortcomings of modern scholarship on the Mercedarians. The caritative model gives primacy to the select rhetoric and language of internal Mercedarian records and ecclesiastic writings to

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<sup>28</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*; Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, “Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragon durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIV.”

<sup>29</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, “Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragon durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIV,” docs. 23, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 67. Brodman also provides a translated copy of the constitution of 1272 of the Order of Merced in his Appendix B.

<sup>31</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 63; Bruce Taylor, *Structures of Reform: The Mercedarian Order in the Spanish Golden Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 24.

create a social niche for the order. Scholars working in this model often overlook or dismiss the diverse social functions of the order because internal records frequently lack references to Mercedarian contributions beyond charity-based ransoming. Explicit reference to or records of Mercedarian functions appeared most often in the discourse of contemporaries outside the order. The caritative understanding of the ransoming brothers, therefore, limits modern understanding of the multiple functions of the order and creates a false dichotomy between Mercedarian self-perceptions and external view of the group.

### *The Caritative Movement*

Modern scholars have focused for decades on the Mercedarians as one embodiment of a new lay charitable movement that swept through Latin Christendom in the High Middle Ages. This caritative spirituality “saw great religious importance in the alleviation of material and human suffering,” including aiding captives and other neglected groups.<sup>32</sup> The increased charitable drive helped fuel the expanded definitions of *pauperes christi* found in the High and Late Middle Ages. James W. Brodman’s seminal work, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain: The Order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic Frontier*, suggests that the Mercedarians are best understood as part of this lay spirituality. Subsequent scholars have continued to classify and conceive of the Order of Merced primarily as a caritative institution, a designation that does accurately portray the internal rhetoric of the order, but outside perceptions of the order and the numerous social functions for which lay members of Catalan society supported the order.

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<sup>32</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 11.

One aspect which distinguished the caritative from other forms of Christian charity was the central focus on active involvement of the lay community. New lay confraternities and religious orders with active charitable vocations entered the traditional role of local clergy and organized relief for society's poor. The institution of the Mercedarians exemplified this movement, which explains the longevity and utility of the caritative framework for scholars. Pere Nolasc appears to have collected aid for captives and possibly attempted ransoming activities for many years as a lay member of society outside a religious rule. Even after adopting the Augustinian Rule, the order continued to define itself by the active lay charity of Nolasc.<sup>33</sup> Brodman uses papal privileges to reconstruct the appeal of Mercedarians which sustained their alms gathering. Brodman argues that instead of emphasizing any contemplative aspect of its rule, "the Mercedarian Order presented itself as a community of poor brothers who worked on behalf of a particularly deserving segment of the poor, namely captives."<sup>34</sup> This internal discourse of the order lead Brodman to suggest that ransoming eclipsed all other characteristics of the order in the medieval mind. At the start the order lacked a set devotion and Nolasc did not possess the same powerful presence as other founding saints like Francis of Assisi. The lack of these elements has driven many scholars away from exploring the possibility of Mercedarians and mendicants overlapping in their social functions. Prayer and preaching never surpassed the ransoming vocation for the Order of Merced; rather, ransoming remained the group's primary vocation throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the caritative scholars have emphasized the prominence of lay brothers in the Order of Merced and suggested that the group resembled a lay

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 5–55.

<sup>34</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 99–100.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*.

confraternity loosely draped with components of a clerical order. Indeed, the head of the Mercedarian Order was always a lay brother bearing the title of master. It was only after a heavily disputed election at the start of the fourteenth century that a clerical brother held this office.<sup>36</sup> The defining vocation of ransoming captives was also carried out solely by lay brothers for the first generations of the order. The lay master, however, would appoint an ordained brother to the position of prior, who oversaw the duties of the ordained brothers and functioned as the official chaplain for the order.<sup>37</sup> Although officially a subordinate of the master, the prior soon rivaled the lay brother in power. Bruce Taylor even argues that the struggle between the clerical, contemplative nature of the Mercedarian institution and the order's lay, caritative origin made the reforms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries all but inevitable.<sup>38</sup> The Order of Merced's clerical functions, however, received enough external and internal support that scholars estimate half of the Mercedarian houses operated parish churches.<sup>39</sup>

A rigid use of a caritative classification, derived from an institution-centered analysis, limits our understanding of the Order of Merced, its functions, and lay interaction with the order. If we shift our focus from a narrow examination of the Mercedarian Order to incorporate community and individuals' interactions with the group, a more complex system appears.

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<sup>36</sup> After this election the title of master general entered common use to signify the joint secular and spiritual authority invested in the ordained office holder. *Ibid.*, 19–22, 425.

<sup>37</sup> Brodman's work provides some detail on the structure of the Mercedarian Order, but also provides a translated copy of the constitution of the order from 1272 in his "Appendix B." Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*. Readers will find a more detailed explanation of the order's structure in Taylor's work. Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 42–47.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Burns, S.J., *The Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Reconstruction on a Thirteenth-Century Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 248–249.



Although the structure of the Mercedarian Order and some of its practices aligned with the caritative movement, documents from the Catalan communities hosting the Order reveal that individuals approached the Mercedarians in a broader range of capacities. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century donation patterns, for example, resonated more with attempts to reinforce local communities against possible threats to the Faith than they did with a desire to aid *pauperes christi*. People also continued to interact with the Order as if it were another part of the extensive ransoming systems already established in the region, treating the Mercedarians more as agents for hire than as members of a religious entity. A caritative model tends to whitewash these divergent practices in preference of a singular cultural movement. The ways in which people chose to interact with or write about the Mercedarian Order, however, tell us as much about the Mercedarians and the cultural significance of ransoming as the order's internal rhetoric reveals.

The following chapters of this study attempt to address the myriad ways the Mercedarian order interacted with the broader society of the realms of the Crown of Aragon in order to develop a more inclusive understanding of the significance of ransoming and the order in this Mediterranean region. Chapter two examines the rhetorical language surrounding the Mercedarian Order and the medieval act of ransoming. How papal and royal authorities choose to address and describe the Order of Merced and its vocation reveals a great deal about how these groups conceived of the order's role. This chapter additionally examines the works of Pedro Pascual, a bishop who died as a captive in Muslim hands. The bibliographic information on Pascual is dubious, but his writings date back to the Late Middle Ages and help to contextualize the captive aid in a broader scheme of Christian concern. Although chapter two will discuss the issues surrounding the history of the figure of Pascual in more detail, it is

important to note that his writings and the legend that developed around him led to the Mercedarian Order adopting Pascual as a saint and claiming him as a member of the order in the seventeenth century. One may read Pascual's writing, therefore, both as a reflection of larger Christian culture and also as something that resonated with the Mercedarian Order. The analysis of rhetorical language in this chapter reveals how connected ransoming was to evangelical concerns, that is to spreading and defending the Christian gospels, in Catalan society.

Chapter three then looks at patterns of donation, contracts for ransoming, and the actual ransoming endeavors conducted by the Order of Merced. This section attempts to recreate the conceptual framework through which members of Aragonese-Catalan communities approached the Mercedarians. In essence this is an attempt to distill cultural beliefs from the records of practice. These beliefs are largely overlooked by the caritative model and rarely articulated in rhetorical sources, yet they decisively shaped interactions with the order and the order's actions alike. This chapter is broken into two sections; the first addresses the interplay between the charitable ideal of ransoming all Christians and preferential practices carried over from municipal systems into the Mercedarian vocation. The second section examines patronage of the brothers of mercy beyond charitable ransoming, in order to reconstruct the social role which the donors perceived the Order of Mercy occupying. The language of the records documenting community interaction with the ransoming order reveals a surprising lacuna of references to ransoming or to a charitable motivation supporting the practice. The relative scarcity of ransoming references reveals how other cultural motivations beside a caritative concern for captives may have helped the Mercedarian Order to expand. Thus, chapter three explores how the Mercedarians may have benefited from systems of patronage similar to mendicant and

traditional monastic orders, while motivational systems and concepts lingering from earlier Iberian ransoming systems continued to shape the order's activities.

### *A More Inclusive Approach*

The comparison of the religious' views of their own vocation and outside approaches to the ransoming order forces us to grapple with the varying avenues of lay interaction with, and understanding of, ransoming in the Middle Ages. As a result, this study attempts to apply a more inclusive framework within which to understand the position of Mercedarians and ransoming in the realms of the Crown of Aragon. The cultural significance of ransoming and the actions of the Mercedarian Order were constantly in dialog with other cultural and social issues. Just as modern peoples talk of ransoming and other charity in connection with governmental policies, religious dictates, and basic financial practicality, so medieval peoples appear to have viewed ransoming through a similar plethora of lenses. Modern investigators ignore how the majority of the Catalan population perceived of and interacted with the ransoming brothers when they focus on the internal views of the religious. One consistent aspect of these medieval perceptions of the Mercedarians was the order's consistent association with evangelical groups and social roles beyond charity.

A profitable investigative alternative to the caritative approach comes from the work of Benjamin Kedar. In his examination of the interplay between medieval missionizing and crusading efforts, Kedar attempts to reexamine the scholarly trend toward viewing the conversion efforts of the mendicant orders as an opposing force to the contemporaneous crusade activity. After examining the two religious movements, Kedar concludes that instead of

conflicting movements, medieval missions and crusades were complementary activities born of a new evangelical spirit in the Latin West.<sup>40</sup> According to Kedar, both missions and crusading came to embody the same cultural goal of spreading the Gospels within and beyond the borders of Christian polities. As the later chapters will show, this same concern for spreading and preserving the Christian faith appears in Mercedarian related documents of both a charitable and practical nature. Moreover, understanding the Mercedarians in conjunction with the movement which Kedar's evangelical movement, helps the modern observed to contextualize the Mercedarian association with mendicant and military orders that modern scholars tend to downplay.

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<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 133.

## CHAPTER TWO

## RANSOMING RHETORIC AND COMMENTARY ON THE MERCEDARIAN VOCATION

Accessing the ideas of the early Mercedarians and their contemporaries is, regrettably for historians, a difficult task. Unlike the Dominican and Franciscan Orders, the Order of Merced lacked long treatises from their founder or contemporaneous narratives of his life. Later generations of the Mercedarian Order, as well as modern scholars, have therefore struggled to recapture the cultural role of Nolasco's order. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writings exacerbate this difficulty by supplying anachronistic narratives born from later efforts to redefine the Mercedarians' function. Specifically, reformers in the Order often crafted historical narratives of Nolasco and his early followers to fit their then current agenda. The scholarly focus on the caritative nature of Mercedarian ransoming practices attempted to correct misconceptions about the medieval Mercedarians to which exaggerated reformist narratives had given rise. In response to inflated claims that the Order of Merced was either military or mendicant in origin, Brodman and others re-centered the discussion on the distinctive vocation of the ransoming brothers. This attempt to remove the Mercedarian Order from other contemporaneous groups of religious, however, muddles our understanding of the Christian culture that supported all of these religious orders. This chapter attempts to recreate the manner in which Aragonese monarchs, papal authorities, and Mercedarians conceived of the order's function in Christian society through an analysis of these groups' rhetoric on the topic. The examination of language and rhetoric surrounding the medieval Order of Merced reveals a Christian understanding of the

order and its vocation as embodiments of the same cultural goals as motivated the mendicant and military groups.

The caritative classification largely developed in response to the lingering effects of reform narratives from sixteenth-century Mercedarians like Francisco Zumel and Tirso de Molina. Francisco Zumel became the Master General of the Mercedarians in 1593. In this position Zumel turned the Order of Merced into a key player in the theological debates at the University of Salamanca, writing many tracts himself against the works of Thomas Aquinas. Zumel also helped draw Gabriel Téllez (Tirso de Molina) to join the Mercedarians in January of 1600. Tirso de Molina was known for his historical works as well as for his works of drama. Molina wrote many of his plays in forced exile away from Madrid and seems to have based many of his characters on his fellow brothers of mercy.<sup>41</sup> Zumel was both an active philosopher and prominent reformer in the Order of Merced. In 1588 Zumel, while a provincial of Castile, published two small works that would define Mercedarian historiography until the last half century.<sup>42</sup> Bruce Taylor argues that these brief works by Zumel helped the reformer to connect his order to the mendicants and military orders while simultaneously providing a foundation for a distinct Mercedarian spiritual observance.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Zumel is not veiled in his attempts to link Mercedarians with the military and mendicant groups. In *De initio ac fundatione acri Ordinis B.*

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 345–58.

<sup>42</sup> P. M. Fray Francisco Zumel, OdeM, “De Initio ac Fundatione Sacri Ordinis B. Mariae de Mercede Redemptionis Captivorum,” ed. P. Fr. Guillermo Vázquez Núñez, OdeM, *Boletín de la Orden de la Merced* 20, no. 1–3 (1932): 57–77; P. M. Fray Francisco Zumel, OdeM, “De Vitis Patrum et Magistrorum Generalium Ordinis Redemptorum Beatae Mariae de Mercede Brevis Historia,” ed. P. Fr. Guillermo Vázquez Núñez, OdeM, *Boletín de la Orden de la Merced* 20, no. 4–6 (1932): 178–201; *Boletín de la Orden de la Merced* 21, no. 10-12 (1933): 321-40; *Boletín de la Orden de la Merced* 22, no. 1-6 (1934): 21-39.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 1–10.

*Mariae de Mercede redemptionis captivorum*, Zumel presented military crusading and the aiding of Christian captives as equal objectives of the “most Christian” King Jaume’s war against Valencia and Mallorca.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, Zumel reinforced the idea that the Order of Merced germinated as a military institution. Similarly, Zumel promulgated a foundation myth which solidified both the Marian observance of the Mercedarians and their connection to the mendicants. This tale relates that Pere Nolasc came to King Jaume I and the Dominican friar Ramon de Penyafort in August of 1218, seeking their help to found his order. After conveying his vision of the Virgin Mary calling him to the vocation of ransoming, Nolasc received instant support from King Jaume I and Penyafort. Penyafort then aided Nolasc in conceiving of the new ransoming order, which was founded “in the honor and glory of the most blessed virgin” and was called “the Order of Blessed Mary of Mercy of the Redemption of Captives.”<sup>45</sup> In this single narrative, Zumel provided a historic foundation for a spirituality focused on the Virgin Mary, a tie to one of the most prolific mendicant orders, and a precedence for royal patronage.

In actuality, however, there is no convincing evidence corroborating these events. The Mercedarians did not even dedicate their order to Mary at their inception, but rather originally bore the name the Order of Saint Eulàlia of Barcelona of the Redemption of Captives.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Zumel, OdeM, “De Initio ac Fundatione Sacri Ordinis B. Mariae de Mercede Redemptionis Captivorum,” 58–59.

<sup>45</sup> Zumel, OdeM, “De Initio ac Fundatione Sacri Ordinis B. Mariae de Mercede Redemptionis Captivorum,” 61–62: “Haec igitur visio, diviaque revelatio, quae eadem nocte serenissimo Regi Aragonum Jacobo Barchinonae facta fuit et D. Petro Nolasco, pariter etiam facta est fratri Raymundo de Penaforti, regio confessario et capellano sanctissimi Papae Honorii III, cui divina voluntas patefacta est, ut in regno serenissimi regis Jacobi verus ordo institueretur in honorem et gloriam virginis beatissimae, qui diceretur Ordo Beatae Mariae de Mercede redemptionis captivorum.”

<sup>46</sup> The bull of Pope Gregory IX which conferred the rule of Saint Augustine upon the Mercedarians only refers to the group as the “brothers of the house of Saint Eulàlia of Barcelona,” “fratribus domus Sancte Eulaliae Barchinon.” José Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium*

References to the Virgin Mary did not appear until the 1240s and did not fully supplant references to St. Eulàlia until the latter half of the fourteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Few of these errors and exaggerations are original to Zumel, but his influence and popularity allowed them to become ingrained in Mercedarian historiography. Others in the reform movement, such as Tirso de Molina, who wrote a two-volume history of the order, quickly embraced Zumel's concepts regarding their order's origin. As Taylor has observed, these reformers "consolidated a foundation legend that married the divine, royal and military elements considered essential to the Order's make-up."<sup>48</sup> These elements continued to feature prominently in Mercedarian scholarship into the twentieth century. Guillermo Vásquez Núñez's work from 1931, the *Manual de historia de la Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced*, still viewed the Mercedarians as a military order founded in association with the crusades against the Muslims. Moreover, although Vásquez acknowledges a lack of evidentiary support for some of Zumel's narrative, the modern scholar adopted many aspects of the foundation story, including that "the order always recognized the most Holy Virgin as its head and founder."<sup>49</sup> Vásquez's adoption of these foundation myths from the sixteenth century illustrates the longevity of these inflated tales.

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*coelestis ac reglis Ordinis B. Mariae Virginis de Mercede Redemptionis Captivorum simul et cardinalium, antistiumque, et quamplurimum virorum ipsius religionis, quos ipsa pontificia diplomata passim concernunt, intercalari calamo adnotata obiter commendatio: duplici indice: primo pontificum, et ab eis indultorum, altero, rerum, et verborum copiosissimo illustratum* (Barcelon: Ex typographia Raphaëlis Figuerò, 1696), 1–11.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 15–16.

<sup>48</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Guillermo Vásquez Núñez OdeM, *Manual de Historia de La Orden de Nuestra Señora de La Merced*, vol. 1 (Toledo: Editorial Católica Toledana, 1932), 20: "La Orden reconoció siempre a la Santísima Virgen por su cabeza y fundadora..."



James Brodman and his fellow historians who utilize the caritative classification have defined the Order of Merced based on its ransoming charity in order to separate the Mercedarians' function from other coetaneous orders. and institutional composition in order to challenge earlier misconceptions. Brodman in particular takes issue with both the evidence and the chronology of the narrative which helped sustain the 1218 establishment date of the order and its connection to King Jaume I's crusade and with the Dominicans. Brodman notes that, "[the fact] that in 1218 King Jaume was but ten years of age and Ramon de Penyafort was not yet a member of the Order of Preachers—and indeed had no later demonstrable association with the Mercedarians—makes the circumstances of the supposed ceremony of August 10, 1218, improbable at best."<sup>50</sup> Brodman also rejects, as a consequence of this and other challenges to the accepted Mercedarian historical narrative, the interpretive structure scholars derived from this foundation story. Instead of a system which viewed the Mercedarians as a mendicant or military order based on exaggerated similarities and associations between the groups, Brodman argues that researchers should adopt a classification system based on the acts to which the ransoming brothers dedicated themselves. Under such a schema the Mercedarian Order occupies the distinct cultural niche of charity; Mercedarians neither appear to have carried arms like the military orders, nor to have dedicated themselves to evangelical preaching like the mendicant orders. The Order of Merced's primary goal of collecting alms to aid captives "suggests its placement instead among the caritative orders."<sup>51</sup> In turn, this new classification supports a reexamination of which cultural movement the ransoming order embodied. Instead of a

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<sup>50</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 42.

mendicant variant adapted to the Iberian crusades, a caritative Mercedarian Order is the product of changing views on the proper nature of religious charity.<sup>52</sup>

Divorcing caritative motivations from the context of coeval cultural movements, however, artificially simplifies the position of the Mercedarians in the Catalan cultural environment. For even those rhetorical sources which fueled the caritative analysis of modern scholars are not devoid of mendicant and military language. Brodman's own summary of the patterns of thirteenth-century papal praise for the Order of Merced recognizes the order's increasing association with the crusading effort.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, both Brodman and Taylor note that the individual poverty and begging of the brothers of mercy likely created a popular perception associating them with the mendicant orders.<sup>54</sup> Most modern scholars who use caritative labels only acknowledge the associations between the religious groups in passing. Their research sacrifices an understanding of the Mercedarians' cultural relationship to other religious groups for a more precise description of the religious institution of the ransoming brothers.

The current attempt to re-contextualize the Mercedarian Order alongside the mendicant and crusading movements will be undertaken in three parts: first, this investigation will analyze how medieval Christians, starting in the thirteenth century, categorized captives in relation to other charity recipients; second, it will examine the Order of Merced's connections to martial rhetoric and crusading efforts; finally, it will explore the Mercedarian concern for fighting the possibility of apostasy within captive communities, and the relation of this fear to the evangelical

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<sup>52</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 11–12; Brodman, *Charity & Religion*, 168–172.

<sup>53</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 99–100.

<sup>54</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 63; Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 24.

fervor Benjamin Kedar associates with missionizing and crusade efforts. Although the Order of Mercy was distinct from other categories of religious orders, the prevalence of (and early Mercedarian acceptance of) their popular association with the mendicant and military orders reflects a common cultural motivation between the groups. Moreover, examination of the Order of Merced's attempts to curb apostasy through ransoming indicates a similar evangelical impetus as lay behind the other orders' drive to spread and defend the teachings of the Gospels.

*Captives are to Mercedarians as the Poor are to ...*

Hagiographic sources on the founding saint of the Order of Merced and papal bulls concerning the order reveal that from its early years fellow Roman Catholics associated Mercedarian ransomings with mendicant work of charity. Like many other religious orders, the Mercedarians had a single saintly founder to whom they traced their vocation. As already discussed, Pere Nolasc's actions were sufficiently inspiring to generate the Mercedarian Order, but Nolasc lacked the saintly reputation and contemporaneous hagiographic vitae of other founders. Through archival sources, Brodman is able to trace Nolasc's likely date of death to 1245.<sup>55</sup> The saint's early life is harder to reconstruct. Most accounts agree that Pere Nolasc was born into a merchant family in the Occitan village of Mas-Saintes-Puelles before he dedicated his life to aiding captives in the lands of Aragon-Catalonia.<sup>56</sup> The earliest extant works to provide a biographic narrative for Nolasc appeared in the 1440s, long after his death. Many of the

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<sup>55</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Nadal Gaver, "Speculum fratrum ordinis beatissime virginis Marie de Mercede redemptionis captivorum," in ACA, Colecciones, Manuscritos, Varia, 2, fol. 3v-11v.

apocryphal stories found in Zumel's biographic writings already appeared in these fifteenth-century works, however, making their accuracy dubious. Nevertheless, for the current study, biographic accuracy is less important than cultural conceptions of the saint. These sources, therefore, offer insight into how Nolasc's later followers viewed the activities of the Mercedarian Order.

Many of the *vitae* of St. Nolasc make explicit comparisons between Nolasc and St. Francis of Assisi or implicitly reference the latter's life. One of the earliest accounts of the life of St. Pere Nolasc, written by Nadal Gaver in 1445, equates Nolasc's redemptive work with St. Francis's donations to the poor. In an unveiled description of the Mercedarian founder's work as an equivalent to St. Francis's charitable giving, Gaver claims that "if blessed Francis sold everything and gave it to the poor, likewise the holy man brother Pere Nolasc set aside all things for the redemption of the faithful of Christ."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the few times Gaver refers to Nolasc as "Pere Nolasc the merchant" occur in such close proximity to the references to St. Francis that the text conjures forth images of Francis famously giving away the rich cloth and other forms of wealth from his father's mercantile business.<sup>58</sup> From this source it is unclear whether contemporaneous Christians in the lands of the Crown of Aragon conceived of Pere Nolasc as a parallel figure to the father of the brothers minor or if Gaver originated the comparison. We can say, however, that later biographers continued to make this comparison. Zumel seems to have

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<sup>57</sup> ACA, Colecciones, Manuscritos, Varia, 2, fol. 3r: "et si beatus Franciscus omnia vendidit et pauperibus dedit et santus vir frater Petrus Nolascus omnia exposuit in redemptionem christi fidelem..."

<sup>58</sup> ACA, Colecciones, Manuscritos, Varia, 2, fol. 3r: "Petrus Nolascus merquator [sic]..."; Robert Bartlett, *Why can the Dead do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 65-70.

used Gaver as his source for much of Nolasc's life, although the later author expanded the connection between the two founders.<sup>59</sup>

Papal bulls regarding the Order of Merced further support a strong association between the charity of the mendicant orders and that of the Mercedarians. As early as 1245, Pope Innocent IV praised the Mercedarians for their charitable work and their voluntary poverty, saying, "because they were weak in spirit, they willingly endure burdens for the poor, so that they more abundantly can aid the poor, while also having nothing, and possessing everything, as if to learn to experience want and to be wealthy."<sup>60</sup> Thus Innocent IV became the first in a long line of popes to praise the Mercedarians for both their mendicant-like poverty and their magnanimous care of the captive poor. Later papal documents often continued to discuss aid for captives in similar terms of aiding the poor. The same phrasing that Innocent IV used above appears unchanged in later bulls from popes who also started to employ the term "poor captive."<sup>61</sup> On one level these phrases could simply be literal in nature. Since the Order of Merced was one of the first groups to institutionalize ransoming efforts and often possessed funds beyond the abilities of a captive's relatives, Mercedarians often did ransom economically poorer captives than previous ransoming practices were able to aid.<sup>62</sup> References to "poor

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<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the connection between Graver and Zumel see Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 1–12.

<sup>60</sup> José Linás y Aznor, ed., *Bullarium coelestis, ac regalis* (Barcelona, 1696), 5: "qui cum sint pauperes spiritu, sponte subeunt onera paupertatis, ut pauperibus possint copiosius subvenire, dum tanquam nihil habentes, et omnia possidentes, velunt penuriam pati, et abundare didicerint."

<sup>61</sup> "pauperum Captivorum." Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*, 31, 32.

<sup>62</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 6, 92; Jarbel Rodriguez, *Captives and their Saviors*, 171-73.

captives,” however, also connected the aid of captives to other groups of economically poor charity recipients. This language describing the benefactors of Mercedarian charity further strengthened the conceptual ties between the Order of Merced and the mendicants by linking captives with the poor for whom the mendicant orders cared. Not infrequently bulls would claim that Mercedarians tended to captives and the poor, distinguishing between the groups and emphasizing the Mercedarian association with both.<sup>63</sup> It is also likely that some of the abundant references to the poor in these documents stemmed from the inclusion of captives as part of the traditional recipients of Christian charity known collectively as *pauperes christi* or the poor of Christ.<sup>64</sup> Variants of *pauper* at times may have functioned as shorthand to indicate the status of captives within this group. Still, the conceptual links between captives and the economically poor remain apparent when one considers that papal bulls only equated captives with the poor and never other charity groups, like the sick or travelers. While a few papal records claimed that the Mercedarians helped more than just the poor or captives, and most bulls discussed captives in terms limited to their unique predicaments, no bull appears to have described captives in terms associated with any charity groups other than the economically poor.<sup>65</sup>

Examining the papal records through a caritative lens similarly does not necessarily contradict an association between the ransoming brothers and mendicant charity. Brodman has argued that the inclusion of captives as *pauperes christi* was foundational to the Mercedarian form of the caritative movement. The caritative label highlights the development of the

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<sup>63</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac reglis*, 7, 9.

<sup>64</sup> The term “*pauperes christi*” appeared in a few papal bulls regarding the Mercedarians and captives, but is rare. Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac reglis*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*.

Mercedarians' active vocation in order to aid these new members of the *pauperes christi*. Yet, the Mercedarians were not the only group to develop in response to the changing definition of Christian charity. The phrase *pauperes christi* by itself referred to a large category of diverse groups of impoverished people. Latin Christendom only started to include the working poor, people with below subsistence levels of income, in the ranks of proper charity recipients in the eleventh century. Lester Little, moreover, suggests that the mendicant friars developed largely to address the needs of the working poor and helped shape the corresponding change in conceptions of Christian charity.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, although the Mercedarians were more focused and active in their charitable vocation, their appearance in the thirteenth-century discussions of *pauperes christi* further connects them to the cultural spheres of the mendicant orders. The similarities between these orders went beyond their rules of poverty and charity, however, and so should our analysis. The papal bulls and hagiography around Pere Nolasc do admittedly present the association between the Order of Merced and the mendicants in terms of their caritative endeavors. Nevertheless, subsequent examination of Mercedarian association with military orders and the ransoming brothers' fear of apostasy reveal a common evangelical motivation behind all three groups, which lends further credence to their popular association.

### *Captives as a Crusading Resource*

Before the inception of the redemptive orders, military orders dedicated resources to ransoming captives in the Iberian Peninsula. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the military orders

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<sup>66</sup> Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 146–70.

in the region almost exclusively helped ransom their own members. Brodman remarks, however, that “only one order, that of Santiago, attempted the systematic liberation of non-members, namely, of those Christians captured from the general population.”<sup>67</sup> Aiding captives was not one of the founding concerns of the Order of Santiago, but by 1180 (within ten years of its establishment) the order was operating a hospital for captives in Toledo. Aragonese monarchs like King Alfonso II similarly entrusted captive hospitals to military orders in the eastern regions of the peninsula. In the first half of the thirteenth century most of the captive hospitals run by military orders either changed function or ownership. Brodman has suggested that the transition of ransoming efforts away from military orders and toward redemptive orders was reflective of the divergent nature of the two groups. Whereas the Order of Merced and the Trinitarians focused primarily on ransoming, the Order of Santiago and other armed groups “had a function which was primarily military and not charitable.”<sup>68</sup> The Order of Santiago, therefore, transitioned away from ransoming captives as their role in the crusading effort changed.

Brodman argues that, as the kingdom of Castile rapidly acquired new territory, the Order of Santiago stopped dedicating resources to ransoming in favor of supporting settlement efforts in the newly annexed regions. Similar transitions occurred in the lands of the Crown of Aragon.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the Order of Merced developed within a lineage permanently colored by the early efforts of the military orders. Later Mercedarian scholars embraced this connection and at times went as far as to suggest that the Order of Merced started as a military order.

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<sup>67</sup> James W. Brodman, “Military Redemptionism and the Castilian Reconquest, 1180-1250,” *Military Affairs* 44, no. 1 (February 1, 1980): 24.

<sup>68</sup> Brodman, “Military Redemptionism and the Castilian Reconquest, 1180-1250,” 26.

<sup>69</sup> Brodman, “Military Redemptionism and the Castilian Reconquest, 1180-1250,” 24–27.



Guillermo Vásquez Núñez argued that the precedence of military orders guided the founders of the Mercedarians to create a similar order and that modern scholars, therefore, should interpret early Mercedarians through the same lens used to analyze members of the military orders.<sup>70</sup> Despite these later exaggerations it is important not to ignore the connections between the Mercedarians and the early ransoming efforts of the Order of Santiago and other groups. Since Benjamin Kedar argues that crusading efforts, embodied by the military orders, were affected by the evangelical movement as mendicant missions, rhetorical association between the Mercedarians and crusading groups would further support the validity of conceptualizing the Order of Merced as part of the same cultural change. Both ecclesiastic and secular records, in a manner similar to the rhetorical association between the Order of Merced and the mendicants, discuss the Mercedarians in terms associated with military orders and the crusading movement.

The earliest records from both the Mercedarians and the papacy on the Order describe it in militaristic language reflective of the crusading efforts. In their constitution, adopted in 1272, the Order of Merced claimed that its members would “labor willingly and visit and deliver those Christians who are in captivity and in the power of Saracens or of other enemies of our law.”<sup>71</sup> Moreover the brothers were expected to give their lives voluntarily to aid their fellow Christians in captivity.<sup>72</sup> In later years this self-sacrifice would further expand to include the practice of brothers offering themselves into captivity in exchange for the release of captives. Archival

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<sup>70</sup> Vásquez Núñez OdeM, *Manual de Historia de La Orden de Nuestra Señora de La Merced*, 1:22.

<sup>71</sup> ACA, Colecciones, Manuscritos, Varia, 2, 44v; translations of this constitution, unless otherwise stated, come from James Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 127-40.

<sup>72</sup> ACA, Colecciones, Manuscritos, Varia, 2, fols. 44r-53v; Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 127-40; Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain*, 113.

evidence suggests that this practice was never widespread. The specific devotion of Mercedarian brothers to captives in the hands of Muslims and their promulgation of the ideal of self-sacrifice to a capital degree suggests a similar anti-Islamic focus as found in the crusading orders. Moreover, papal bulls periodically described the brothers of mercy in terms associated with soldiers. In 1278 Pope Nicolas III issued a series of indulgences to muster support for the Order of Merced, since the brothers “labored in the field of the warring church to redeem Christian captives from the hands of the Saracens.”<sup>73</sup> In the same passage Pope Nicolas III also praised members of the order for their willingness to put themselves in danger. Such explicit descriptions of the Mercedarians as part of the military of the church are, admittedly, rare. Ecclesiastic sources tend to focus on the friars’ charitable nature, but many echo Nicolas III’s praise for the self-sacrifice of the group. As early as Pope Alexander IV, and continuing through Boniface VIII and into the fifteenth century, the papacy lauded the willingness of the Order of Merced to endanger themselves to help the Christian faithful.<sup>74</sup>

Without further evidence, the similarities in terminology and descriptions between the Mercedarians and the military orders offer only a limited and cloudy image of how Catalan culture conceived of religious ransoming. The prevalence of symbolic language in the ecclesiastic sources of this time period can complicate the study of conceptual associations. Much of the military language that these records apply to the Order of Merced mimic descriptions of martyr saints as much as they resonate with crusading efforts. Some of the

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<sup>73</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*, 24: “Cum igitur Magister Generalis, & Fratres Beatae Mariae de Mercede, Redemptionis Captivorum, pro redimendis Captivis Christianis de manibus Sarracenorum in agro Militantis Ecclesiae laborent, quotidie in periculo mortis ponendo corpora sua...”

<sup>74</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*, 11, 33.

earliest saints' lives depict their holy subjects in marshal terms as soldiers of Christ. Other saints, like Perpetua, entirely adopted the mantle of a soldier in holy visions before their martyrdom.<sup>75</sup> It is dangerous, therefore, to conclude that medieval Christians associated the redemptive efforts of the Mercedarians with the crusading efforts based on militaristic descriptions alone. Papal indulgences and records from the secular authorities, however, suggest that both the King of Aragon and the Pope conceived of the Order of Merced as part of crusading endeavors.

The papacy granted numerous indulgences in association with the Mercedarians' ransoming effort. Although by the fourteenth century indulgences had come to be a motivating tool for more than just the crusading effort, the continued appearance of crusader terminology in the Mercedarian indulgences suggests that they retained some connection to the crusading movement. In 1254, Pope Innocent IV became the first to offer an indulgence for donations to the Mercedarian Order. Over the next hundred years more than a half dozen other papal bulls would offer new or confirm existing indulgences associated with the brothers. Many of these indulgence bulls included some of the most explicit use of marshal language to describe the Order of Merced. Pope Alexander IV, in one of the first indulgences offered for aiding the Mercedarian Order, praised the ransoming brothers who "taking up their cross followed the Lord."<sup>76</sup> In this context "taking up one's cross" could be a reference to Jesus' instructions in the gospel of Mark, which Alexander IV's language mimics closely, but since the first crusade and Urban II the gospel passage and the phrase "taking up the cross" had become near synonymous

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<sup>75</sup> Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*, 4-6.

<sup>76</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*, 6: "tollentes Crucem suam Dominum sunt secuti."

with taking crusader vows.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Pope Nicolas III's description of the ransoming efforts of the Order of Merced, from the already discussed indulgence bull, easily conveys a crusading connotation in this new context.<sup>78</sup> These examples of military language and allusions to crusader vows in the discussion of indulgences suggest that both these particular indulgences and the Order of Merced which they supported retained an association with crusading and crusade inspired indulgences.

Language of documents from the monarchs of Aragon, in similar ways to what is found in the papal records, indicate that the Aragonese-Catalonian kings considered the ransoming efforts of the Mercedarians to be part of, or complementary to, royal crusading efforts. Unlike the papal records, royal documents did not tend to employ the same military and crusader language. Royal interaction with the brothers instead reveals more literal associations between the Mercedarians and conquest in the monarchs' conceptions of the order. The foundation narrative of the Mercedarians linked the brothers closely to the conquering king, Jaume I of Aragon. The apocryphal account of the creation of the Order in 1218 by Jaume, Nolasc, and Penyafort grew out of a desire to portray the ransoming brothers in association with the successful campaigns of the king. Faustino Gazulla's analysis of the Mercedarians' connection to Jaume I, although dated, explains how the ransoming brothers thrived through their connection to Jaume's military reputation.<sup>79</sup> It is exceedingly difficult, however, to determine

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<sup>77</sup> Mark 8:34; Jonathan Riley-Smith, "The State of Mind of Crusaders to the East: 1095-1300," in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68-89.

<sup>78</sup> See note 73.

<sup>79</sup> Faustino D. Gazulla, OdeM. "Don Jaime de Aragón y la orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced," *Congrés d'història de la Corona d'Aragó, dedicate al rey En Jaume I y la seua época* (1909) 1:385-388.

the king's actual degree of involvement in the structure of the Mercedarian Order. Jaume I did provide many of the initial land grants to Nolasc and his followers. The crest of the Order of Merced also bears testament to this royal connection with the prominence of the royal strips displayed under a small cross.<sup>80</sup> Jaume, in a select few of his donations, further claimed an active role as the founder and patron of the Mercedarians. Brodman, however, challenges the trustworthiness of the textual transmission which preserved the records of Jaume I's explicit use of the titles "patron" and "founder" of the Mercedarians.<sup>81</sup> Brodman convincingly shows Jaume I did not cultivate a special role for himself in the Order of Merced. Later monarchs, such as Jaume II and Pere the Ceremonious, instead used Jaume I's extensive donations to the ransoming brother in order to create an ancestral basis for their own interaction in Mercedarian operations.<sup>82</sup> These royal interactions with the order often utilized a military role of the ransoming brothers.

Aragonese kings, periodically, aimed to use the brothers as tools of war, often seeking permission from the pope to use the alms collected by the order to fund royal militaries. This practice occurred at least twice in the Middle Ages. The first instance transpired in 1309, when King Jaume II desired to use Mercedarian funds to support his offensive crusade against Granada.<sup>83</sup> The second request to redirect funds from the order saw King Martí I, almost a

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<sup>80</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 32.

<sup>81</sup> Manuel Marià Ribera, *Real Patronato de los Serenissimos Señores Reyes de España en el Real y Militar Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced Redencion de Cautivos* (Barcelona: Pablo Campins, 1725), 305.

<sup>82</sup> Brodman, *Ranomers or Royal Agents*, 240-241; James Brodman, "The Origins of the Mercedarian Order: A Reassessment," *Studia Monastica* 19:2 (1977), 353-360.

<sup>83</sup> Pope Clement V failed to issue a bull in favor of Jaume II's request. James W. Brodman, "The Rhetoric of Ransoming: A Contribution to the Debate over Crusading in Medieval Iberia," in *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of Crusades*, ed. Michael Gervers and James M. Powel (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 41-52.

century later, petition the pope to allow him use of both Mercedarian and Trinitarian funds to expand his navy.<sup>84</sup> The appeals by King Jaume II and King Martí I to utilize ransoming funds for the military reflected a tendency for kings to associate the vocation of the ransoming brothers with both an offensive and defensive military function. King Martí's petition to the pope argued that funding a naval defense would be the same as funding ransoming since a stronger navy would decrease the number of Christians taken captive by Muslim pirate raids.<sup>85</sup> In comparison, Brodman suggests that Jaume II attempted to stabilize the internal politics of the Mercedarians so that the ransoming institution could aid the struggle against the Muslims. In the years following the 1309-1310 crusade, King Jaume II played an active role in the election disputes of the Mercedarian master using his predecessor's patronage of the groups as precedence for his own intervention. Brodman has entertained the possibility that Jaume II's concern over the Mercedarian elections reflected his desire to control the order, but in the end he asserts that Jaume II's actions indicated "apprehension that the order's ability to function was impaired."<sup>86</sup> Jaume II thought it equally acceptable to utilize Mercedarian funds for both the advance of the crusade and for ransoming captives from the failed campaign and therefore he sought stability in the institution. This royal use of a military function of the Mercedarians reveals a practical

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<sup>84</sup> María Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, "La redemció de captius a la Corona catalanoaragonesa (segle XIV)," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 15 (January 1, 1985): 274.

<sup>85</sup> James W. Brodman, "Ransomers or Royal Agents: The Mercedarians and the Aragonese Crown in the Fourteenth Century," in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Robert I. Burns S.J.*, ed. Larry J. Simon (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 289.

<sup>86</sup> James W. Brodman, "The Rhetoric of Ransoming: A Contribution to the Debate over Crusading in Medieval Iberia," in *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of Crusades*, ed. Michael Gervers and James M. Powell (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 50.

association between ransoming efforts and crusading campaigns, which gives body to the rhetorical connections shown in the papal records.

### *Apostasy and Keeping the Faith*

More than simply aiding their coreligionists in a moment of need, the Mercedarian Order viewed its ransoming activities as a defense of the Faith. One of the most pressing concerns surrounding the plights of captives was the risk of conversion. As the historian Jarbel Rodriguez explains, fear of apostasy permeated the lands of the Crown of Aragon during the High to Late Middle Ages. Secular authorities prescribed capital punishment to Christian apostates, and King Martí I went so far as to ban Christian settlement in the Muslim quarter of Valencia for fear of conversion.<sup>87</sup> Rodriguez suggests that the concern over apostasy and especially the conversion of captives was in part a product of a historical “backdrop of Christian crusading and missionizing failures.”<sup>88</sup> Expanding on Rodriguez’s assertion, further review of papal and royal records suggests that many viewed the Mercedarian ransoming activities as part of the struggle to spread and defend the Roman Christian faith. By the end of the thirteenth century Mercedarian records even reflected this concern over apostasy with apologetic works aimed at strengthening the resolve of the wavering. One particular group of writings, credited to a Mercedarian saint, mimic evangelical sermons of the mendicant orders and indicate a similar goal of spreading and preserving orthodox belief.

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<sup>87</sup> Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors*, 68–72.

<sup>88</sup> Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors*, 70.

Both royal and papal authorities continually discussed ransoming in connection with efforts to combat apostasy. As often as papal bulls praised the work of the Order of Merced as charity for the poor, papal authorities lauded the aid given to those in danger of forsaking their faith. A bull of Pope Boniface VIII from 1297 commended the Mercedarians for aiding captive Christians who, “fearful of the Saracens and hostile tortures, deny the Catholic faith.”<sup>89</sup> Other constructions of this praise mention captives who, “held by the enemies of the faith,” had to convert.<sup>90</sup> References to helping those on the verge of coerced conversion appear with sufficient frequency in papal documents to suggest that these were not isolated comments but rather reflective of broadly held perceptions of the role of the Mercedarians in defending the faith. Royal records also reveal kings of Aragon turning to the Order of Merced specifically to aid captives who they feared were in danger of converting. In 1395 King Joan I of Aragon ordered the Mercedarians to send two or three members from their next general meeting to the Barbary territory in order to aid a group of captive Christians. The king feared that the “orthodox faith of the Christians” was in danger due to the hardships of captivity.<sup>91</sup> Aragonese Monarchs not only associated the Mercedarians with the fight against apostasy but, in a manner similar to royal use of Mercedarians funds for the army, personally sought to employ the order’s resources to prevent conversion from the Faith.

Extant Mercedarian literature reveals how cognizant the order was of its role in the struggle against apostasy, and how connected the fight to preserve the faith of captives was to the

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<sup>89</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*, 33: “qui a Sarracenis diris, & diversis tormentis, ut negent fidem Catholicam...”

<sup>90</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium coelestis ac regalis*, 48: “in Redemptionem Fidelium Christianorum, qui per inimicos eiusdem Fidei captivi detinentur converti debeant...”

<sup>91</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, “Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragon,” doc. 42.



fight for the conversion of non-Christians. Pedro Pascual, one of the most famous saints associated with the Mercedarian Order, supposedly achieved martyrdom for his polemical writings while captive in Islamic Granada. The historic accuracy of the recorded life of St. Pascual, however, is highly contested. The official hagiography claims that Pascual was Bishop of Jaén, a member of the Order of Merced, and, for the last three years of his life, a captive. Over the years some scholars have attributed works in Castilian, Catalan, and Latin to this saint, while others deny his existence entirely.<sup>92</sup> Some historians have tracked the earliest extant editions of Pedro Pascual's polemics against Islam and his glossing of Christian scripture to the late 1380s or 1390s (almost a century after the saint's supposed death).<sup>93</sup> The *vita* of St. Pascual claims that the saint wrote these works for his fellow Christian captives to keep them from converting to Islam, but even without this biographical introduction the works reveal a concern for a captured audience. Pascual's writings give voice to the struggle, which governed the Order of Mercy's activities from the group's inception, to defend Christian communities. The next chapter attempts to reconstruct this early Mercedarian activity, but Pascual's writings, as a product of this tradition, help reveal the perceptions these practices produced.

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<sup>92</sup> Domingo Muñoz León, "San Pedro Pascual, Obispo de Jaén," in *La controversia judeocristiana en España: Desde los orígenes hasta el siglo XIII* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1998), 309-315; Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1960), 13-14.

<sup>93</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual, mártir, obispo de Jaén y religioso de la Merced, en su lengua original*, ed. Pedro Armengol Valenzuela (Rome: F. Cuggiani, 1905) 3:IX. John Tolan remains skeptical of the details of Pascual's life or the authorship of his works, but Tolan accepts that many of the works provide accurate depictions of twelfth-century beliefs. John Victor Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Miami: University Press of Florida, 2013), 22. For a full record of the manuscript traditions of the works ascribed to Pascual see Klaus Reinhardt and Horacio Santiago-Otero, *Biblioteca Bíblica Ibérica Medieval* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1986), 274-80.

Many of St. Pedro Pascual's works were clearly intended to bolster Christians whose faith was under attack. The preface to Pascual's *Glosa del Pater Noster* claims that he wrote the work in defense of the law of God and implicitly against the alternative religions. Pascual attempts to weaken the apostates' sacrilegious choices when he goes out of his way to explain that "neither Muslims, nor Jews can call themselves children of God" since the Pater Noster, as he explained, did not apply to these groups.<sup>94</sup> Although Pascual quotes from the Hebrew Bible (Solomon, David, the books of the prophets, etc.), most of his discussion remains focused on the glory of Christ as he found it expressed in the Gospels. The *Glosa*, like Pascual's other writings, provided few original contributions to debates with Jewish and Islamic teachings, focusing instead on instruction in the Christian faith. Statements that "neither the Muslims, nor the Jews, nor bad Christians" can claim their God is in heaven, which opened numerous passages in the *Glosai*, help reveal the mindset of Pascual's audience. The saint chose to consistently reference the faiths of Muslims and Jews in order to weaken their appeal to a Christian audience, not to convert a non-Christian reader.

Pascual became more explicit in the description of his audience in his more polemical works. In the *Sobre la seta Mahometana*, Pascual describes the troubles of his audience more explicitly. Pascual opens the work with an explanation of how Muhammad supposedly was able to convert the Moors due to their ignorance. Consequently, Pascual explained that he chose to write against the Islamic faith because he was pained on behalf "of the souls of our Christians, who I saw lose themselves because they neither know nor were familiar with the truth," and thus

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<sup>94</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:18.

were likely to follow the Moors and convert.<sup>95</sup> This earnest introduction reveals the defensive fear of conversion which motivated Pascual's, and likely many Christians', attacks on other faiths. Pascual further revealed that his audience was of limited education and therefore like the convertible Moors. The saint claimed to have compiled his work in order to allow his audience to spend their time more productively "reading or hearing this book, than in reading or hearing stories of the romance, of love, or other vanities," acknowledging the mixed levels of literacy in his audience.<sup>96</sup> At best Pascual viewed his audience as people literate in Castilian but knowledgeable in little more than what he saw as popular frivolities. The historian John Tolan observes that Pascual always contextualized his scholarly references with information which would have been common knowledge for any formally educated contemporary. Pascual always recites biblical passages in Latin and in the vernacular and recounts background information on theologians like St. Augustine. As Tolan notes, these extra steps made Pascual's teachings more approachable and were consistent with the aims of someone writing for an audience of common captives, not learned scholars.<sup>97</sup> Pascual's focus on Christians without formal education reflects the evangelistic nature of the Mercedarians and their vocation. Pascual's writings, like the century of Mercedarian ransoming before him, attempted to reinforce and maintain Christian societies.

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<sup>95</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 4:2: "Veyendo yo esto, o ve dolor de las animas de nuestros christianos, que veyan perderse por no saber ni conoscer la verdad".

<sup>96</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 4:3: "que mejor spenderes vuestros dias e vuestro tiempo en leer or oyr este libro, que en dezir o oyr fablillas de romances de amor e de otras vanidades..." John Tolan translates "fablillas de romances" as "fables." Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 136–37.

Pascual, although not attempting to expand the number of Christian faithful, constructed his writings as evangelical tools. St. Pascual's polemical works adopted similar design and goals as the missionizing efforts commonly associated with the mendicant orders. On a foundational level, Tolan argues that Pascual functioned under the same error as many missionaries. In Pascual's series of historical arguments against Islam, the captive saint revealed that he believed Islam was taking its final breaths. Pascual anchored this argument in a prophesy supposedly from Methodius which limited the Muslim reign to 560 years, a variant of the optimism which fueled anti-Islamic and anti-Jewish writings in the mendicant orders.<sup>98</sup> Like many mendicant writers Pascual attempted to find holes in the logic of Islamic claims. One of Pascual's primary targets in Islamic thought was the story of Muhammad's trip to heaven. According to Pascual, Muslims said that when Muhammad went to heaven he saw in the air "the angel of death ...who had in one hand a tablet so large that it reached, as is said, from the orient to the occident."<sup>99</sup> The story claimed that the angel's tablet was a ledger of all human souls, specifically "which should go to paradise and which to the inferno."<sup>100</sup> Pascual made particular note that the angel claimed his ledger held all the names from throughout time and into the future. The belief in this all-encompassing record book of salvation, Pascual asserted, led Muslims to believe in predestination.

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<sup>98</sup> Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 140–42. For a summary of the assumptions which helped motivate and sustain the mendicant missions see Robert I Burns, S.J., *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Societies in Symbiosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chap. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:55: "falló en el ayre el angel de la muerte en una siella, e que tiene en una mano una tabla tan grande, que tiene, asi como dixo, de oriente a occidente."

<sup>100</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:55: "los omes que debian yr a parayso e quales a ynfierno ..."

Predetermined salvation, in turn, fueled Muslim patronage of fortunetelling and methods of prediction such as astrology in order to divine a person's fate in the afterlife. Like many Latin Christians, Pascual rejected belief in predetermination and challenged the assertion that an all-good God could predetermine and seemingly arbitrarily judge salvation. The implication of this salvific system was an equally arbitrary system of damnation. Pascual firmly believed that one had to actively engage with the law of God to earn salvation.<sup>101</sup> The saint primarily attempted to refute Muslim predestination by affirming the existence of human free will. Only by a proper use of God's freely given gift of individual will could a human warrant salvation or damnation through their actions. Furthermore St. Pascual asserted that attempts to divine the future through astrology and other means opened one to manipulation by demons. Since demons were able to understand the stars and natural law better than humans, they could easily use these systems to wrongly convince humans of predestination.<sup>102</sup> Consequently Pascual's refuting of predestination also tried to convince his audience that the Muslim ledger of souls was an indication that the followers of Islam associated with devils.

Pascual presented his arguments such as his challenge to predestination in a manner reminiscent of missionary guides. Pascual organized his *Sobre la seta Mahometana* into separate topics focused on hypothetical arguments for conversion to Islam and a series of didactic counter arguments. When discussing the incarnation of Jesus Christ, for example, Pascual explained that

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<sup>101</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:54-91.

<sup>102</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:54-91. Pedro Pascual's beliefs regarding free will, predestination, and demonic influence over systems of portents are not unique to him. Thomas Aquinas makes almost identical arguments in his *Summa Theologica*. A. M. Fairweather, ed., *Aquinas on Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 1954). See also *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.95 which addresses Aquinas's beliefs on divination, but is not part of the selection Fairweather edited.

Muslims and Jews did not understand Jesus as anything but a prophet. The saint then immediately suggested to his audience that because of this it was proper for all Christians to prove “that Jesus was not solely pure human, but was truly God, and truly human”; Pascual then provided instruction in how to use biblical passages to structure the arguments.<sup>103</sup> Similar instruction appeared for responses to Muslim arguments for Christian circumcision, charges of idolatrous worship of the cross, and other common challenges to Roman Catholic theology.<sup>104</sup> Much like manuals which enumerated arguments to entice Muslims to convert, Pascual provided his readers with tools to combat the spread of Islam. Moreover, as Norman Daniel points out, Pascual’s general polemical lines followed “the same traditional pattern as Ricoldo’s [de Monte Croce],” one of the largest Dominican missionary writers of the late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries.<sup>105</sup> Both Pascual and Ricoldo argued against the apparent incongruity between Islamic scripture and the older writings of Jewish and Christian prophets. The lessons that Pascual used to buttress the faith of his readers doubled in purpose as scriptural arguments against Islam, variants of which appeared in Ricoldo’s works.<sup>106</sup> Pascual even made a subtle jab at the Qur’an when he said that he would write his *Sobre la seta Mahometana* “neither in rhymes, nor in harmonies, since poets often add or decrease the truth,” evoking a common Christian criticism of

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<sup>103</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 4:155: “por ende conviene que nos provemos, que Jhesu Christo no fué señera mente puro homo, mas fué verdadero Dios, e verdadero homo.”

<sup>104</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 4:186, 288.

<sup>105</sup> Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 88.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 83.

the poetic nature of the Qur'an.<sup>107</sup> The similarities between Ricoldo and Pascual's polemics along with Pascual's lack of original engagement with Islamic sources indicate his familiarity with missionizing and polemical writings from mendicants and other Christian groups. Pascual's choice, moreover, to employ these missionizing tactics for his apologetics suggests a perceived common aim between ransoming as a defense of the Christian faith and attempts to convert new followers.

Pascual's writings reveal a man who actively attempted to defend against apostasy through spreading of the Gospel. He was not discreet about his desire to remedy his audiences' lack of theological training. His scripture-based support for his arguments in the *Sobre la seta Mahometana* was for the edification of his readers as much as it was meant to challenge Muslims. Attacks against Muslims and Jews even entered his more didactic works like the *Glosa del Pater Noster*. Pascual used passages to support wavering Christians in his writing just as willingly as he attacked the weakness of Islamic prayer and Jewish inability to understand the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>108</sup> To Pascual, both polemic works and defenses against apostasy were equally productive undertakings for the Christian faithful. It is therefore not a stretch to consider that, seeking the same goals as missionaries like Ricoldo da Monte Croce, Pascual shared the same cultural motivation as the mendicant missionaries. Consequently, it appears fitting that we acknowledge similar motivations behind Pascual's writings and the ransoming tradition of the Mercedarians, which Pascual reflects.

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<sup>107</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 4:3: "no por rimas, ni por concordancas, por razon que los rimadores suelen añadir o menguar en la verdad". For a description of this critique of the Qur'an see Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 77-80.

<sup>108</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:20, 27.

The preservation of Pascual's writings, both polemical and apologetic, further implies that the Mercedarian Order embraced associations between the categories of missionizing and anti-apostasy rhetoric. Furthermore, alongside arguments designed to aid the wavering faithful Pascual attempted to gain support for the cause of ransoming. In his *Glosa de los diez mandamientos*, Pascual asserted that not only did the seventh commandment against stealing imply that one should not take from others, but also that one should not keep something from those in need, such as "refus[ing] to give freely to captives and the needy."<sup>109</sup> Some of the saint's writings even reference a subsequently lost work designed to instruct Christians in the proper way to undertake ransoming expeditions.<sup>110</sup> From this reference and Pascual's extant writings it appears that the saint believed ending a Christian's captivity was the best way to fight apostasy. Nevertheless, it is hard to determine how generations of Mercedarians used the writings of Pedro Pascual. It is possible that members of the order used Pascual's defense of the Roman Catholic faith when preaching to captives, but it is also important to acknowledge the possibility of the works functioning to promote support of ransoming in Christian lands. Pascual's advocacy of ransoming likely endeared his writings to the Order of Merced. The order's continued association with the saint suggests that his union of Christian apologetic, anti-Islamic polemic, and writings in support of ransoming efforts resonated with Christian communities and the Mercedarian Order. The ransoming practices of the Order of Mercy, as the following chapter will show, solidified a social function of ransoming designed to reinforce local Christian communities in the century preceding Pascual. Consequently, the arguments of

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<sup>109</sup> *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela, 3:15: "e de los encarcelados, e de los que yazen en cativerio."

<sup>110</sup> Armengol Valenzuela, *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, 1: vi.



Pascual's writings appears to have been a continuation of early external perceptions of the Mercedarian Order.

### *CONCLUSION*

In these varied writings, ranging from papal bulls and royal records to anti-Islamic polemics, the Order of Merced appears as an independent entity but one not entirely divorced from the crusading and mendicant spheres. The caritative model accurately depicts the individual character that a ransoming vocation gave to the Order of Merced. Indeed, caring for captives remained distinct from mendicant charity and missionizing or militant crusading. Mercedarian and exterior discussions of the order, however, reveal a perceived connection between the ransoming brothers, their professed vocation, and the crusading and mendicant movements. Papal authorities discussed Mercedarians caring for the poor through their ransoming efforts. The brothers did not wield arms but monarchs found easy justification to use the order's resources to fund crusades. The Order itself discussed its fight against apostasy in relation to the same goal as mendicant missions. The caritative model with its narrow focus on ransoming charity ignores a large portion of the records which scholars use to support it. These records acknowledged the distinct ransoming activities of the Mercedarians while simultaneously describing the order's ability to perform other functions.

## CHAPTER THREE

## PATTERNS OF SUPPORT, BELIEF IN ACTION

The actions taken by the Mercedarian Order frequently deviated from the ideals and abstract concepts of the order that were discussed in the previous chapter. Noting contrasts between the idea and its manifestation, between discourse and practice deepens our understanding of the social function the Mercedarians filled for those whom they served. These medieval practices can illuminate unvoiced perspectives of the actors on their world. In this vane, modern understanding can extract as much significance from the enactments of Mercedarian ransoming practices as from the surrounding discourse. Records tied to the order provide glimpses into the component processes of religious ransoming through a variety of means. Christian donors, Mercedarian agents, and newly freed captives slip in and out of the extant sources and reveal the expanse of ransoming networks which existed in the realms of the Crown of Aragon. Patterns in the separate stages of the ransoming process, furthermore, expose both Christian motivations to support Mercedarian practices and the order's response to donor-induced pressures. In examining the practices of the Order of Merced and its supporters we also gain a perspective on the Mercedarian social role beyond ransoming. In particular, these patterns illustrate Medieval inhabitants of the realms of the Crown of Aragon engaging with the Order of Mercy as a means to strengthen the faith of Christian communities.

One set of evidence that largely has evaded the focus of modern scholarship is the records of support which assisted the expansion and operation the Order of Merced in ways distinct from ransoming concerns. The Mercedarians, as a religious order, had to fund

simultaneously the survival of their members and the charitable vocation to which they dedicated themselves. Donations to the order which provided resources for activities other than ransoming charity record active support of Mercedarian operations in expanded social roles. Examination of the ransoming activities of the Mercedarian Order and community support of these practices in conjunction with broader lay contributions to the brothers, therefore, reflect how Christians in the Catalan regions perceived ransoming in a wider social context. Indeed, patterns in Mercedarian ransoming and donations to the vocation reveal lingering military and community-focused motivations, while the appeal of both the order's passive and active spiritual lives helped them to expand throughout the region.

The caritative model for the Mercedarian Order places a great deal of emphasis on the Mercedarian self-portrayal, often whitewashing the effects of individuals engaging with the order for different purposes. The current examination of the manner in which local groups sought to shape Mercedarian activities through their donations attempts to grapple with the diversity in the cultural appeal of the ransoming brothers. This study, furthermore, endeavors to return the order to its original complex social role connected to charity, military endeavors, and ecclesiastic activities. Donation patterns and Mercedarian activities, moreover, often preserve parts of Mercedarian and popular perceptions which conscious discourse often belied. Discussion of these activities is divided into two sections designed to examine the Mercedarian ransoming system, as records allow us to reconstruct it, and community support of Mercedarians beyond charitable ransoming, respectively.

The first section's analysis of actual ransoming practices generates a test for how greatly the caritative design of the Order of Mercy reflected or produced a shift in ransoming habits of the wider Christian population. Evidence of the Mercedarian agents functioning in older patterns

of ransoming, however, would suggest a military and community role of the Mercedarians similar to that which sustained earlier ransoming systems. The second section's examination of community donations to Mercedarian charity adds further nuance to our understanding of the order's role in Catalan culture. The motivations of individual Mercedarian patrons which records of their gifts and contributions have preserved allow us to track both the spiritual and practical desire for Mercedarian services. Observations from this second section, furthermore, challenge the use of an analytical system which focuses solely on the active vocation of the Mercedarian Order. The allure of the ransoming brothers outside their worldly vocation quickly becomes apparent in these records.

An attempt to situate the Order of Merced properly in Aragonese and Catalan society demands engagement with an active scholarly debate which surrounds the motivations and implications of charitable giving. The first of two separate topics around which the discussion revolves is the division between the *vita activa* (active life) and the *vita passiva* (passive life). These categories represent two types of religious existence in the High Middle Ages, the active charitable engagement with the world and the passive observance of spiritual tasks. The exact balance between the active and passive emphasis, however, remains contested. Teofilo Ruiz has argued that the active and the passive life remained confined to the religious and did not penetrate into lay perceptions of religious lives.<sup>111</sup> Brodman, however, postulates that the concepts of *vita activa* and *vita passiva* were constantly mixed in the late Middle Ages and that charitable vocations were conceptually wed to religious observance.<sup>112</sup> The examination of donations to the Mercedarian Order attempts in part to detect the public support for both the

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<sup>111</sup> Ruiz, *From Heaven to Earth*, 110-132.

<sup>112</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 245-286.

passive and active lives of the ransoming brothers, thereby offering a case study into external perceptions of religious life. The fact of appeal of the different aspects of Mercedarian life defies Ruiz's views, but also causes problems for Brodman's thesis. Brodman's caritative categorization of the Mercedarian Order has downplayed the brothers' role in spiritual observance, despite his later scholarship arguing for a general interlacing of the *vita activa* and *vita passiva*.<sup>113</sup> Documental support of a mixed active and passive life, however, suggests that lay people recognized and embraced the passive life of the ransoming brothers.

The second topic of the debate on the nature of charity attempts to distinguish personally-motivated charity from the structures of welfare. Much of this distinction is predicated on the motivation of the giver and the role of the recipient. Brodman perhaps explains the distinction best when he states that in medieval charity, "the poor were passive players in a larger drama that focused on the salvation of the giver rather than the improvement of the recipient."<sup>114</sup> Medieval charity largely relied on the desire for salvation to overcome miserly impulses for self-preservation. Welfare, in contrast to charity's focus on the giver's salvation, is motivated by the goal of improving the condition of the recipient. Brodman further suggests that welfare systems showed conscious attempts to maintain or control a certain social order.<sup>115</sup> Welfare-styled systems were very selective of whom they helped and were very purposeful in their justifications. This selectivity increasingly appeared in expressions of donors' wishes. Ruiz, in a study of Castilian wills, argues that the nature of testamentary donations in the thirteenth century started to diversify their offerings. Individuals increasingly donated to numerous charity

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<sup>113</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*; Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*.

<sup>114</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Welfare*, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Welfare*, 7.

organizations in an attempt to improve their own odds of salvation. The diffusion of giving, however, was paralleled by increased attempts to control the funds' distribution to the poor. Ruiz contests that this shift was indicative of both growing concerns over actually aiding the lowly and trends to secularize charity into municipal aid systems.<sup>116</sup> Charity systems adopted aspects of welfare and systematic poor relief as they became increasingly detached from religious organizations. Ransoming on a basic level did not fit this model of a shift from religious charity to a secular welfare system, since municipal systems predated the Mercedarians and other religious ransoming institutions in the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, the function of religious ransoming closely resembled the social reinforcing nature of welfare systems, despite this reverse chronology. Our understanding of the ransoming brothers, therefore, benefits from a detailed consideration of the motivations behind donations to the order. Distinguishing between charitable donations to the Mercedarians and attempts to use the order to sustain a particular social order helps develop our understanding of the Mercedarian role in Aragonese and Catalan society. Any welfare styled activities of the Mercedarians challenge the investigator to try to identify the social structure which the particular action was meant to reinforce. Applying this charity-welfare framework to the Order of Merced and its supporters reveals a much broader role for the order than simply a ransoming outlet for charity or a secular aid system. The spectrum of engagement with the Mercedarians, by medieval contemporaries suggests that the Order of Mercy functioned beyond the sphere of charity. Modern focus on the charitable aspects of the order detract from the medieval function of the Mercedarians as agents in a continuing fight to strengthen the peninsula's Christian societies.

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<sup>116</sup> Ruiz, *From Heaven to Earth*, 47-49, 111-112.

*Community Pressures and Military Holdovers*

Modern scholarship tends to view the Mercedarian ransoming enterprise as an idyllic charity constrained by worldly pressures.<sup>117</sup> One embodiment of the ideal of the caritative shift was the presentation of charitable ransoming as part of a universal concern for all Christian captives. In theory, the only criteria for who should benefit from this captive charity was Christian faith and captive status in non-Christian hands.<sup>118</sup> Scholarship which relies too heavily on the caritative model has viewed deviations from this universal or unrestricted ideal as reflections of the limitations of charitable pressures. Consequently, historians tend to explain individual outliers as results of economic, political, or familial pressures. Examining these events together, however, suggests a common motivation behind many instances of preferential Mercedarian functions towards local communities. Donation and ransoming patterns reveal communities promoting localized ransoming practices as a means to reinforce Christian societies against Islamic and Jewish threats.

Reflections of the unrestricted ideal of ransoming appear most prominently in ecclesiastic or internal Mercedarian documents. Most of the papal bulls associated with the Mercedarian Order, as well as Pedro Pascual's writings, reflect the mentality of universal ransoming in their unrestricted language. These records often refer simply to "captives" or "Christian captives"; more limiting adjectives indicating geographic affiliation, vocation, or similar traits almost never

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<sup>117</sup> Brodman, "Community Identity and the Redemption of Captive," 248-249.

<sup>118</sup> It is probably safe here to read Muslim hands as that was the main concern at the time. The records, however, often prefer a more inclusive term such as "pagan" when discussing aiding captives.

appear for captives in these discussions.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, when Pope Alexander IV issued an indulgence for those who contributed to the Mercedarians, he praised the order for their inclusiveness, “since ... alms, which they collect from the faithful of Christ, they pay out broadly for the redemption of captives.”<sup>120</sup> The Mercedarians’ own documents also adopted this verbiage of universal concern for Christian captives. Although the brothers of mercy did not appear shy about providing information on the captives they ransomed, the Mercedarians rarely employed limiting adjectives when they discussed ongoing missions. A 1332 document, for example, describes that the commander of the Mercedarian house in Girona had “entered the land of Granada in order to ransom faithful Christians from the hands and prisons of the Pagan infidels.”<sup>121</sup> The only descriptor of the captives this brother was meant to aid referenced the captives’ faith. This inclusive language again suggests that religious affiliation was the main if not only requisite for this charity. The preferential patterns in the actual practice of Mercedarian ransoming, however, show that the order was also distinctly shaped in their vocation by residual ransoming trends from earlier municipal practices in the Aragonese and Catalan regions.

The unique propensity of municipalities in the Spanish kingdoms to generate ransoming systems created corresponding community-centered perceptions of ransoming’s role in society. Brodman, in a response to Yvonne Friedman’s comments on the Iberian Peninsula’s ransoming

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<sup>119</sup> See Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium Coelestis ac regalis*; and *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual*, ed. Armengol Valenzuela.

<sup>120</sup> Llinás y Aznar, *Bullarium Coelestis ac regalis*, 6: “quia non solum eleemosynas, quas a Christi fidelibus colligunt, in redemptionem expendunt latissime captivorum, sed etiam proprias animas pro fratribus ponere non formidant...”.

<sup>121</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 193r: “Cum venerabilis et religiosus frater Ioannes Capitis Ville Comendator domus Beatae Mariae Mercedis Captivorum Gerundae terram Granatae ... [6 unintelligible letters] intraverit ad redimendum fideles Christianos de manibus et carceribus infidelium Paganorum...”.



peculiarities, suggests that these ransoming systems were developments dependent upon the creation of strong municipal communities.<sup>122</sup> As discussed earlier, the foral law codes in the Spanish kingdoms created some of the first Latin-Christian systems to pool resources in order to aid captives since the classical period. These laws were distinct in each region and, by their very nature as municipal laws, were tied to specific communities. Brodman suggests that these foral laws primarily attempted to regulate ransoming in order to prevent hired agents or slave holders from taking financial advantage of captives' families. Many of these codes thereby reflect earlier systems of individualized captive aid. Examples of the uniquely Iberian efforts to aid captives as a community appeared in limited number but were very specific about who received help. The earliest foral instances of pooled captive aid focused on the members of town militias or others serving the municipality. Some codes further reinforced the military perception of ransoming by specifically sequestering portions of martial spoils for captive aid.<sup>123</sup> Local communities thus appear to have perceived ransoming as a means to support vulnerable societies through contributions to military efforts. This municipal identity of ransoming continued to influence donation patterns to the Mercedarians, despite the order professing a universal concern for all Christian captives.

Christian communities appear to have continued to donate to the Brothers of Mercy under the belief that they would be aiding captives from their home regions. This practice lasted for a least a century after the founding of the Mercedarians. The resilience of community based

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<sup>122</sup> James W. Brodman, "Community, Identity and the Redemption of Captives: Comparative Perspectives across the Mediterranean," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 36, no. 1 (2006): 241.

<sup>123</sup> Brodman, "Community, Identity and the Redemption of Captives," 243–45. See also Brodman, "Municipal Ransoming Law," 318-330.

ransoming comes to the forefront in documents where contemporaries thought the Order of Mercy was violating this preferential practice. In May of 1370, King Pere the Ceremonious of Aragon felt forced to intervene in Mercedarian activities when the population of Mallorca City attempted to prevent the Mercedarians from using their alms to ransom non-Mallorcans. The local commander of the Mercedarians sought royal aid after the city's inhabitants forcefully prevented the alms collectors from transferring donated funds to the Mercedarian house. King Pere, consequently, intervened by using his authority to order the jurors and leading men of the city to free up the funds and cease their impediments to Mercedarian affairs. The language of Pere's reprimand reminded the offending parties that they were opposing alms even though the donations "which are freely given by the Christian faithful, in regions on this side of the sea [i.e. the Iberian Peninsula] as across the sea [i.e. Mallorca], for the said redemption of captives, are universal and dedicated to redeeming captives from the island of Mallorca as from Catalonia and the other parts of our kingdom."<sup>124</sup> Scholars debate whether this incident resulted from the Mercedarians actually using Mallorcan funds for other ransoming activities or if a general lack of funds suspended all redemptive endeavors by the brothers in this period.<sup>125</sup> This unknown detail complements a discussion of Mercedarian action but does not affect the perceived slight to Mallorca. The king's spirited defense of the redemptive brothers placed the order's ideal in direct opposition to the preferential treatment of the earlier systems which the Mallorcans sought to maintain. The Mallorcan conflict, moreover, illustrates the continued tendency to engage in

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<sup>124</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón," doc. 18: "elemosina que per Christi fideles, tam in cismarinis quam ultramarinis partibus, elargitur pro dicta redemptione captivorum, sit comunis et ad redimendum captivos tam insule Maioricarum quam Catholonie et aliarum partium regnorum nostrorum dedicata...".

<sup>125</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 170-172.

ransoming under traditional perceptions despite the charitable ecumenicalism of the Mercedarians.

King Pere's invocation of caritative rhetoric to scold the disruptive Mallorcans clearly reveals the monarch's perception of the Mercedarians as universal Christian ransomers. The monarch's comments, however, were not objective assessments of the brother's function. Just four years before the Mallorcan controversy, the Mercedarians' Master General had given King Pere authority to command Mercedarian brothers independent of the order's hierarchy.<sup>126</sup> Brodman argues that this power allowed Pere to use the brothers as royal agents in diplomatic roles beyond ransoming.<sup>127</sup> Such control over the order made the brothers of notable utility to the king, especially if he managed to maintain their cohesion and revenue. Part of Pere's motivation to support Mercedarian charity in the Mallorcan affair may therefore have been to protect his access to expanded sources of Mercedarian income. This fiscal benefit does not, however, diminish the significance of Pere's ability to employ universal rhetoric to defend the Mercedarians. The King's choice in words suggests a recognition of the universal charitable function of Mercedarians. Defense of the caritative concern for captives which many associated with the Mercedarian provided Pere the Ceremonious with sufficient rationale to justify his interventions. Nevertheless, unrestricted ransoming had not supplanted the Mallorcan practices, nor had King Pere unequivocally embraced the new system.

King Pere's defense of caritative inclusiveness was not unwavering, and his other interactions with the Order of Mercy reveal a ready acceptance to hold the brothers to the whims of regional societies. Fourteen years after Pere defended the Mercedarians' interregional charity

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<sup>126</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón," doc. 15.

<sup>127</sup> Brodman, "Ransomers or Royal Agents," 239–251.

he exerted his authority again in Mercedarian matters, this time to insist they keep their aid localized. In April, 1384, the “just and honest” people of Morella made a complaint to King Pere which echoed the Mallorcans’ grievance. Representatives of Morella claimed that the Order of Merced was using its funds for purposes other than ransoming captives from the town. Pere, instead of lecturing the Morellans on the charitable duties of the order, supported their request and ordered that “each and every donation or alms which is given in the said town and villages for the redemption of captives or is bestowed by the faithful of Christ, you [the Mercedarians] spend in the redeeming of the above mentioned captives who are from the said town and villages.”<sup>128</sup> Evidently Pere did not perceive ransoming along the dictates of local concerns to be in opposition to the apostolic calling or social function of the Mercedarian Order, despite recognizing the ideal of universal charity. References to the interregional nature of the Order of Mercy did not appear in the Morellan events. Pere simply deemed that the captives from the region should be given preferential treatment over other captives for their town’s alms.<sup>129</sup> Pere showed no indication of internal conflict over his support of the Mercedarians as both practitioners of universal charity and participants in localized struggles.

The particular outcomes in the Morella and Mallorca interventions undoubtedly reflected Pere’s differing political aims for the distinct locales. Mallorca represented a recently annexed island-kingdom which Pere was constantly trying to integrate more thoroughly into his

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<sup>128</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, “Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón,” doc. 31: “quatenus omenes et singulas lexias seu elemosinas que in dictis villa et aldeis vobis pro redimendis captivis legabuntur seu tribuentur a Christi fidelibus, convertatis in redimendo captivos predictos qui sint de dictis villa et aldeis, cum rationabile iudicemus quod ad ipsas lexias seu elemosinas ipsi captivos aliis quibuscumque captivis et operibus preferantur...”

<sup>129</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, “Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón,” doc. 31. See note 128 for relevant Latin quotation.

Mediterranean empire; in contrast, Morella was a relatively small town in the mainland kingdom of Valencia.<sup>130</sup> The symbolic gesture of incorporating Mallorcan alms into broader ransoming practices, therefore, supported Pere's political maneuverings in the Mediterranean. Preferential treatment to Morella did not pose the same threat of fueling resistance as Mallorca would have. These political motivations help explain why Pere engaged in a bipolar treatment of the order; nevertheless, his use of these rhetorical descriptions suggests that a receptive audience holding corresponding views was present in the population. These royal perceptions detail the coexistence of new caritative concerns and preferential practices from municipal systems. Although Pere was able to employ the Mercedarian charitable concepts of universal concern for Christian captives, he also clearly expected the order to comply with local interests. Pere simply chose which Mercedarian role he wished to emphasize based on his particular needs.

Earlier documents of lay members of Catalan society interacting with the Mercedarians provide a historic echo of King Pere's mixed perception of the Order of Mercy. Individuals from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries persisted in approaching the Mercedarian Order expecting practices similar to what had been present in earlier municipal systems. Some people explicitly attached caveats to their donations to the order in an attempt to designate regional limitations on whom they wished to aid. Such a donation in 1331 established an annual fund of 30 sous to help aid captives from Perpignan. Pere Lanrigoni, the founder of the endowment, displayed exceptionally localized concerns for captives in his insistence that the Mercedarians

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<sup>130</sup> J. N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250-1516*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 1978), 1: 347–371.

use his contribution to ransom those whom the local chaplain recognized.<sup>131</sup> Brodman identifies a similar donation made by a Gironès cloth merchant in 1332 to ransom any captive from Girona. Strongly preferential donations like Pere Lanrigoni's and the Giron merchant's admittedly are not overly abundant in the extant sources. Less explicitly restricted donations provide further evidence for these overtly preferential gifts, however, by revealing an assumption of localized aid.<sup>132</sup>

Most of the contributions to the Mercedarians lacked geographic restrictions on which captives the money could aid, but these gifts appeared to carry implicit expectations of preferential treatment for a region. Some of the earliest donations reflect the general and inclusive language of the papal and ransoming records mentioned earlier. As early as 1219, over a decade before the Order of Merced received papal recognition, documentation reveals donations to aid captives identified simply as Christian, if the donor applied any adjective at all. One particular gift in 1219 reflected a certain Guillem de Entesa giving 100 sous for captive aid to the "alms collector" Pere Nolasc.<sup>133</sup> Admittedly, Guillem de Entesa's gift challenges Brodman's claim that the first recorded donation to Nolasc appeared in 1230, and Entesa's record only survives in a seventeenth-century copy. The structure and language of the document, however, support its authenticity.<sup>134</sup> The record employed formulae and language found in more

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<sup>131</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 76r-v. How the recognition based donation was supposed to work remains unclear as there is no indication that the chaplain expected to or ever did join the brothers on a ransoming expedition.

<sup>132</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 107.

<sup>133</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 398r: "eleemosine captivorum ... fratri petri nolasci producratori eleemosine."

<sup>134</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 15-17.

authoritative sources. The particular date of Guillem's donation, moreover, is not as important as is the inclusive language which appears repeatedly in more secure documents. Bequests and gifts from throughout the thirteenth century discuss the "redemption of Christian captives who are detained by the Saracens [read Muslims] in chains" or simply the desire "to redeem captives."<sup>135</sup> This phrasing, which closely mimics Mercedarian descriptions of their actions, appears to indicate that lay Christians recognized the order's charitable nature and willingly invested in that system.

One thirteenth-century document offers a rare glimpse into the enacting of unrestricted donors' wishes and challenges the presumption that unrestricted gifts reflected an abandonment of localized ransoming practices. A will from 1238 suggests that the acceptance of universal Christian aid coexisted with an assumed privileging of ones' neighbors and relatives. Brother Bernat de Tona willingly accepted an annual gift of 10 sous, promising that it would be used to ransom captives, and that "if there are captives from Villa de Vallibus it will be particularly allotted for their ransoming."<sup>136</sup> It remains unclear whether Villa de Vallibus was an indicator of location or if it designated relatives of the will's executor, Pere de Villa de Vallibus, but the brother clearly attempted to tie the donation to the giver's home. There was no specific indication that the donation was contingent upon the privileging of captives from Villa de Vallibus, and theoretically this donation could have gone to the aid of any captive had the

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<sup>135</sup> Both ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 188r-v, which dates to 1248, and ACA, ORM, rollo 1, doc. 11, which dates to 1254, use identical phrasing of, "ad redemptionem captivorum christianorum qui a sarracenis in vindulis detinentur." For the different phrasing discussed see, ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 216r; ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 520.

<sup>136</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 117r-v: "Itaque, si captivos fuerint de Villa de Vallibus ad eorum redemptionem specialiter tribuentur."

brother not made his offer. This particular preferential treatment, instead, appears to be a codification of a verbal or unspoken societal agreement to acquiesce to local concerns. The prioritized aid, moreover, only appeared in the portion of the document which Brother Bernat de Tona authored, thus displaying the brother's personal recognition of his orders' role in the regionalized system. Indeed, the Mercedarian Order often yielded to or even seemed to accept preferential systems, thus stepping into a role beyond that of pure agents of charity.

The continued local motivations found in donations do not appear to have permeated Mercedarian discourse extensively, but regional affiliations closely tied themselves to, if they did not dictate, the ransoming practices of the order. Records of Mercedarian ransomings are regrettably sparse for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, making it difficult to detect patterns in the order's activities during this period. The first record to name the rescued captives from a Mercedarian expedition dates to 1366, and this is only the second expedition to Muslim lands for which detailed information survives. The returning party of 1366 stopped in Mallorca on their way to Catalonia where the local bailiff recorded the twelve ex-captives' oaths to provide six months of service to the Order of Mercy in acknowledgment of their ransoming debts. Of the twelve captives, six were from either the Catalan region or the Kingdom of Valencia, while the remaining half of the party all hailed from islands which were claimed by King Pere and had an established Mercedarian presence. The lack of any other Mediterranean Christian captives in the group displayed the Order of Merced's targeted ransoming practices. The document further reinforced this selectivity by the fact that it recorded the majority of the transaction in Catalan instead of in more widely legible Latin.<sup>137</sup> Additional records of individual captives support this vision of localized ransoming practices. One clustering of ransoming documents which survives

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<sup>137</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón," doc. 13.



from the region around Girona all report aid distributions to captives from the same region. In 1238 two ex-captives promised to pay ransoming debts of 101.5 or 103.5 besants to the Order of Merced for retrieving them from Islamic Játiva. Both of these ex-captives were from Palafrugell, a small coastal town east of Girona.<sup>138</sup> Despite passing multiple Mercedarian houses on the way to Girona, these ex-captives confirmed their debts with the house embedded in and dedicated to their community. A century later a handful of Girona residents recognized a debt of 100 sous which they owed to the Mercedarians for ransoming “Guillem son of Guillem de Petra of the parish mentioned above [i.e. Girona].”<sup>139</sup> These individual ransoming episodes, despite the small volume of captives they represent, conformed to the patterns of community-targeted Mercedarian activities found in the group records.

The apparent Mercedarian acquiescence to their donors’ desire for localized aid is visible further in their monetary assistance. One common activity of the brothers involved subsidizing other agents’ ransoming efforts or contributing to the funds of pleading families. These contributions produced a mix of receipts and lists apparently meant to memorialize the generosity of the Order of Merced. In 1265 a Mallorcan citizen by the name of Bernat Potery received 50 besants from the Mercedarians as partial reimbursement for his work ransoming captives from Sant Feliu de Guixols. Potery notably did not seek funds from the main house of Mercedarians in Barcelona or the chapter established in his home region of on Mallorca. Instead, Potery’s 50 besants came from the Mercedarians at Girona, located just north-west of his

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<sup>138</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 7r-8r.

<sup>139</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 5r-6r: “In subsidium redemptionis so\_\_ende [two unintelligible letters] Guillermi filii Guillermi de Petra de Perrochia antedicta.”

beneficiaries' hometown.<sup>140</sup> Geographic convenience may have contributed to this connection to Girona, but Potery's choice also resonated with the regional mentality displayed by Mercedarian and community members alike. The Mercedarian dealings with Potery thus suggest that the brothers embraced their guardianship of the local captives.

Other records actively advertised the Mercedarian's regional nature and selectivity. A fourteenth-century record from the order's house in Vic recounts a list of sixty-two captives who received monetary subsidies from the brothers for their release. The document provides a list of captives whom the two specific brothers aided, omitting the formulaic passages of other such records, but including geographic or familial designators for each ransomed individual.<sup>141</sup> Brodman and others have examined this document, which only survives in an eighteenth-century copy, at length, so there is little value in reiterating the exact monetary donations or other details here.<sup>142</sup> It is meaningful to note, however, that all 62 captives appeared to have come from Vic and its neighboring region or to be related to a resident of the area.<sup>143</sup> The record does not relate the origin of the funds, a possible nod to the universal charity of the order, but does focus on connecting the captives to the host community. The practical nature of this document as a ledger and its manuscript transmission create complications for conducting too close a reading; nevertheless, we have a detailed instance of Mercedarian aid paralleling community desires.

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<sup>140</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 9r-v.

<sup>141</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 27r-29r.

<sup>142</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 105-107.

<sup>143</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 27r-29r.

Records of individual subsidies only substantiate this localized pattern.<sup>144</sup> The Mercedarians thus appear to have incorporated preferential practices into their ransoming activities, despite their rhetoric on the topic. The order even went as far as to produce documents like the Vic list which publicized their selective activities. The continued function of ransoming in a local context was evidently strong enough to induce the Order of Merced to accept the preferential stance into their practices.

Modern scholarship has successfully acknowledged the Mercedarian pattern of regionalized ransoming, but our understanding of its significance has remained at a very cursory level. Brodman's early work was content with the conclusion that a need for community support fueled Mercedarian preferences. In a convincing, and likely accurate, observation of the Vic donation record, Brodman stated that the practice was "prudent," as the "local application of its [the Order of Merced's] charity would thereby develop ties with the communities in which it was located and thus enhance the continuing effort at raising additional alms."<sup>145</sup> Brodman's later scholarship further argues for the value of protective patrons whom the Mercedarians could acquire through their preferential practices. The need for such patrons is evident in the number of times the Mercedarian Order sought advantageous privileges over their Trinitarian rivals or protective action after secular clergy or other religious attacks on newly established Mercedarian houses.<sup>146</sup> Brodman recognizes the social importance of the community ransoming practices

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<sup>144</sup> For examples see ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, 133r; 136r-138r. All five of these donations relate to the Mercedarian house in Tarragona.

<sup>145</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 107.

<sup>146</sup> For examples of royal patronage, see Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón," and Joaquín Millán Rubio, "Colección Diplomática de Jaime II de Aragón Sobre La Orden de Ntra. Sra. De La Merced," *Estudios* 30, no. 104 (1974): 93–125.

born from municipal systems, but he maintains a conceptual dichotomy between the caritative nature of the Mercedarians and the pragmatic actions of the order.<sup>147</sup> Brodman clings to the perception of the Mercedarians as embodiments of charitable impulses, instead of acknowledging a more diverse social function of the brothers. King Pere's recognition of the mixed role of the Order of Merced and the brothers' own incorporation of local requests into the institution's practices suggests, however, that Mercedarians simultaneously filled both social roles. Medieval observers easily saw the redemptive brothers as a religious charity and, like the earlier municipal ransoming systems, as a supportive structure for maintaining local societies. Brodman's insistence on a categorical difference between the universal ideal and localized practice of the Order of Mercy emphasizes the novelty of the order, but diminishes the significance of local patterns of engagement with religious ransoming.

A fourteenth-century challenge to the Mercedarian Order suggests that Catalan communities, and likely others in the realms of the Aragonese monarchs, perceived preferential ransoming as an integral part of religious aid to captives and a martial-styled support of local communities. The telling challenge came in the form of a royal petition from a priest of Mallorca to allow the creation of a new ransoming order. In 1370, less than three full months after Pere IV's reproach of the area's attempts to sequester Mercedarian alms, the islanders sought a new path to localized aid. Father Bernat Parato, as the community representative, asked that the King allow the creation of a new religious under the name "Semana Santa." This new confraternity was meant to sustain a community-focused system of captive assistance. The royal recounting of Parato's appeal conveys that Semana Santa would use its collected funds to ransom captives or to conduct other charitable works in the cities or villages where it would establish

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<sup>147</sup> Brodman, "Community, Identity and the Redemption of Captives."

itself.<sup>148</sup> This localized group was, simultaneously, an indication of more universal conduct by the Mercedarians and confirmation that ecclesiastics and lay alike perceived charitable ransoming as a community-focused act. King Pere's response did little to refute the views of religious ransoming's role as a practice wedded to the maintenance of local communities. Pere rejected the *Semana Santa* confraternity under his purview as patron and guardian of the Mercedarians, who would presumably lose revenue from the competition. Pere's justification avoided any reference to a universal ideal in religious ransoming, in stark contrast to his earlier rebuke of Mallorca. The monarch seemingly did not feel compelled to challenge this local function which the Order of Merced filled as much as it challenged.

The conceptual coexistence of universal ransoming and preferential charity in Mercedarian records appears to reflect more than the divide between the ideal and the pragmatic. Instead, this duality was reflective of the Mercedarians' role as both an agent of charity and an active agent in sustaining communities of orthodox Christian faithful against their religious rivals. Clauses and phrases oriented specifically toward captured militia largely escaped Mercedarian ransoming records, but the martial mentality of municipal ransoming systems survived in the oppositional stance created by the documents' combative religious phrases. These more practical records echo some of the counter-Islamic rhetoric found in the literary sources discussed in chapter two. Over half of the ransoming records in this study explicitly adopted a polarized stance between the cultures of the captives and captors. Most captive descriptions utilized divisive language evoking a dichotomous image of the "orthodox faithful of Christ" held captive or aiding the Order of Mercy contrasted against "the enemies of the cross"

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<sup>148</sup> Sainz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón," doc. 19.

or “enemies of the faith.”<sup>149</sup> Even the records which the order authored, appear to emphasize this polarity, at times describing their ransoming as the redeeming of “faithful Christians” from “infidel pagans.”<sup>150</sup> A few records simply employed the ethnic designators of “Saracens” or “Moors” and at least one donor could provide the personal names of the Muslim captors who held his relative.<sup>151</sup> These less culturally charged descriptors could suggest a familiarity between the Christian and Islamic societies, but were not always detached from the combative language. Ethnic descriptors often appear paired with insulting adjectives, as is visible in Guillem de Manso’s recounting of his time as “a captive in the power of the perfidious Saracens.”<sup>152</sup> These couplings of descriptions of the Christian faithful and enemies of the faith go beyond illustrations of the needy charity recipient to invoke an active struggle against a perceived threat to the donor’s society. The Mercedarians consequently don the role of defenders of the faith in this environment.

The polarizing language of ransoming records, when considered in conjunction with the preferential practices they document, further suggest a Mercedarian role beyond Christian charity. The continued presence of cultural patterns germinating from the militia-focused

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<sup>149</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 5r-v: “Vestro ordine elogitis a Christi fidelibus hortodoxis centum solidos Barchinoneni...”, “et ductus captus apud Butgiam cum quibusdam complicitibus suis per inimicos crucis seu barbaros sarracenos”; ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 76r: “vel aliqui de coquolibero per tempore futuro inciderint quod Deus avertat, captivitatem in posse fidei inimicorum...”.

<sup>150</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 193r: “ad redimendum fideles christianos de manibus et carceribus infidelium paganorum...”.

<sup>151</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 188r-v. For the relevant Latin passage see footnote 132.

<sup>152</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2704, fol. 4r-v: “fui et steti captivus in posse perfidorum Sarracenorum...”.

municipal systems finds a conceptual resonance with the oppositional language of the documents. These records, although not bereft of language which indicates a salvific motivation behind ransoming donations, a topic that will be discussed below, reveal both a practice and language of religious conflict. The Mercedarian Order coalesced in a society where ransoming was a local endeavor integrated into the struggle against Islamic polities. This Christian society continued to approach ransoming, even charitable ransoming, through traditional perceptions and patterns of action. The vocation of ransoming and the Mercedarian Order appear to have functioned in a military domain as often as in the province of charity. Even if the internal conceptions of the Order of Merced regarding ransoming promoted a religious and charitable rhetoric around the action, this construct did not appear to penetrate society enough to change Catalan perceptions of captive aid. Nevertheless, an order dedicated to religious ransoming was able to thrive in such an environment. The Mercedarians' expansion relied in part on their ability to integrate local systems into their ransoming practices, but also due to their appeal beyond their professed vocation.

### *Ransoming Beyond Charity, and Other Mercedarian Activities*

The limited ability of a caritative definition to fully encapsulate the patterns of ransoming support and undertakings involving the Mercedarians suggests the possibility of a more inclusive mental framework through which we can interpret this order. It would be a mistake to downplay the power of the ransoming brothers' chosen vocation in forming the order's identity and character. An equally erroneous misconception would be to return to an understanding of the order as part of the same military structure as the Order of Santiago or the Templars. Instead of

these portrayals of the Mercedarians, the records of interactions between lay Christians and the Order of Mercy reveal a social function of the brothers to strengthen local Christian communities through a mix of charity and increased access to ecclesiastic ritual. The community interactions with the Order of Mercy extended beyond donating to or profiting from ransoming. Occasional gifts sought to expand the ecclesiastic works of the order. The frequency of donations to the Mercedarians for religious services appear incongruous with the minimally-structured religious life of the brothers. The prominent position of ransoming in the Mercedarian constitutions, however, has clouded modern scholarly examinations of these records. Governing documents of the order and donations undeniably reveal the internal significance of ransoming to the brothers, yet the language and patterns of donations suggest that the defining vocation of the order functioned as part of a broader social role for the brothers. Indeed, the salvific discourse surrounding Mercedarian ransoming and the other operations of the order indicate a connection between religious ransoming and Christian evangelism. The scholarly focus on the lay ransoming activities of the brothers, however, has failed to explore the joint function of the order's charity and non-charity based actions.

The configuration of the Order of Merced resembled a lay confraternity dedicated primarily to their chosen charity and loosely draped with a rule. This composition changed over time, however, partly due to internal power struggles but likely also in response to the social roles asked of the order. The first constitution of the Mercedarians, enacted in 1272, focused overwhelmingly on provisions for ransoming and the related tasks of travel and alms collection. The personal observance of the brothers was, as Brodman notes, “commutated to a series of paternosters” and is rarely ever mentioned.<sup>153</sup> Of the fifty chapters in the 1272 constitution only

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<sup>153</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe*, 165.



three prescribe particular rites of observance for the brothers.<sup>154</sup> In the early fourteenth century a new constitution for the order was created, which dedicated far more space to detailing religious observance and which expanded the presence of ordained priests in the order. This shift has led most modern scholars to emphasize the struggle between the ordained and lay factions in the Mercedarians in order to craft an explanation of the combative rise of the clerical brothers.<sup>155</sup> This trend also divides the prominent activities of the order along these factional lines based on which group most dominated each particular practice. An additional factor in the increase of the power of the order's ordained members may have been the need to better address the religious function of the Mercedarians in Catalan society. One of the ways that the religious ransoming institution of the Order of Mercy garnered support was through the administration of religious needs which resonated with raid-afflicted societies. Often the practical approach of these communities to ransoming and their spiritual ministrations from Mercedarian brothers is overshadowed in modern research by ransoming duties.

In order to adequately understand the social function of the Mercedarians we must reevaluate the scope of activities to which charitable impulses drove the order's patrons. One of the distortions of the caritative model is the overstatement of the charitable nature of an action; consequently, the caritative label often obscures the social appeal of the Mercedarian Order beyond their charitable vocation. Brodman's study on medieval charity describes the practice as a religiously motivated embodiment of an "altruism toward humanity," distinguishing it from

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<sup>154</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, Appendix B. Chapters 37, 47, and 49 talk of Lenten observance, prayers at annual remembrances, and daily prayer hours respectively.

<sup>155</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 2-5,7-10.

any “benefice intended merely to assist the family and group or to extol the self.”<sup>156</sup> This definition only holds true with any consistency for the vocation of ransoming when looking at Mercedarian-controlled actions. Mercedarian alms, except for a few periods of disorder or embezzlement in the group, went towards aiding captives with minimal limitation imposed by the brothers. Agreements with particular captives or their representatives, however, did include breach of contract clauses. These passages often follow the phrasing of Guillem Tolsamens’ agreement with the Mercedarian house at Tarragona, which stated: “I [Guillem] promise you [the Mercedarians] that if ever you can prove that I came out of captivity without ransoming since I stood as a captive in Crivellent, or that I was not captured, I will return to you and your successors the said 60 sous.”<sup>157</sup> This language reflects the general rise in contractual documentation in the late Middle Ages, but is still illuminating in terms of the specific contingencies it provides for. None of these restrictions attempted to control who was ransomed. The provisions in fact only created safeguards to ensure that subsidies from the order went to aiding captives; presumably the order would redistribute returned funds for the ransoming of another Christian. People who approached the Order of Merced, however, frequently did not maintain this charitable openness in their contractual language.

The altruism espoused by the ransoming brothers did not prevent lay people from adopting a pragmatic stance toward ransoming and using the order accordingly. Incorporating these non-charitable concerns of ransoming into our understanding of the Mercedarians challenges modern scholars to address the social role of the ransoming brothers beyond

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<sup>156</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe*, 2.

<sup>157</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 133r: “Promitto vobis quod si unquam poteritis probare me exire de captivitate sine redemption cum steterim captivus apud crivelley n vel quod non fuerim captivatus, ego reddam vobis et successoribus vestris dictos 60 solidos.”

providing an outlet for charitable impulses. Examples of familial or personal use of Mercedarian agents are seemingly ever-present in the historical record. Many of these documents recorded donations to the order for the ransoming of a particular captive, whom the document named and whose location the donor frequently listed.<sup>158</sup> These donations, more than those with community based limitations, reveal motivations of personal benefit sustaining contributions to Mercedarian ransoming. In many of these cases the Mercedarians appear to have filled the role of secular ransoming agents and in one case may have actively entered a contract to do explicitly that. In 1244 Berenguer Arnaldo, a self-identified merchant, signed a deal with the Barcelona house of Mercedarians to facilitate the ransom of Pere Guilano. Berenguer agreed to give 100 sous Melgorian (about 133 sous Barcelona at the time) to the order provided that the brothers “rescued [Pere] from captivity and also conducted [him] to Narbonne.”<sup>159</sup> That the document recording the deal does not list a relation between Berenguer and Pere Guilano suggests that Berenguer may have hired the Mercedarian Order to take his place as an agent. Berenguer’s self-identification as a merchant, a profession which often doubled as agents for ransoming deals, increases the likelihood that the ransoming brothers were actively accepting another’s charge. Regardless of the accuracy of this hypothesis, in Berenguer’s use of the Mercedarians the ransoming brothers appear to enter a role governed by contractual frameworks which attempted to ensure particular earthly rewards.

These more pragmatic uses of the Mercedarian Order lack religious verbiage and are perhaps better understood as forms of contractual hiring than as records of charity or receipts of

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<sup>158</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2703, fol. 3r.

<sup>159</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 117v: “de ipsa captivitate extraxeritis, et eundem adduxeritis in Narbonam...”.

magnanimous gifts. Breach of contract resulted in reimbursement of the monetary contribution. Simon Dalmenara, a merchant from Tarragona, entered into such an employment relation with the order only to demand his restitution. Simon, likely working on behalf of Llorenç Generi, “an inhabitant in the boundary of the castle of Tamarito of the diocese of Tarragona,” had given a small fraction of the going rate of a ransom to the order. The key condition of this contribution appears to have been that the brothers were to use the funds to extract Llorenç’s son Pere from Islamic lands.<sup>160</sup> The brothers, however, never accomplished this task. Documentation of Simon’s resulting interaction with the order survives in a receipt of the Mercedarian reimbursement of the unused funds. The brothers returned 60 Barcelona pounds to Simon for which the merchant provided the simple justification that the money was given to the brothers to aid Pere Generi “whom the said brothers did not ransom.”<sup>161</sup> There is no mention of charitable motivations or intentions to reinvest the money towards other charities. Simon’s contractual engagement of the brothers echoed similar interactions with the order in this avoidance of acknowledging the caritative approach to ransoming. Neither Simon’s objection nor Berenguer’s hiring provide any indication of spiritual motivation in the parties. Instead, the grievance is presented as a breach of contract; the ransoming as the work of a hired specialist.

Simon Dalmenara’s refund was likely more anomalous than commonplace considering the paucity of extant records recording similar events. One explanation for the documents’ distinctiveness appears in the contested sum, which suggests a family of rarified means and with

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<sup>160</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2703, fol. 3r: “ipsi fratres debant redimere et rescatamur a manibus serracenorum Petrum Generii filius Laurentii Generi habitatoris termini castri de tamarito dioecesis Terrachone qui detinetur captus in villa de tedelis terrae serracenorum in posse almohani serraceni dicte ville quem dicti fratred non redimere.”

<sup>161</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2703, fol. 3r. For relevant Latin passage see note 160.

the ability to enforce their contracts. Sixty pounds, although only about half the average price of a full ransoming, was still vastly larger than the majority of donations, which tended to vary around 100 sous in value.<sup>162</sup> Simon's petition also suggests some difficulty in the reimbursement process as the receipt was made between the Barcelona house and the master general Jaume Anymerric, despite the fact that the captive's home city of Tarragona held one of the most active Mercedarian houses.<sup>163</sup> Simon likely had to complete his petition at the central house of the order to regain his funds. Furthermore, Simon's, or perhaps Laurentius Gereni's, employment-styled interaction with the order was not a singularity. Both the order and its supporters often included clauses in their contracts which could enable similar refund requests.

The continued presence of ransoming without explicit altruistic motives neither extinguishes nor diminishes the existence of charitable ransoming; however, its obscuration in the caritative model suggests potential value in reexamining the conditions under which spiritual and charitable motivations appear in Mercedarian donations. The perceivable division between charitable and socially reinforcing, or welfare, ransoming bolsters the argument that the Order of Mercy was both an evangelical agency and a charitable outlet. The nature of medieval charity, however, makes it difficult to delineate between charitable and other motivations for ransoming. The religiosity of the high and late Middle Ages and of the Order of Merced make it complicated to differentiate indications of salvific motives, which define Ruiz and Brodman's concepts of

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<sup>162</sup> For a study of the financial costs of ransoming a captive see Rodriguez, "Financing a Captives Ransom," 164-181.

<sup>163</sup> For a history of the Mercedarian house at Tarragona see Joaquín Millán Rubio, *La Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced (1301-1400)* (Roma: Instituto Histórico de la Orden de la Merced, 1992), 687-690. ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2703, fol. 3r. The receipt also states that the initial donations to the Mercedarians was conducted by Simon Dalmenara's agent in the city of Mallorca.

charity, from other religious trappings. Nevertheless, *pro anima mea* phrases and similar passages which denote an expected reward of salvation help provide litmus tests for these charitable impulses.

Donations to the Mercedarian Order, perhaps unsurprisingly, employed salvific phrases most frequently when the terms of the donation approached the Mercedarian ideal of universal ransoming. Both the testamentary and living gifts which avoided placing geographic limitations on their recipients often explicitly stated a spiritual motivation behind their generosity. Expressions of this motivation were usually general, not mentioning a specific sin or transgression that the donation aimed to mend. The phrases were, furthermore, often formulaic and relatively consistent through the generations. Gerald Adroerius's donation from 1248 provides a fine exemplum of this pattern of contribution when Gerald claimed to give a certain measure of barley (one *migeria*), "for the cure of my soul and of my parents' souls and my children's and my relatives and [the souls] of all the faithful and for the redemption of Christian captives."<sup>164</sup> The lack of limiting language in Geraldus's gift and similar explicitly salvific donations reveals a permeation of the Mercedarian conception of ransoming into the surrounding lay populace. This diffusion did not remain entirely separate from other Catalan perceptions of ransoming, but appears to have mixed with previous systems. In rare instances language of charitable motivation accompanied geographically-focused donations or personal contracts with the order. The division between the overtly charitable and the openly selective nevertheless reflected a duality in the social function of the Mercedarian vocation. Some medieval Christians clearly supported the Mercedarians and their ransoming in order to sate their charitable impulses,

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<sup>164</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 188r-v: "dono in perpetuum ob remedium animae meae et animarum parentum meorum et filiorum et consanguinorum meorum ac omnium fidelium et ad redemptionem captivorum christianorum...".

and thus donated with more flexibility. Preferential gifts more closely resembled welfare systems and attempted to provide targeted aid to specific groups in order to support local communities. Restrictive donations echoed municipal systems designed to create social stability in the raiding prone frontiers than they resemble religious charity. Selective gifts, moreover, often exchange salvific terms for the confrontational language which reflected concern over the perpetuation of these societies. It is unlikely that either group of donations categorically lacked the motivations which sustained the other. The distinctive configuration of motivations, therefore, reveals the desired emphasis of the giver more than it suggests a binary division. The mixed function of the Mercedarians to preserve social order and to provide a release valve for urban charity, moreover, challenges the continued utility of the purely charity-focused understanding of the group. The two roles of the Order of Mercy, charity and welfare, at times coexisted in the documents, as they likely did in the society at large. Pere de Villa de Vallibus's execution of a testamentary donation, briefly discussed above, included both a variant of the spiritual *pro anima* phrase yet still gains preferential treatment for familial or regional relatives.<sup>165</sup> Academically dividing these two activities misconstrues how Aragonese and Catalan cultures and societies viewed ransoming. It would be equally inaccurate to say the Mercedarians lacked a caritative character as it would be to claim charitable ransoming was their sole or perhaps even primary social role.

Our more inclusive discussion of ransoming still only details part of the lost complexity of the Mercedarians' medieval practices. The caritative lens has focused investigative attention on Mercedarian ransoming to the detriment of other spiritual services provided by the Order of

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<sup>165</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 216r-v: "pro anima sua" appears in reference to Bernat de Gatello."

Mercy. The majority of donations to the ransoming order mention ransoming only in the name of the order, if at all, and often do not receive modern attention. Consequently, these gifts largely have failed to shape the scholarly perception of the brothers. The ignored contributions sought to fund actions beyond ransoming and suggest expanded Mercedarian functions which medieval Christians perceived as connected to the brothers' ransoming vocation. Many of these gifts included *pro anima* and similar spiritual sentiments suggesting that the Mercedarians held a charitable appeal beyond their ransoming activities.

The diversity of donations to the order partially reflected the thirteenth-century trend to diversify religious gifts. Ruiz identifies such a shift in the wills of Castile to donate to assorted groups instead of one religious entity in an attempt to secure salvation.<sup>166</sup> A cursory examination of the data provided in Carme Batlle and Montserrat Casas's study of charitable donations in Barcelona confirms that Catalan peoples started to spread their donations similarly to their Castilian neighbors. Of the 27 wills which Batlle and Casas identified as having donated to the Order of Mercy less than a third failed to donate to the mendicant or military orders as well and a half dozen donated to all three groups.<sup>167</sup> The extreme cynic would assert that, following from Ruiz's analysis of the thirteenth-century shift, donations to the Mercedarians which did not target ransoming, or donation connections between the redemptive brothers and mendicant or military groups, were simply a means for Christians to play the odds and diversify their salvation portfolio. Such a system of diversification would suggest a relative detachment from the ransoming act and thus explain some of the absence of references to ransoming. A donation to

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<sup>166</sup> Ruiz, *From Heaven to Earth*, 110-132.

<sup>167</sup> Carme Batlle i Gallart and Montserrat Casas i Nadal, "La caritat privada i les institucions benèfiques de Barcelona (segle XIII)," in *La pobresa y la asistencia a los pobres en la Cataluña medieval*, ed. Manuel Riu (Barcelona: C.S.I.C, 1980), 181-187.



the Mercedarians would not necessarily come from a desire to promote ransoming but simply to expand one's odds in the afterlife. A more detailed examination, however, uncovers selective solicitation of Mercedarian services consistent with the evangelical trends of the mendicant and military orders. Numerous Christians approached the ransoming brothers for the specific duties of secular clergy or for expanded access to such ecclesiastics. Furthermore, the choice of Mercedarians from the great plethora of late medieval religious institutions for these clerical functions suggests a conceptual association between the brothers' professed vocation and access to the spiritual benefits of clergy.

One set of documents which are unpredictably quiet on the topic of ransoming were donations associated with joining the Order of Merced in the tertiary or primary order. These records suggested expected spiritual rewards from both the *vita activa* of ransoming and the *vita passiva* of the spiritual observance. Individuals or couples joining the Order of Merced gave over all their property. Part of the exchange between initiate and order gave the new confraternity member or full brother access to the resources of the order. The donors, from the eight descriptions of members joining the Mercedarians found in a single volume of archival records, do not mention the redemption of captives outside the name of the order save in one account.<sup>168</sup> More surprisingly still, most of the records included a passage written by the receiving brothers which remained similarly silent on the topic of captive aid. The passages from the order offer new brothers "bread and water" and habitually welcome all new members to "have a part in all the temporal and spiritual goods of the order."<sup>169</sup> This language, which

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<sup>168</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 520r-v.

<sup>169</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 520r-v: "dare tibi panem et aquam et quos habebas partem in omnibus bonis temporalibus et spiritualibus ordinis." For similar phrasing

encompassed spiritual benefits from the active life of ransoming and the passive life of prayer, could have been inclusive for efficiency, but also suggests a connection between the two activities of the religious. The only document that attempted to itemize and thus separate the active and passive spiritual goods of the order survives in a highly suspicious eighteenth-century Castilian summary. The later editor likely felt compelled by the internal struggle between ordained and lay brothers to enumerate the spiritual goods of “sacrifices, fasts, abstinences, and ransoming of captives,” in order to bolster the clerical contributions.<sup>170</sup> The Castilian editor, however, perhaps unwittingly touched upon an apparent truth in the lay perceptions of the Mercedarians, despite the limited value of his/her summary.

When donors did request specific benefits upon joining the Order of Mercy, they would commonly request a combination of two services, one of which relied upon the clerical branch of the order. The first traditional request was for new Mercedarian tertiaries to confirm their burial near the brothers.<sup>171</sup> Burial close to pious individuals was a traditional concern of Christians and a common request accompanying charitable donations to urban institutions in the late Middle Ages.<sup>172</sup> Community members periodically sought burial rights through simple testamentary donations without ever joining the Mercedarians in life.<sup>173</sup> Burial requests consequently are not

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regarding temporal and spiritual goods see, ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 23r-24v; 207r-208v.

<sup>170</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 290r: “todos los sacrificios, ayunos, abstinencias, y redenciones de cautivos y demas biendes spirituales del orden.”

<sup>171</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 23r-v; fol. 290v.

<sup>172</sup> Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead do Such Great Things?*, 14-16; Ruiz, *From Heaven to Earth*, 110-132.

<sup>173</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 378.

unexpected and provide limited insight into the distinctive role of the Mercedarian Order. The second request was for a mass to be held for the new member or their family upon entry or death. Masses, as with burial rights, were not singular to the Order of Mercy.<sup>174</sup> Often donations would fund mass services on the anniversaries of loved ones' deaths or births.<sup>175</sup> Masses, however, required ordained priests. In a Mercedarian house this ritual would entail the services of the clerical brothers, or put differently, the brothers more dedicated to the spiritual observance and the *vita passiva* than the *vita activa* of ransoming. A second option would be for a local priest to visit and perform the mass, but the order's constitution and archival records suggest that this rarely happened. Individuals joining the Order of Merced, moreover, could occasionally make lingering requests to clerical brothers. Boniface and his wife Maria patronized the ordained Mercedarians in this manner, when they entered the order in 1243. The couple donated all their goods to the Barcelona house with the partial condition that after their death "the order retain always one priest who forever will celebrate mass daily one after another for our souls."<sup>176</sup> This appeal of the *vita passiva* in a group so structured to facilitate the *vita activa* reflected a combined external perception of the order as ransoming agent and access point to the gospels. The importance of Mercedarian religious services, moreover, increased the order's role in providing support to Christina communities, not just captives.

The appeal of expanded access to Christian ecclesiastics garnered the Mercedarians numerous donations of houses and other resources. Masses and church services, in addition to

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<sup>174</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 23r-24v; fol. 207r-208v.

<sup>175</sup> Ruiz, *From Heaven to Earth*, 1-11, 110-132.

<sup>176</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 207r-208v: "ordo tenere semper unum presbyterum qui semper quotidie unum post alium celebret missam pro animabus nostris nisi tamen fuerit de voluntate Domini Regis."

the defining activity of the brothers of mercy, appear to have fueled their expansion into frontier localities. Donations for masses in newly conquered regions commonly enticed the ransoming brothers to expand the presence of their ordained brothers into the area. Less than a generation after the conquest of Valencia a local man “for the cure of our soul” gave multiple land holdings to the Mercedarians “in order to make and hold forever in the said manor a populated church with its own priest.”<sup>177</sup> This same man gave another piece of land for a Mercedarian house and hospital under a similar condition that a priest would reside on the location and offer masses for his soul. The records of these donations captured the spiritual motivations of the donors in both *pro anima* formulae and their insistence on the new priests conducting masses for giver’s sake. This intentional expansion of the clerical brothers unmistakably indicated the popular recognition of a Mercedarian spiritual benefit beyond charitable ransoming. Donations of candles and similar component contributions to masses further suggest support of the Order of Mercy’s function as an evangelical center.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, Mercedarian growth appears to have relied on the appeal of their priests as much as on their lay ransoming brothers.

The order’s dual appeal of active ransoming and passive observance in these communities displays a magnetism similar to the joint preaching and charity of mendicant groups. It is estimated that half of the thirteenth-century Mercedarian houses also operated parish churches.<sup>179</sup> Records survive of land donations intended for Mercedarian churches in

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<sup>177</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 25r-26r: “ob remedium anime nostre”, “ad faciendum et tenendum semper in dicto podio ecclesiam populatam cum suo presbitero...”.

<sup>178</sup> ACA, ORM, rollo 1, doc. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Burns, *The Crusader Kingdom of Valencia*, 248-249.

Játiva, Ubeda, and Tortosa, in addition to the Valencian account mentioned above.<sup>180</sup> These expansions all occurred in places where the active vocation of the order had broad allure for donors and a developed presence in established Mercedarian houses. All of these towns were either in newly conquered territory with large Islamic populations or were vulnerable to ship-born raiding. The appeal of Mercedarian ransoming in these locales, therefore, is evident. Mercedarian houses preceded all four of these donations and presumably established a reputation for their chosen profession before their patrons sought to expand the order's priestly presence. The bishop of Tortosa even helped to found the first local house of the order specifically for ransoming and not church functions.<sup>181</sup> The explicit limitations on the first Tortosan house in its preemptive nature further illustrates the Mercedarians' reputation as church operators. The bishop likely attempted to limit Mercedarian activity due to a concern over competition for parishioners. Furthermore, access to church services in these vulnerable regions complemented the efforts visible in the ransoming records to support the orthodox faithful of Christ. Ransoming the faithful and providing religious observance both were ways to reinforce the local Christian society. The engrained connection between Mercedarians and ransoming carried over into the selection of this particular order to operate a new church. The medieval function of the Order of Mercy as priests and ransomers suggests connected social functions for the order's captive aid and observance activities.

The appeal of Mercedarian passive life challenges the monochromatic focus on their active vocation in modern thought. The four donations of Játiva, Ubeda, Tortosa, and Valencia

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<sup>180</sup> ACA, Monacales, Haciendas, v. 2676, fol. 271 r-v; fol. 270r; fol. 25r-v. for an original parchment see ACA, ORM, rollo 1, doc. 25.

<sup>181</sup> Millano Rubio, *La orden de nuestra señora*, 633-639, 695-705.

all occurred during the height of lay power in the Order of Mercy. The constitution of the order at the time of all these donations focused on the active over the passive life, and brothers still reserved the position of master for lay members. This structure did little to limit the joint patronage of the active lay and passive clerical contingents of the order, however. Taylor's analysis of the ransoming brothers correctly identifies this dual nature of the order from its inception. He argues that the shifting nature of the Order of Mercy was a product of broader shifts in Christian perceptions of the role of the religious. Taylor's assertion, however, inaccurately bifurcates the spiritual benefits and cultural perception of the Mercedarian Order, in a manner similar to Brodman's caritative classification.<sup>182</sup> The internal power conflict between lay and ordained brothers did not appear to proceed from a division in the support or external perception of the order. Instead, these two groups served the same social function. The Order of Merced was simultaneously part of the *vita active* and *passiva*.

King Jaume II offers an illuminating final case study of the perceived duality of the Mercedarian Order. Jaume II ruled during the fateful elections of the first clerical master of the order. The elections were highly contested and dragged on for upwards of five years until finally being settled in 1317 with the election of Ramon Albert.<sup>183</sup> Prior to this dispute, Jaume II had patronized the order like most of his predecessors; he provided the Mercedarians with tax relief, enforced testamentary donations to the group, and granted expanded pegging rights to bolster ransoming funds.<sup>184</sup> Jaume notably donated also to the clerical activities of the ransoming brothers. On one occasion the king donated four one-hundred pound candles to the

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<sup>182</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*; Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*.

<sup>183</sup> Taylor, *Structures of Reform*, 5-42.

<sup>184</sup> Millán Rubio, "Colección diplomática de Jaime II", doc. 5, 17, 40.

Mercedarians, ordering his regional bailiff to “hand over [the candles] to their priest or the procurator of the church of Blessed Mary of the house of Valencia.”<sup>185</sup> The priest of the brothers’ church was to use the candles during every conventual or greater mass. This donation thus contributed greatly to the endeavors of the passive life of the order. In addition to the object of Jaume’s gift, the record of this donation further emphasized the clerical brothers by not mentioning ransoming outside the order’s name. The king chose to donate to the brothers in Valencia, not to their main house in Barcelona, thereby paralleling the evangelical impetus to expand the clerical presence in border regions. Nevertheless, Jaume II actively attempted to maintain the lay composition of the Order of Merced, despite his patronage of the order’s clerical branches.

Jaume II’s struggle to preserve lay control of the Mercedarian Order works together with his patronage of the clerical branches to reveal his unified perception of the order’s two natures. The candle donation occurred just over half a year after Jaume petitioned Pope Clement to recognize the election of the lay brother Pere de Amerio as Master of the order over his clerical challenger. The king espoused the good deeds of the lay brothers, “expending forth their goods for the redemption of captives of the orthodox faith from the prisons of barbarians.”<sup>186</sup> His arguments, however, all focused on the precedence of the order’s previous composition and the ability of the military orders to perform their duties without a clerical head. There is nothing to suggest that Jaume II conceived of the shift from lay leadership as a threat to the ransoming abilities of the order. Scholars have instead suggested that the king feared losing control of a

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<sup>185</sup> Millán Rubio, “Colección diplomática de Jaime II”, doc. 20: “tradat Sacriste seu procuratori Ecclesie beate Marie de podio Valencie.”

<sup>186</sup> Millán Rubio, “Colección diplomática de Jaime II”, doc. 18: “pro redimendis captivis fidei orthodoxe a captionibus barbarorum bona sua exponens...”.

local revenue stream.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, the reference to the military religious groups, compounded with the fact that the king discussed the royal patronage of the order embodied in the group's emblem, indicated monarchical rather than spiritual concerns. The function of the clerical brothers thus was not the driving concern of Jaume's actions. Patronage of the ecclesiastic functions of the Mercedarians complemented Jaume's perception of the order's role regardless of his lay ideal of the order. The donation of candles was neither a resigning acceptance of the order's shift towards clerical control nor a challenge to its lay vocation. A year and a half after Jaume's donation he again attempted to support Brother Amerio's position as master, ordering his regional officials to do the same. Once more Jaume cites his ancestral role as benefactor of the order to justify his preservation of the old structure, but remains silent on any feared change to Mercedarian function. The case of King Jaume II, although plagued with the singularities which come with royal status, provides an excellent example of the joint role of the Mercedarian Order in the realms of the crown of Aragon. Jaume, despite explicitly praising the Mercedarians for their active vocation and opposing a transition to governance by agents of the passive life, willingly supported both functions of the Order of Mercy. This mixed perception in Jaume's actions and discourse challenges our understanding of the Mercedarian Order. Medieval contemporaries appear to have understood the ransoming brothers to be agents of both active and passive spiritual lives, recognizable by their ransoming but not divisible from their observance duties. Mercedarians as reinforcing pillars in Christian societies occupied the role of both ransomer and priest.

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<sup>187</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 73-75; Brodman, "Ransomers or Royal Agents."



## CONCLUSION:

## FINAL THOUGHTS AND LINGERING SHADOWS

Pere Nolasc and his followers created a religious order integrated with the cultural goals and social systems of the Catalan world. The use of the caritative model to limit modern analysis of the Mercedarians, therefore, belies the multiplicity of their functions and ignores aspects of the self-perception and exterior perceptions of the order. The Order of Merced dedicated itself to the *vita activa* of ransoming, but the order's social role extended far beyond active charity. Contemporary discourse surrounding the brothers' vocation and the order's practices suggest that the Mercedarians operated in a social role closely linked to the evangelical nature of military and missionizing efforts. The move in scholarship to distinguish between the redemptive brothers, the military orders, and the mendicants provided a clearer understanding of the distinct operations of each group than do earlier models. Focusing purely on these distinctions, however, belies the perceived common goals of these orders. Recognition of a Mercedarians' social role, common to contemporaneous military efforts and pastoral care alike, helps us reconstruct the *mentalité* of the Catalan world.

Understanding the perceived social role of the Mercedarian Order requires scholars to engage with the diverse associations which the language of medieval discourse reveals between Mercedarians and other groups. The diction surrounding the redemptive brothers captures the external and internal perceptions of interconnectivity between the Mercedarians' ransoming, mendicant practices, and military endeavors. Comparisons and allusions to mendicant charities shaped discussions of Nolasc's followers from the earliest generations, while martial language simultaneously permeated discussions of Mercedarian practices. Indeed, popes and kings alike

periodically described the ransoming brothers in martial terminology. Understanding the Mercedarians is, therefore, not solely a matter of understanding their distinctiveness, but also their similarity to these other groups. Pedro Pascual offers insight into one possible connection through his work against apostasy. Pascual's concern over defending the faith of wavering Christians reveals a similar evangelical design as missionizing and crusading. Pascual's writings echo the generations of ransoming practices which preceded him in the writings' attempts to reinforce threatened Christian communities and thus contribute to the number of Christian faithful.

Reconstructing the patterns of ransoming and Mercedarian social functions works to further challenge the precision of the caritative model. The Order of Merced's activities more closely resemble efforts to reinforce Christian societies than they do purely charitable outlets. Preferential ransoming practices from the municipal systems continued for decades after the Mercedarians professed universal ransoming of Christian captives. Language of donations promoting localized ransoming suggests an attempt to defend against Islamic threats to Christian societies. The caritative model ignores this combative stance in Mercedarian ransoming in order to emphasize the group's charitable function. The caritative model, furthermore, ignores the duality of roles the ransoming brothers' occupied. Medieval Christians employed the Mercedarians for their ransoming in conjunction with their ecclesiastic services. Donation records suggest dual clerical and lay identity to the Mercedarian Order, whereas scholarship has contrarily maintained a dichotomy between the two factions and their operations.

The nature of Mercedarian activities challenges the divisive classification of the caritative model. Brodman's analytical system has limited utility if we continue to use it to divide charity from broader social goals. The charity of Mercedarian ransoming gave the order its

distinguishing characteristics, but was never fully removed from the order's clerical duties or Christian military aims. The present study has focused on the different instances when medieval sources recorded Mercedarian functions inconsistent with a caritative vocation. These deviations from the model do not necessarily suggest an absence of charitable impetuses, however. Many of these instances likely reflected the existence of multiple motivations operating at once. Sam Conedera's recent study on the military orders in Castile even challenges whether a focus on charity distinguishes the Mercedarians from military groups. Conedera, in a similar manner to the present examination of the Order of Mercy, attempts to offer a redefinition of military orders and an examination of their spirituality. One of Conedera's conclusions is that the military orders attempted to protect Christians from armies, enslavement, and illness, and that "the unifying principle behind these activities... was charity."<sup>188</sup> Conedera's assertion that charity was such a defining characteristic of even the armed aspects of the military orders undercuts the utility of sequestering the Mercedarians' role in society due to their charitable nature. It is possible to conclude from Conedera's argument that medieval contemporaries perceived the Mercedarians, even in their caritative aspects, as integrated into similar roles as were the military orders.

A further benefit of the examination of ransoming from the evangelical model of Benjamin Kedar, beyond understanding the various perceptions of the Mercedarian Order, is the implications for our understanding of late medieval evangelism. Scholars following the interpretive views of Jeremy Cohen tend to focus on the missionizing movements as aggressive

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<sup>188</sup> Sam Zeno Conedera, SJ, *Ecclesiastical Knights: The Military Orders in Castile, 1150-1330* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 103, 111.

attacks against the other Mediterranean religions.<sup>189</sup> More recent challenges to Cohen have shifted focus instead to the internal function of religious attacks for Christian communities. Authors like David Nirenberg have examined instances of medieval violence in a manner that helps explain the contemporary function of the events within medieval society.<sup>190</sup> Introducing ransoming and the Mercedarian Order into modern understanding of medieval evangelism, however, supports even more internal motivation for polemical texts and ideas. The polemical writings of Pascual, which explicitly aimed at challenging Islamic and Jewish teachings in order to reinforce wavering Christians beliefs, substantiate the assertion that some polemical or missionizing texts were designed for a Christian audience. The localized nature of Mercedarian ransoming, moreover, suggests further possible concern over the faith of local communities. This is not to say that actual attempts at medieval missionizing did not occur. There are too many known instance of missionaries traveling to Islamic lands to refute their expressed goals of converting non-Christians; Saint Francis of Assisi was the first in a long line of largely unsuccessful missionaries.<sup>191</sup> Viewing missionizing in conjunction with Mercedarian practices, rather, can aid in understanding the expanse of missionizing texts and efforts. A proper exploration of this topic, however, would require more time and pages than the present study can offer.

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<sup>189</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

<sup>190</sup> David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>191</sup> See for a study of Saint Francis's famous missionary trip, John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The dictate of time and the desire to produce a succinct study also have left a few aspects of Mercedarian ransoming unexplored or under-explored in the present project. One of the main lacuna remaining in our understanding of Mercedarian ransoming practices is the treatment of women. Women in the role of ransomed captives are almost entirely absent from the documents of this study. A focus on male captives corroborates the military styled ransoming which local communities transferred from municipal systems to the Mercedarian Order. It would follow from the previous ransoming systems' preference for ransoming captured male militia that military perceptions of Mercedarian activities carried this preferential treatment into Mercedarian operations. This assertion may well be accurate, but this argument from silence is less illuminating and less defensible than a targeted study could produce.

Women appear in descriptions of ransoming outside the Order of Mercy and the governing documents of the Mercedarian Order with enough frequency to invite a dedicated study of the topic. Yvonne Friedman's study of the writings about female captives during the crusader period illustrates the cultural support for ransoming Christian women. Unlike male captives who writers feared were at risk of apostasy, women "were seen as in more immediate danger of sexual conquest, which in a way symbolized the military victory, and then to the danger of assimilation."<sup>192</sup> This concern over the vulnerability of female captives is generally believed to have encouraged some Christian aid for seized women. Friedman acknowledges, however, that women remained at a disadvantage in ransoming, since the factors of economic value and social status which drove most medieval ransoming prioritized male captives. Nevertheless, this concern over female captives would logically have produced some reflection

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<sup>192</sup> Yvonne Friedman, "Women in Captivity and their Ransom During the Crusader Period," in *Cross Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period: Essays Presented to Aryeh Grabois on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 84.

in the ransoming records. The Mercedarian Order also drafted provisions for a female order in their first constitution of 1272, suggesting a recognition of female interest in the ransoming side of captive aid. The provision is very limiting and required sisters to be economically self-sufficient in order to join the Mercedarians. The constitution also ordered female Mercedarians to stay in their own home, providing little indication of women's involvement in the active Mercedarian vocation.<sup>193</sup> Women in the order of Mercy, however, remain like women aided by the order understudied. A new source collection of Mercedarian ransoming documents, which the modern Order of Mercy aims to produce for the Mercedarian 800-year anniversary may facilitate the type of study female captives have lacked.<sup>194</sup> This concentration of resources should at least provide future scholars with a sufficient data pool to better explore the significance of any remaining silence regarding female captives.

The upcoming source collection may also allow further exploration of the localized ransoming trends discussed in this study. The present analysis examines the records held in the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón and, consequently, focuses on Catalan society. Many of the practices explored in this work likely adopted regional characteristics throughout the Mediterranean. Local variants in traditional ransoming systems may have produced different patterns of engagement with the Mercedarians which escaped this examination. Centralization of the Mercedarian records, which remain largely dispersed throughout European archives, will allow future researchers to reconstruct specialized regional tendencies. The increased quantity of data may also allow for statistical analysis of the order's medieval practices. Ellen Friedman has

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<sup>193</sup> Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, Appendix B, Chapter 15.

<sup>194</sup> For information on this collection see the Homepage of the Institutum Historicum Ordinis de Mercede, last modified 2015, <http://www.odemih.com/es/>.

already proven the utility of such quantitative studies using the more abundant Mercedarian sources of the early modern world.<sup>195</sup> The most significant advantage of expanded source collections, however, is the opportunity they provide for future scholars to more fully explore the complex associations between the Mercedarians, their vocation, and the broader world of Christian-Muslim relations. The Mercedarian Order offers an unparalleled glimpse into the practices of medieval Christian ransoming. This unique resource has a tendency to attract scholars, but also to narrow their gaze. Future investigations into ransoming practices should be careful to consider the social function of captive aid in combination with its outward appearance. It is from this stance that we can fully appreciate that the brothers of the Order of Merced were part of a broad segment of Catalan Society motivated to defend and expand the Christian faith by arms, by ransoming, by holy communion, or by charity.

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<sup>195</sup> Friedman, *Spanish Captives in North Africa*.

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