

Ambiguity and Conversion in the Correspondence of Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and Thomas D'Arcos, 1630-1637*

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Abstract

In the summer of 1630, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637), a magistrate, cleric, and tireless correspondent in the South of France, offered to negotiate the release of Thomas D'Arcos (1573-1637?) from his Moorish captors in Tunis. Peiresc had a pragmatic reason for writing. As an intermediary in the Republic of Letters and collector of curiosities, he needed information from North Africa that D'Arcos could provide. But to Peiresc's dismay, D'Arcos converted following his release from captivity, perhaps the only Frenchman to do so. Many converts published captivity accounts after their return to their country of origin. D'Arcos's letters provide a unique insight into his dual existence both in Tunis, where he gained local prestige as a convert, and in France because of his ability to procure information from North Africa. An examination of 80 published letters exchanged between Peiresc (Aix-en-Provence and Belgentier), D'Arcos (Tunis), and a mutual friend Honoré Aycard (Toulon) in the period 1630-1637 reveals the way in which these correspondents framed the conversion at a time when such an action was considered an "apostasy." D'Arcos presented a paradox by living in two worlds. He never justified his conversion but instead insisted that his inner convictions (faith) remained unchanged even though his dress, or "habit," had changed. Peiresc avoided confronting the issue of the conversion and addressed D'Arcos as if nothing had changed, using strategies to lure him back to the Catholic faith. He dissimulated news of the conversion in the Republic of Letters but at the same time shared observations obtained by a source he identified as a "former captive." The exchanges with the intermediary Aycard were more explicit, and correspondents disclosed their feelings concerning the impact of the conversion on their relations as well as on the broader community. Although D'Arcos expressed a fear that he had lost Peiresc's respect, he did

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little to comply with the Frenchman's need for specific information, blaming any shortcomings on Barbary and providing only the exotic rather than the noteworthy.

Keywords

Religion, religious conversion, captivity, Peiresc, D'Arcos, 17th-century France, correspondence, Northern Africa, Republic of Letters

Introduction

In the summer of 1630, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637), a magistrate, cleric, and tireless correspondent in the South of France, offered to negotiate the release of Thomas D'Arcos (1573-1637?) from his Moorish captors in Tunis.¹ Peiresc had a pragmatic reason for writing. As an intermediary in the Republic of Letters and collector of curiosities, he needed information from North Africa that D'Arcos could provide.² Peiresc played an important role in organizing and extending scholarly exchange, writing to more than 500 individuals scattered throughout Europe and the Levant, many of whom espoused diverse ideologies.³ He took pride in his role as a "midwife" to research by colleagues.⁴ In a period of censorship and during the Inquisition, he viewed "tolerance" as necessary to the pursuit of knowledge.⁵

¹ Peiresc to D'Arcos, July 13, 1630, Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres de Peiresc*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1893), 7: 85.

² Nabil Matar, "Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity, 1577-1704," in Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York, 2001), 22-23.

³ Robert A. Hatch, "Peiresc as Correspondent: The Republic of Letters & the 'Geography of Ideas,'" Chapter 2 in *Science Unbound*, ed. Brian Dolan (Umeå, Sweden, 1998), 19-58. Robert Mandrou, *From Humanism to Science, 1480-1700*, trans. Brian Pearce (Middlesex, UK, 1978), 189; Harcourt Brown, *Scientific Organizations in Seventeenth Century France* (New York, 1934), 5; Sarah S. Gibson, "Scientific Societies and Exchange: A Facet of Scientific Communication," *Journal of Library History* 17 (1982): 148; Paul Dibon, "Communication in the Republica Literaria of the 17th Century," *Res publica litterarum: Studies in the Classical Tradition* 2 (1978): 46.

⁴ Peiresc to Gilles de Loches, July 3, 1634, le P. Apollinaire de Valence, ed., *Correspondance de Peiresc avec plusieurs missionaries*, 60. See also Peiresc to P. Dupuy, May 9, 1634, in Paul Tannery, Cornelis de Waard, and Armand Beaulieu, eds., *Correspondance du P. Marin Mersenne* 16 vols. (Paris, 1932-1985), 4: 115.

⁵ Peiresc to L. Holstenius, June [n.d.] 1637, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 5: 486. Peter N. Miller has addressed the concept of "toleration," or "accommodation," a virtue enabling a scholar to achieve the goals of communication and cooperation without viewing

A former secretary to Cardinal Francisco Joyeuse and a captive for nearly five years, D'Arcos was one of 3,000 to 4,000 Christian captives living in Tunis.⁶ Of the 11 to 16 percent of Christians who converted during enslavement in Barbary, D'Arcos was perhaps the only Frenchman who converted following release from captivity.⁷ Many converts published captivity accounts upon return to their country of origin. D'Arcos's letters provide unique insights into his dual existence, both in Tunis, where he gained prestige as a convert and in France, where he was able to provide information about North Africa. D'Arcos established contact with Peiresc prior to his conversion and remained an important contact for many years. D'Arcos has been described an "adventurer" whose interest in "travel and scientific curiosities" led him to convert to the Muslim faith rather than "abandon his studies."⁸ In biographical dictionaries, he has been portrayed as showing "a great respect" and "boundless admiration" for Peiresc and at

knowledge as a threat. Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, 2000), 42. See also Michel Feuillas, "Peiresc et religion," in Anne Reinbold, ed., *Peiresc ou la passion de connaître* (Paris, 1990), 70-73; Peiresc to P. Dupuy, Feb. 6, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 3: 28.

⁶ According to consular records, D'Arcos was captured off the coast of Toulon in January 1625 and enslaved in Tunis. His ransom was paid by an intermediary and reimbursed by his wife in Sardinia. Records indicate D'Arcos returned to Tunis in 1628 where he was captured a second time. See Pierre Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie au début du XVII^e siècle*, 10 vols., (Tunis, 1925), v. 4: xv, n. 14, and 162, 166, 173, and 353-356. For slave counts, R.P. Pierre Dan estimated that 3,000 to 4,000 renegades and approximately 7,000 slaves were living in Tunis. R.P. F. Pierre Dan, *Histoire de la Barbarie et ses corsairs* (Paris, 1637) 313, 319. Davis, who has provided an excellent discussion concerning the problem of an accurate slave count, has estimated that between 1580 and 1680, approximately 35,000 captives lived in Barbary. Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800* (New York, 2003), xxi and 14-15. Weiss has written that of the 7,000 Christians, as many as 150 were French. See Gillian Lee Weiss, "Back from Barbary: Captivity, Redemption and French Identity in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Mediterranean," Dissertation (Palo Alto, 2002), 34-38. See also Ellen G. Friedman, "Christian Captives at 'Hard Labor' in Algiers, 16th-18th Centuries," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13, 4 (1980): 617.

⁷ According to Clark, of the 1,331 Frenchmen taken captive from 1629 to 1631, 149 (or 11 percent) converted. G.N. Clark, *War and Society in the 17th Century* (Cambridge, England, 1958), 105-129. For Algiers, Davis estimated 14 to 16 percent of the European slaves converted. Robert C. Davis, "Counting European Slaves," *Past and Present* 172 (2001): 116.

⁸ This reference is cited in *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France*, 26: 1 (1863), 159.

the same time there was a “freedom” in his correspondence: not only did he dedicate rough drafts of manuscripts to Peiresc but he also discussed personal health problems.⁹

The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which Peiresc, D’Arcos, and a mutual friend Honoré Aycard framed conversion and the cultural “other” in their letters.¹⁰ Given the importance of self-fashioning at this time, I address D’Arcos’s use of letters to convey and negotiate his identity and the impact of his conversion on the Republic of Letters. This study focuses on 80 published letters exchanged between Peiresc (Aix-en-Provence and Belgentier), D’Arcos (Tunis), and Aycard (Toulon) in the period 1630-1637.¹¹

Context

Captivity led to what Nabil Matar has described as a multicultural mix, which contrasted with a more “homogeneous” Europe.¹² Captives could provide the first accurate accounts of this little-known region, its religion and culture, which contrasted with embellished reports written by former slaves and redemptive priests.¹³ North African society, open to mobility and the assimilation of diverse ethnic and religious groups, was also one in

⁹ “... d’une grande déférence et d’une admiration sans bornes... une grande liberté,” in G. Lazare, “Thomas d’Arcos,” in J. Balteau, M. Barroux, M. Prévost, eds. *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, 16 vols. (Paris, 1939), 3: 418.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the “other,” my appreciation goes to Nabil Matar who shared this letter with me: William Hareborn to Assan Aga, June 28, 1586, in Richard Hayluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow, New York, 1904), 6: 282-283. See also Nabil Matar, *Britain and Barbary, 1589-1689* (Gainesville, 2005), 5-7; and Weiss, “Back from Barbary,” 337.

¹¹ Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Les correspondants de Peiresc: Lettres inédites, publiées, et annotées*. 2 vols. (Paris, 1897-1897; repr., Geneva, 1972). *Lettres de Peiresc*, 7 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1893. Alexandre-Jules-Antoine Fauris de Saint-Vincens, ed. “Suite des lettres inédites de Peiresc, communiqués par M. Millen,” *Magasin encyclopédique* 5 (1806), 109-155.

¹² Matar, “Introduction,” in Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption*, 56, 22.

¹³ Matar, “Introduction,” in Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption*, 18-22. For a discussion of an “idealized version” of Europe, see Weiss, “Back from Barbary,” 280. See also Guy Turbet-Delof, *L’Afrique barbaresque dans la littérature française aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Geneva, 1973), 111. An excellent analysis of the British captivity accounts by historical period and theme is provided by Nabil Matar, “English Accounts of Captivity in North Africa and the Middle East,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, 2 (Summer 2001): 553-572.

which individuals used “imposture” to dissimulate identity, often for social integration.¹⁴

Captives converted to attain a better life, to reduce the hardships of slavery or to evade financial or familial obligations in Europe.¹⁵ Although some converts claimed to remain Christians at heart, many European critics portrayed them as “untrustworthy”¹⁶ or held the belief that conversion led to spiritual perdition.¹⁷ But as Matar has said, many Europeans wanted to believe the converts retained a vestige of their European identity, that they had not entirely renounced their European heritage for the religious and cultural “other.”¹⁸ Weiss has echoed this view, writing, the “prospect of hybridicity also afforded comfort—suggesting that Catholic faith remained within the hearts of the apostates or that a modicum of Frenchness endured even in men who deserted their native lands.”¹⁹

“Turning Turk” introduced ambiguity into an individual’s identity. In addition to renouncing their faith, converts adopted a Muslim name and dress, underwent circumcision, attended the mosque, and changed diet.²⁰ Jocelyne Dakhliia has described a persistent “duality” in identity following conversion that included retaining parts of their former Christian name.²¹ Clothing, an integral element of what Stephen Greenblatt has termed “self-fashioning,” revealed the intentional, studied, and strategic “expression of identity.”²² Changing of *habit* or clothing, signified by the removal

¹⁴ Jocelyne Dakhliia, “Ligne de fuite: Imposture et reconstructions identitaires en Méditerranée musulmane à l’époque moderne,” in Wolfgang Kaiser and Claudia Moatti, eds. *Gens de passage en Méditerranée de l’Antiquité à l’époque moderne. Procédures de contrôle et d’identification* (Paris, 2007), 427-458. See also Ronald F.E. Weissman, “The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Social Relations, Individualism, and Identity in Renaissance Florence,” in Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F.E. Weissman, *Urban Life in the Renaissance* (Newark, 1989): 271-273.

¹⁵ R.P.F. Pierre Dan, *Histoire de la Barbarie et de ses corsairs* (Paris, 1637), 315-321. See also Antoine Quartier, *L’Esclave religieux, et ses aventures* (Paris, 1690), 6-7.

¹⁶ Weiss, “Back from Barbary,” 335.

¹⁷ For a comparison to “amphibious animals,” see Louis Chénier, *The Present State of the Affairs of Morocco. . . . Translated from the French of M. Chenier* (London, 1788; reprt. New York, 1967), 155, quoted in Weiss, “Back from Barbary,” 62. For the hybrid nature, see also Quartier, *L’Esclave*, 88.

¹⁸ Nabil Matar, Personal Communication, July 6, 2007, Melbourne, Fla.

¹⁹ Weiss, “Back from Barbary,” 335.

²⁰ P. Dan, *Histoire*, 321-327.

²¹ Dakhliia, “Ligne de fuite,” 427-458.

²² Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), 1.

of the old and replacement with the new, implied “incorporation” and “commitment” to the adopted culture.²³ Serving as an important component of assimilation at a time of the emergence of national identity,²⁴ dress indicated rank and status,²⁵ changed external appearance, but could also be removed. In contrast, circumcision offered physical proof of conversion.²⁶ The absence of circumcision implied a vestige remained of an individual’s former identity, both as French and Catholic.²⁷

Correspondence

The exchange of letters began (April 25, 1630) when D’Arcos, a captive at the time, wrote to Aycard: “I am still in chains and hope to God to leave soon by one means or another.”²⁸ D’Arcos spoke figuratively of his enslavement, but he described the walks he took, pirate raids, the death of a renegade, and redemptive activities. He included gifts for his correspondents, complained of failing eyesight, and sent his respects to Peiresc, a courtesy suggesting that the men knew of each other. In his postscript dated June 20, 1630, he provided a description of the bones thought to be those of a giant and insisted on the veracity of his claims since he had viewed and touched the remains. He concluded with news of the departure of galleys from Tunis and Algiers destined to “inflict great damage on Christians.”²⁹

When Peiresc (July 13, 1630) learned of the so-called giant’s bones, he offered to negotiate D’Arcos’s release from slavery and to contact influen-

²³ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge, England, 2000), 3-6, 11, 49, and 273; Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York, 1999), 95.

²⁴ Matar, “Introduction,” in Vitkus, ed., *Piracy*, 36.

²⁵ Davis, *Christian Slaves*, 104.

²⁶ See Bartholomé Bennassar and Lucille Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d’allah: l’histoire extraordinaire des renégats, xvi-xvii siècles* (Paris, 1989), 332-333. See also Bartolomé Bennassar, “Chrétiens convertis à l’Islam et circoncision aux XVI^{ème} et XVII^{ème} siècles,” *Horizons maghrébines, Le droit à la mémoire*, 14/15, (1989), 64-72.

²⁷ Gabriel Audisio, “Renégats Marseillais (1591-1595),” *Provence Historique* 45, 185 (1996): 305-331.

²⁸ “Je suis encore en la chaisne, et espere en Dieu en sortir bientost par une voye ou un autre.” D’Arcos to Aycard, April 25, 1630, Fauris de Saint-Vincens, ed., “Suite des lettres inédites de Peiresc,” *Magasin encyclopédique* 5 (1806): 112-113.

²⁹ “. . . promettent de faire grand domage aux Chretiens.” D’Arcos to Aycard, April 25, 1630, Fauris de Saint-Vincens, “Suite,” 115.

tial figures in France and North Africa, and even the king if necessary.³⁰ The identification of statesmen signaled Peiresc's ties to the political arena. In exchange for his release D'Arcos would set up a pipeline to provide Europe with information and artifacts from North Africa. Peiresc promised to locate a globe and planned to send gifts "to give [satisfaction] to your patron or your friends to maintain their good graces so they show some remorse at having allowed you to languish."³¹

Letters sent from France to Tunis could take four to six weeks to arrive at their destination. D'Arcos had been released prior to receiving Peiresc's offer to help. In a letter (June 24, 1630) to Aycard, he announced his freedom by using an excerpt in Latin from Psalm 124:

The snare is broken and we are set free. I have finally paid my ransom to my patron, and, in exchange, the chains of my slavery are broken; and although I am free, my patron does not want me to leave as a slave but as a friend. Given the numerous kindnesses I have received from him, I am obliged to comply [and remain here] for five or six months during which time you can write or engage me in your service.³²

D'Arcos enumerated gifts he sent—a chest with one pair of white boots, two pairs of slippers, a dozen soles, and one pair of shoes. He mentioned problems with his eyesight and implored help in gaining the release of two "renegades," one of whom had been forcibly circumcised in D'Arcos's presence, but who, "in his heart," remained a Christian. He stressed that both renegades needed to leave Barbary, "this accursed and terrible country."³³

³⁰ Peiresc to D'Arcos, July 13, 1630, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 85-86.

³¹ "... donner aussy [satisfaction] à vostre patron ou à voz amis, de quoy vous conserver leurs bonnes grâces en sorte qu'ilz eussent remordz de conscience de vous laisser languir." Peiresc to D'Arcos, July 13, 1630, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 86. For the role of gifts to captors, see Matar, "Introduction," in Vitkus, ed., *Piracy*, 26.

³² "*Laqueus contritus est et nos liberati sumus, j'ai enfin payé mon rescat a mon patron, moyennant lequel les chaisnes de mon esclavitude se sont rompues; et bien que je suis franc, mon patron nonobstant ne veut que je laisse sa compagnie, non comme esclave, mais comme ami. Je suis forcé des grandes courtoisies que j'ai receues de luy, de luy complairre pour quelque cinq ou six mois, pendant lesquels vous me pourrés escrire et m'employer a vostre service.*" D'Arcos to Aycard, June 24, 1630, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 115. My appreciation goes to Dr. Alan Rosiene, who translated the Latin and identified the origin of this quote.

³³ "Il fut circoncis par force en ma présence... et crois qu'en son coeur il soit encore chrestien.... Vous fairés oeuvre de charité de l'acheminer a quelque chose de bon, affin qu'il ne retourne plus icy." D'Arcos also described Barbary as "accursed and terrible." D'Arcos to Aycard, June 24, 1630, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 116. Other redemptive

He ended the letter with a reminder to send a globe of the world and convey his respects to Peiresc. He also provided a description of two teeth he recovered from the “great giant” (each weighing 3 ½ pounds) but mentioned that the remainder of the bones had crumbled.³⁴

Peiresc beleaguered D’Arcos with numerous requests, but questions about his captivity were not among them. He commented on the teeth of the so-called giant and then requested information on its genealogy as well as the region in which the bones were discovered.³⁵ At the end of the letter, he congratulated D’Arcos on his release: “It remains to congratulate you on your fortunate deliverance and to pray to God that He repays you for the ills and inconveniences you have suffered by as much prosperity and happiness, and especially by the healing of your eyes.”³⁶

Thanking Peiresc for his letters of July 13 and Sept. 27, 1630, as well as for the map sent on Sept. 30, 1630, D’Arcos began:

On one hand being satisfied and pleased that people of your stature should hold me in esteem, but on the other hand quite ashamed that someone as useless and lowly as I am should be granted consideration beyond his abilities. I must believe that this stems from your goodness and courtesy rather than from my merit; and while I have put off my answer for a time and hesitated to send it on account of the disparity between my person and your reputation and worth, I finally decided that I would sin less by publicizing my ignorance and lack of prudence than by disobeying your orders.³⁷

activities carried out by D’Arcos have been described in letters of April 3, 1635, Tamizey de Larroque, *Correspondants* 2: 219, and Feb. 16, 1636, *Correspondants* 2: 222. For more on the “accursed” Barbary, see Weiss, who has described the way in which captives contrasted the ills of Barbary with the virtues of their home country. Weiss, “Back from Barbary,” 280.

³⁴ D’Arcos to Aycard, June 24, 1630, Fauris St.-Vincens, “Suite,” 116.

³⁵ Peiresc to D’Arcos, July 13, 1630, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 87, and Peiresc to D’Arcos, Sept. 17, 1630, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 90.

³⁶ “Il me reste à vous feliciter de vostre heureuse delivrance et à prier Dieu qu’il vous veuille recompenser tous les maux et inconveniences que vous avez soufferts par autant de prosperitez et contentements, et particulièrement par la guerison de vos yeux.” Peiresc to D’Arcos, Sept. 17, 1630, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 90.

³⁷ “... me trouvant d’une part fort aise et content de me voir estimé des personnes de vostre qualité; mais d’autre costé bien honteux qu’un sujet si bas et inutile, comme je suis, soit tenu en consideration plus relevée que sa capacité. Je veux croire que cela a procedé plutost de vostre bonté et courtoisie que de mon merite; et bien que j’aye suspendu ma reponse quelque temps et mis en balance si je la devais faire pour l’inegalité de ma personne à vostre reputation et dignité, je me suis à la fin resolu que je pecherois moins en publiant

In response to Peiresc's numerous questions about the giant's bones, D'Arcos wrote that he had only recovered two teeth. The Moors' claims (which D'Arcos described as a "fabrication") about the giant had "no basis in reason or fact." No one talked about it anymore; it was as if "nothing had happened."³⁸ However, he and ten men visited the site and located some "truly monstrous" bones that turned to dust upon contact. He sent one tooth along with tokens from Tunis and Mecca, books, two ostrich eggs, and an engraved carnelian stone, which the Moors maintained held occult properties.³⁹ He also explained why he postponed his return to France: "Praise to God, I am free and without obligation. I can leave here when I like, but the difficulty of the transit has made me decide to remain in this country for several months more."⁴⁰ D'Arcos had announced his release to Aycard the previous year (June 24, 1630), and he mentioned it to Peiresc in passing on March 15, 1631). The Tunis resident, who earlier wrote he needed to remain to repay a moral obligation now delayed his return to France due to the risk of a difficult sea journey. In his letter to Aycard (April 10, 1631), he listed gifts for Peiresc mailed the previous month: a small locked crate, two white turtledoves in a cage, 20 books, a packet of medals and miscellaneous objects from Mecca, the giant's tooth, and two ostrich eggs. He questioned the title by which to address Peiresc and reiterated an offer to serve.⁴¹

In another letter to Peiresc, after providing personal details about his poor eyesight, D'Arcos launched into an update about genealogy of the giant said to have died 4,000 years earlier: "You believe as I do that these are only musings... I would fear ridicule if I wrote you everything."⁴² He

mon ignorance et indiscretion de desobeir a vos commandements." D'Arcos to Peiresc, March 15, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 117.

³⁸ "... ce que disent les Mores de l'invention de ce corps sont toutes reveries qui n'ont ni raison, ni fondement... comme si jamais on n'en avait rien vu, ni su." D'Arcos to Peiresc, March 15, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 119.

³⁹ D'Arcos to Peiresc, March 15, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 118-120.

⁴⁰ "Je suis graces à Dieu libre et franc, et je puis sortir d'icy quand je voudray; mais la difficulté du passage me fait resoudre a demeurer encore en ce pais quelques mois." D'Arcos to Peiresc, March 15, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 120.

⁴¹ D'Arcos to Aycard, April 10, 1631, M. Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 121.

⁴² "Vous croirés, et je crois aussi que ce sont des reveries... [J]e crains d'estre estimé ridicule si je vous escrivois tout." D'Arcos to Aycard, April 10, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 121.

also sent a stone a learned Moor claimed contained the tormented soul of an emperor and concluded with news of corsair raids on the French.⁴³

Peiresc, skeptical of the claims about the so-called giant, said he believed the bones came from a large animal and planned to compare the fragment of the tooth to other specimens in his cabinet of curiosities at Aix. He also expressed an interest in learning about other cultures even though he considered many of the tales surrounding the giant to be “musings.”⁴⁴ Some objects had little value for scholarly collectors. Peiresc returned the carnelian stone, writing (May 10, 1631): “Since you are in a country where everyone is so credulous and so ready to believe in the occult properties of stones and especially those with engravings, most of which are thought to be talismans, I thought it best to return your carnelian now that I have deciphered its mystery for you. You can pass it off as having these added qualities to some curious-minded [person] who is fonder of such things.”⁴⁵ He identified the other stone as a fossilized sea urchin, writing that its unusual shape likely gave rise to the belief that it contained the soul of an emperor.⁴⁶ Peiresc requested substantiation for all information to better understand “what these poor people are led to believe” and “the extent to which their naïveté and gullibility go.”⁴⁷ He sent a letter several days later along with a catalogue of manuscripts, most of which were Arabic translations of the ancient Greek texts, writing: “You will have something to please these Moors who believe they are so learned, and if permissible, it would be advantageous to know whether they have seen some of these books or have others, or whether a catalogue could be obtained.”⁴⁸

⁴³ D’Arcos to Aycard, April 10, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, “Suite,” 121-122.

⁴⁴ Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 10, 1631, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 95.

⁴⁵ “Parce que vous estes en un païs où le monde est si credule et si prest à defferer à cez opinions de proprieté occultes des pierres, et particulièrement des gravées, qu’ils prennent quasi toutes pour des Talismans, j’ay creu que vous renvoyant vostre corniole, maintenant que je vous en ay deschiffré le mystere, vous la ferez passer pour quelque chose de plus considerable, pour la troquer avec quelque curieux qui en soit plus friand.” Peiresc to Arcos, May 10, 1631, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 97.

⁴⁶ “...que tels figures extraordinaires leur font forger cez imaginations.” Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 10, 1631, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 96.

⁴⁷ “...ce que cez pauvres gentz s’en font à croire...faire voir jusques où peut aller leur simplese et credulité.” Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 10, 1631, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 95-96.

⁴⁸ “Vous aurez de quoi faire un peu feste à cez Mores qui se croyent si doctes, et seroit bon de sçavoir d’eux s’il estoit loisible, s’ils ont veu de cez livres icy et s’ils en ont d’autres, voire s’il s’en pouvoit obtenir un catalogue.” Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 13, 1631, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 98.

Peiresc shipped barrels of wine (May 20, 1631) to D'Arcos and his patron. He requested additional bone fragments from the so-called giant, which would enable him to identify the animal. He also wanted to confirm a report that the city walls of Tunis contained the bones of a giant.⁴⁹ Responding to Peiresc's incessant questions with apologies for his own ineptitude, D'Arcos attempted to enhance the value of the objects the Frenchman dismissed as trifles. For example, he claimed the carnelian had been stolen from a king; the stone with the tormented soul of emperor would speak if washed in blood.⁵⁰ Although Peiresc stressed the importance of observation and inquiry, D'Arcos focused on hearsay and folklore.

D'Arcos also requested a Latin or Italian translation of the Qur'an⁵¹ and included a manuscript he penned: "I took the liberty of sending you and dedicating to you a Spanish memoir on the government of princes I wrote to attest to the honor I want to convey to you. And you would do me a favor by censuring and correcting it where you deem it necessary."⁵² D'Arcos's frequent refrain of self-proclaimed humility contrasted with the liberty he took in dedicating a rough draft to Peiresc. The Tunis resident thanked him for the wine and listed the gifts he sent: antique medals, clay lamps, handles of daggers, slippers in Christian and Moorish styles, the dedicated book, and remnants of bones of the so-called giant.⁵³ But the mail was delayed. In a letter of July 17, 1632, Peiresc wrote that he received D'Arcos's letters and gifts, which were sent on Oct. 20, 1631, five months later on March 20, 1632. As for the political memoir, he had the dedication replaced with one to Cardinal Francisco Barberini:

I am extremely sorry about the poor choice you have made [in dedicating the book to me], which could detract from the value of one of the best works of this time. For that reason, when I received your book, I implored Mr. Aycard to convince you to remove the dedicatory preface and replace it with one addressed to His Eminence Cardinal

⁴⁹ Peiresc to D'Arcos, May 20, [1631], Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 100.

⁵⁰ D'Arcos to Peiresc, Oct. 20, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 122-123.

⁵¹ Latin translations of the Qur'an were completed in the twelfth century, and they were printed in 1543. An Italian translation was completed in 1547, French in 1647, and English in 1649.

⁵² "J'ay pris la hardiesse de vous envoyer et dedier un petit memorial espagnol que j'ay escrit du gouvernement des princes, vous le recevé s'il vous plaist en témoignage de l'honneur que je desire vous rendre, et me favoriserés de le censurer et corriger ou vous jugerés qu'il sera nécessaire ou raisonnable." D'Arcos to Peiresc, Oct. 20, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 125.

⁵³ D'Arcos to Peiresc, Oct. 20, 1631, Fauris St.-Vincens, "Suite," 126.

Barberini, the pope's nephew, my former patron, who took a particular delight in this type of study.⁵⁴

The dedication of a book to a cardinal would enable D'Arcos to gain recognition or even a patronage position when he returned to Christian Europe. In the same letter (July 17, 1632), Peiresc thanked for a copy of the Punic inscription and then detailed the method for making an accurate mold.⁵⁵ In a short letter of Aug. 11, 1632, that accompanied a supply of prunes and figs, he included a second request for a mold of the Punic inscription.⁵⁶ But then Peiresc received disturbing news (Nov. 21, 1632) as he told Aycard—rumors that D'Arcos had converted (or reneged):

I praise God with all my heart of the confirmation that Mr. D'Arcos is in the grace of Christianity, to an extent very different from the rumors that have been spread, because far from what has been calumniously invented that he has reneged, he has written such a beautiful book to defend the Christian faith against the impugnation by the Moham-medans, which I have resolved to send to Rome.⁵⁷

Still, Peiresc continued to correspond with D'Arcos as if he did not suspect that D'Arcos had converted. Although Peiresc lamented he did not have a copy of the Qur'an, he sent religious readings to D'Arcos and mentioned his plans to mail the political memoir to Barberini.⁵⁸ Peiresc wrote the Dupuys in Paris the following day (Nov. 22, 1632) to announce the forthcoming manuscript containing little-known information on North Africa by a "former secretary to Cardinal Joyeuse and enslaved by the Turks for

⁵⁴ "[J]e plains extremement le mauvais choix que vous avez fait de ma personne, qui seroit capable d'oster le credit que pourrait mériter la meilleure pièce du temps. C'est pourquoy, dez que j'ai receus vostre livre, je priay Mr. Aycard de vous faire trouver bon d'en oster l'epistre liminaire et d'y mettre une adressée à l'Eminentissime cardinal Barberin, neveu du Pape, mon ancien et particulier patron, qui avoit une delectation particulière en cette sorte d'estude." Peiresc to D'Arcos, July 17, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 102.

⁵⁵ Peiresc to D'Arcos, Aug. 11, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 106.

⁵⁶ Peiresc to D'Arcos, Aug. 11, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 106-107.

⁵⁷ "Je loue Dieu de tout mon coeur de la confirmation de Mr. d'Arcos en la grace du christianisme jusques à un point bien different des mauvais bruits qu'on en avoit voulu semer, puisque tant s'en faut qu'il se soit renié, comme calomnieusement on avoit controuvé, il a fait un si beau livre pour la deffence de la Foy chrestienne contre les impugnations des Mahometans, laquelle je suis resolu d'envoyer à Rome." Peiresc to Aycard, Nov. 21, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 285-286.

⁵⁸ Peiresc to Aycard, Nov. 21, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 285-286.

eight or ten years, who endured 1,000 hardships to be ransomed.”⁵⁹ He made no mention of the rumored conversion.

D’Arcos wrote Peiresc (Nov. 25, 1632) that he earlier sent a New Testament in Arabic, manuscripts, and medals. He assured Peiresc that the book on Africa was nearing completion. Then he announced that the courier of the letter would provide the “news of the country” and promised to serve Peiresc in “whatever state” D’Arcos found himself, a choice of words that called attention to a fundamental change in his identity. Did Peiresc’s letter (July 11, 1632) concerning the switched dedication of the political memoir to Barberini prompt this avowal of his conversion? A “scandalized” Peiresc wrote Aycard (Dec. 26, 1632) that he learned D’Arcos had “reneged” six months earlier, “taken the turban,” lived in a large house with a pension from the viceroy of Tunis, changed his name to D’Osman, and attended the mosque: “He told me that the courier would give me news from this country without referring to his change of condition. However, there is a word that seems to lead to this unfortunate interpretation . . . [because] he offered to serve me in *whatever condition he is*, which seems to indicate he is no longer in that which he wanted to be.”⁶⁰

But in the course of this 600-word letter, Peiresc’s terminology softened—from “reneged” to a “change in condition.” He added that he admired D’Arcos’s resolve to write a book on Christianity after this “change,” and he wondered whether to mention the conversion since D’Arcos continued to sign his letters as D’Arcos, not as the convert Osman. But other French sources confirmed the conversion. Peiresc then told Aycard he learned D’Arcos was considered as a “Turk among Turks, as a Jew among Jews, and as a Christian among Christians, not knowing who he is or what he should

⁵⁹ “. . . autrefois secretaire du cardinal du Joyeuse, et depuis esclave des turcs 8 ou 10 ans, d’ou il a eu milles peines a s’en pouvoir faire mettre a ranson.” Peiresc to Pierre Dupuy, Nov. 22, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 2: 375-376.

⁶⁰ “Sieur d’Arcos s’est renié, et a pris le Turban Turquesque et maison droicte avec pension ou assignation certaine de la part du Vice-Roy de Thunis, dont j’ay esté si scandalizé que je ne sçaurois exprimer le just sentiment de déplaisir que j’en ay. . . . Il m’escrit que le porteur de sa lettre me dira les nouvelles de ce pays-là, sans rien exprimer de son changement de condition. Il y a neantmoins un petit mot en passant qui semble se pouvoir interpreter en ce mauvais sens-là, . . . me faisant de belles offres de son service *en quelque estat qu’il se trouve*; ce qui semble presupposer qu’il ne soit plus en celuy qu’il voulait estre.” Peiresc to Aycard, Dec. 26, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 288. Grandchamp has pointed out that D’Arcos signed a document as Osman on March 4, 1632, which could date his conversion much earlier. Grandchamp, *La France en Tunisie*, 4: xv, n. 14.

be, for which I am greatly sorry for him.”⁶¹ Was D’Arcos an opportunist; did he lack conviction in his own identity?⁶²

D’Arcos’s conversion caused another problem for Peiresc because of personal recommendations. He had previously told the Dupuys in Paris about D’Arcos’s forthcoming books, and he recommended one book be dedicated to a cardinal. Now, after these encomiums, he learned D’Arcos had converted. Four months passed before Peiresc wrote D’Arcos (March 22, 1633). He did not mention the conversion but instead itemized specific information to include in the manuscript on Africa such as geography, mythology, and archaeology. In his postscript, he asked for the citations of reference books used by the Moors to interpret their talismans and for information on Arabic and Christian weights and measures. He also sent books—a copy of the Qur’an as well as writings on Christianity, all of which would contribute to the scholarship of the *Relation Africaine*.⁶³ In a letter to Aycard written the following day (March 23, 1633), Peiresc explained:

You will see in what terms I have written, not wanting to address him too openly about his change and not wanting to dissimulate it altogether. . . . I would like to tell him much more than I have said, and in the two small books I have sent him in addition to those he requested, there is enough to guide him and bring him back to his duty by honorable means.

I did not want to speak of the dedication of his book. Given his condition, it would be too great a mockery to dedicate it to a cardinal, who is nephew to the pope. I wanted to see the books he has written and found that he said favorable things about Christianity, but he said nothing of any consequence against the Muslim faith. . . . This pathetic man has let himself go in my opinion, which does not surprise me since he has abandoned himself, as they said, to this Moresque [woman], for one loses one’s head easily at that game. . . . But since he did not know to benefit from his visits by God, he will have to account for it. He will find all types of small printed tracts along with the Qur’an, which will cleanse his head effectively. . . . I have addressed [those items] with which he could find ways to help us should he accept to use his credit with

⁶¹ “. . . tenu pour Turc entre les Turcs, pour juif entre les juifs, et pour chrestien entre les chrestiens; ou pour ne sçavoir qu’est ce qu’il est ou qu’il doit estre; en quoy je le plains grandement.” Peiresc to Aycard, Dec. 26, 1632, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 289.

⁶² A similar expression was used by another writer to describe a harsh patron named Moustafa. “Avec les Turcs, il était Musulman, avec les Rénégats impie et débauché, et avec les Chrétiens Romain, il recitait son chappelet en leur presence et ne parlait que de devotion.” See Quartier, *L’Esclave*, 88.

⁶³ Peiresc to D’Arcos, March 22, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 109-115.

these Moors and the governors of the country. We must await his response, following that we will know in what terms we remain with him.⁶⁴

D'Arcos attributed the absence of letters from Peiresc (as he told Aycard, March 15, 1633) to his own change of *habit*, but he insisted this external change did not alter his personal relationship with his correspondents.⁶⁵ For his French correspondents, many of whom were priests, a conversion would create tension and ambiguity in their networks. In writing Aycard, he signed his letters with "Osman de Arcos," whereas in letters to Peiresc, he used his Christian name. He wrote another correspondent, a Sieur Gastines of Marseilles, about "our corsairs" whereas with Peiresc he wrote only of "corsairs."⁶⁶ He specifically asked Gastines the following: "Recommend me to the good graces of Monsieur de Peiresc and tell him without hesitation that he can at least *in convertendo* deal with sinners."⁶⁷ Peiresc shared this comment with Aycard: "[D'Arcos] warns [or reprimands] me not to

⁶⁴ "Vous verrez en quels termes je luy escriis n'ayant pas creu de luy vouloir parler en termes trop descouverts sur son changement, ni de le devoir aussi dissimuler tout à fait... ce que je luy veux dire est beaucoup plus que ce que je luy dis, et que dans les deux petits livres que je luy envoie outre ceux qu'il avoit demandez, il a de quoy pour le guider et ramener à son devoir par un bien honorable moyen; je ne luy ay point voulu parler de la dedicace de son livre, parce qu'en l'estat qu'il est, ce seroit une trop grande mocquerie de luy faire dedier un livre à un cardinal nepveu du Pape. J'ay voulu visiter les livres qu'il a composez et ay trouvé qu'il dit des bonnes choses pour le Christianisme, mais qu'il ne dit rien contre le Mahometisme qui soit de consideration. En ses Politiques... il n'y exprime rien qui ne se puisse appliquer au Mahometisme quasi aussi bien qu'au Christianisme; en somme ce pauvre home s'est laisser gaster tout à fait à mon advis, de quoy je me m'estonne pas s'il s'est abandonné, comme l'on vous dit, à cest Morisque; car on pert facilement son sens à cest exercice là.... Mais puisqu'il n'a sceu faire son profit des visites qu'il avoit eues de Dieu, ce sera à luy d'en respondre. Il trouvera tout plein des traités imprimés conjointement avec l'Alcoran, où il se verra laver la teste de bonne sorte, et s'il n'en faict son profit ce sera son dan.... [I]l auroit prou [sic] bon moyen de nous ayder s'il vouloit employer le credit qu'il a envers cez Mores et les gouverneurs du pays. Il faudra attendre sa response, suyvant laquelle nous verrons en quels termes nous pourrons demeurer avec luy." Peiresc to Aycard, March 23, 1633, Tamizy de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 292-293.

⁶⁵ D'Arcos to Aycard, March 15, 1633, Fauris de Saint-Vincens, "Suite," 131.

⁶⁶ My appreciation goes to Nabil Matar, who located the shift in the use of the term "corsair." Personal Communication, Aug. 16, 2007. The cite is in D'Arcos to Gastines, Nov. 15, 1633, Tamizy de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 45-46, n. 1.

⁶⁷ "[J]e vous supplie de me recommander aux bonnes grâces de M. de Peiresc, et luy dire que sans scrupule il peut (au moins *in connuertend*) traiter avec les pécheurs, et que du tout je suis son humble serviteur... ' signed Osman de Arcos." D'Arcos to Gastines, March 15, 1633, Tamizy de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 230 notes.

abandon the customs (or habit) I have with him, if not for all subjects, at least those dealing with conversion.”⁶⁸

D’Arcos began writing Aycard frequently, sometimes every two weeks, to repair the communication breakdown with Peiresc. He sent a copy of his work on Africa, claiming to include no statements contrary to church dogma. He did not sign the work because he feared “scandalizing” the French, especially Peiresc.⁶⁹ He ended one letter with a prayer from St. Augustine in Latin: “Here cut [me], here burn me and spare me not, but spare me in eternity.”⁷⁰ The prayer in Latin implied his spiritual affiliation with Catholicism. In yet another letter, he alluded to the *Book of Common Prayer*: “If I am unworthy to eat at the table of Peiresc, at least allow me to gather the crumbs.”⁷¹ Unlike the prayers in Latin, this excerpt is reminiscent of a fawning rhetoric used to address superiors much in the same way he lauded the qualities of his correspondents and denigrated his own worth. He expressed remorse at Peiresc’s long silence: “I am afraid that he has pushed me aside for some knave and will be sorry to have lost the friendship and esteem of such a significant individual. Jealousy makes me say this, and my suspicion has grown with his long silence.”⁷²

Even though Peiresc curtailed his written contact with D’Arcos, he continued to refer to him in letters to friends as a former captive, not as a convert,⁷³ and to send gifts through an intermediary.⁷⁴ Yet, to other correspondents Peiresc expressed his disappointment in the poor quality of information provided by D’Arcos.⁷⁵ In a letter to Peiresc, D’Arcos addressed

⁶⁸ “... pour me semondre de ne pas laisser les habitudes que j’avois avec luy si non pour tous sujets, au moins pour ceux qui vont *in convertendo*.” Peiresc to Aycard, April 3, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 296.

⁶⁹ “... de peur de scandaliser...” D’Arcos to Aycard, April 2, 1633, Fauris de Saint-Vincens, “Suite,” 135.

⁷⁰ My appreciation goes to Dr. Alan Rosiene who identified the source and translated the excerpt. June 19, 2007, in Melbourne, Fla.

⁷¹ “[s]i je ne mangeray a sa table, je me contente des miettes qui tomberont d’icelle.”

This is similar to the Order of Communion (1548) in the *Book of Common Prayer*. University of Florida reference librarians (e-mail message to author, Aug. 2, 2007). For the letter, see D’Arcos to Aycard, April 17, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 137.

⁷² D’Arcos to Aycard, April 17, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 137.

⁷³ Peiresc to Pierre Dupuy, May 16, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 523.

⁷⁴ D’Arcos enumerated the gifts sent by Peiresc. D’Arcos to Aycard, March 15, 1633, Fauris de St. Vincent, “Lettres,” 30.

⁷⁵ Peiresc to P. Dupuy, April 25, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 503.

his conversion: "I confess having felt extreme pain caused by your long silence, which I have attributed to my sins, which are not so great that I cannot hope for a pardon from God and mankind. Excision has not won me over yet and the first quality of salvation given me by the church will never be erased from my soul even though my dress has changed."⁷⁶ He used euphemisms (sins and dress for conversion; excision for circumcision, or perhaps even a metaphor for a removal from society or the church). This letter implied he had been circumcised, which led Peiresc to add a notation to another letter saying D'Arcos had not been circumcised when he "took the turban."⁷⁷

In the same letter, D'Arcos also apologized for the inferior quality of his manuscript on Africa, which he blamed on the conditions in Barbary.⁷⁸ He also commented the books sent by Peiresc made him "imagine being some cardinal" due to the elegant quality of the binding.⁷⁹ But he also wanted Peiresc to provide an evaluation of his book on Africa: "I beg you humbly to send me your judgment on the African account and inform me whether you would like to see the remainder... Often good plants are found in a poor garden."⁸⁰ D'Arcos used this letter to rehabilitate his identity. He distinguished between external appearances and internal beliefs, and he attributed the poor quality of his research to the conditions in Barbary. The French perspective, however, seemed to be it was better to suffer than to convert.⁸¹ Even though Peiresc did not respond, D'Arcos continued to

⁷⁶ "Je confesse avoir senti une extreme douleur de vostre long silence, et justement j'en ay attribué la cause à mes pechez, lesquels ne sont pas si enormes que je n'en espere pardon de Dieu et des hommes. L'excision n'a encores rien gagné sur moy, et le premier caractere de salut que l'Eglise m'a donné ne s'effacera jamais de mon ame bien que l'habit soit transformé." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 207.

⁷⁷ According to Tamizey de Larroque, Peiresc made a marginal notation: "Il dit n'avoir pas été circoncis en prenant le turban." See Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 45-46, n. 1. In some cases, older converts were not circumcised. See Bennassar, "Chrétiens convertis à l'islam," 64-72. The question remains. How did Peiresc know?

⁷⁸ D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, *Correspondants* 2: 208.

⁷⁹ "... me suis imaginé estre quelque cardinal, quand j'ay vu la couleur et la propriété de leurs relieures." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, *Correspondants* 2: 209.

⁸⁰ "[J]e vous supplie très humblement de m'envoyer vostre sentence de la relation africaine... Il se trouve souvent une bonne herbe dans un mauvais jardin." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1633, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants de Peiresc* 2: 210.

⁸¹ For comments on the similarities between martyrdom and suffering as a captive, see Quartier, *Captivity*, 35-38. See also Weiss, "Back from Barbary," 327.

send letters as well as gifts that could please, including large hooded chameleons. In the fall of 1633 Peiresc questioned how to repay D'Arcos for the chameleons. But Aycard dismissed this concern, writing D'Arcos gets them for "nothing since there he is the oracle of the Grenadins, who consult him on all of their most important business, and make him gifts of these animals."⁸²

In January 1634, Peiresc resumed correspondence with D'Arcos, requesting information but avoiding mention of the conversion. Although Peiresc claimed his busy schedule prevented elaboration on certain topics, he wrote an additional 3,500 words, asking for astronomical data to advance work on terrestrial longitude, a project that required the establishment of observation points throughout Europe and the Levant. He inquired about locating Grenadins to measure the height of the sun for work on latitude, which he said should be included in the book on Africa. Observations of the lunar eclipse of March 14, 1634, would enable Peiresc to correct erroneous data and to determine the longitude of Tunis.⁸³ Peiresc detailed the preparations and instruments to use before and during the eclipse. He also included anatomical observations of two chameleons, and he complained about the lack of eye-witness reports in the African account.⁸⁴ Peiresc renewed an earlier request for a mold of the Punic inscription, which he said could be obtained by a Morisco if the request did not cause problems for a Christian: "I would be willing to pay the trip of the Grenadin, but if you have some hesitation, I will willingly withdraw my request. . . . I do not want to be the cause of any unpleasantness from those there who take offense at the slightest provocation and seek the slightest pretext to extort or create ill will for a Christian."⁸⁵ By specifying a Grenadin, Peiresc implied he considered them more competent than the natives of Barbary. This

⁸² Concerning the price of chameleons, Aycard assumed they cost nothing: "... rien, car comme il est là l'oracle des Granatins qui le consultent en tous leurs plus importants affaires, ils lui font des presents de ces animaux." Aycard to Peiresc, Nov. 2, 1633, Fauris de St. Vincens, "Suite," 148.

⁸³ Peiresc to D'Arcos, Jan. 25, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 119-120.

⁸⁴ Peiresc to D'Arcos, Jan. 25, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 121, 123.

⁸⁵ "Je payerois volontiers son voyage; mais si vous y trouvez de la repugnance ou de la difficulté, je revoque ma priere de bon coeur, et vous supplie de n'y plus penser; car pour rien du monde, je ne voudrois avoir esté cause qu'il vous en arrivast du desplaisir; comme cez gens là ne prennent que trop facilement des ombrages sur des piedz de mouche, ne cherchent que des pretextes à tort ou travers pour rançonner et mesfaire à un Chrestien." Peiresc to D'Arcos, Jan. 25, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres de Peiresc* 7: 118.

statement also suggests that Peiresc continued to identify D'Arcos as a Christian. But D'Arcos only responded: "I am in Barbary and nothing leaves that is not barbarian; when in Rome, do as the Romans."⁸⁶

D'Arcos's frequent offers to serve Peiresc seemed to be empty rhetoric however, because he found numerous excuses to avoid complying. For example, D'Arcos claimed to have witnessed the eclipse, but he provided the commonly accepted terrestrial coordinates for Tunis rather than new data. As for the Punic inscription, he claimed no one was competent: "You can rest assured that no one in this country is capable of doing that. And although the Moors are most barbarous and ignorant, the Spanish Moriscos are no less so, and although [they are] more superstitious and hypocritical in their laws and in their private affairs, they are worse and more underhanded than even the said Jews."⁸⁷ He also said he promised a "renegade" money if he returned with the actual stones carrying the Punic inscription. He sent accounts of strange creatures, neither man nor beast, reported by another "renegade" who had lived in dark Africa, an eyewitness he described as "a man of good sense and worth, and who told me this several times without varying his account."⁸⁸ He expressed a need for reading glasses and provided information on turbans worn by Muslim princes. He planned to mail another manuscript he had written. Near the end of this letter, he announced a unique gift:

On this boat I am sending you a rare animal that is called an Alzaron in India and Persia; its horns are thought to have the same properties of those of the unicorn, and they are held in high esteem; it is quite tame because he was taken from Nubia when quite small. It is said that he will continue to grow. His speed is marvelous and by far surpasses that of all other animals. He had been given to a great and important Marabou [holy man] of this city, who is one of my good friends, and from whom I acquired this animal to send it to you, assuring you that all those who had seen it and know it

⁸⁶ "[J]e suis en Barbarie, d'ou rien ne peut sortir qui ne soit barbare; et quand on est à Rome, il faut vivre comme à Rome." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1634, Fauris de St. Vincens, "Suite," 139.

⁸⁷ "[V]ous pouvés estre assuré qu'il n'y a aucun en ce pais capable de la faire; et bien que les Mores soient fort barbares et ignorants, les Morisques Espagnols ne le sont pas moins, bien que plus superstitieux et hypocrites en leur loy; et en leurs traitements civils, ils sont pires et plus cauteleux que les mesmes Juifs." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1634, Fauris de St. Vincens, "Suite," 140.

⁸⁸ "Ce renegat est homme de bon sens et de crédit, et m'a conté cecy plusieurs fois sans varier en la relation." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1634, Fauris de St. Vincens, "Suite," 141-142.

[the animal] say it is quite rare. . . . An important person from here offered me a good and substantial price to send it to the Grand Duke but I esteem Mr. Peiresc more than the grand duke and all of his Tuscany.⁸⁹

Unique and bizarre gifts might bring renown to a collection, but a conspicuous gift could lead to jealousy and resentment from individuals of higher social status, especially since D'Arcos said he refused a great price to send it to the Medicis.⁹⁰

Peiresc thanked D'Arcos profusely for the Alzaron along with medals and other curiosities, stressing he found himself "overwhelmed with so much obligation" since similar animals were found at embassies. A mutual friend suggested he send it to Barberini.⁹¹ Peiresc told Aycard (July 26, 1634) he was unable to keep the Alzaron because it was a gift more appropriate for someone of higher status. He regretted he did not know how to repay his obligation.⁹²

The remainder of the 3,000-word letter provided detailed instructions for a "renegade" to take a plaster mold of the Punic inscription, and he requested the credentials of another "renegade" who provided information on Africa. Peiresc emphasized he preferred live chameleons rather than an exotic gazelle.⁹³ In a subsequent letter (Dec. 18, 1634), Peiresc told D'Arcos he sent the Alzaron to Barberini to "discharge" himself of the ownership.⁹⁴ He insisted on the need for revisions in the book on Africa, devoting many

⁸⁹ The Alzaron resembled a gazelle. "Par cette barque je vous envoie un rare animal qu'aux Indes et en Perse on nomme *Alzaron*, on tient que ses cornes ont la mesme vertu que celles de la licorne, et on en fait grande estime; il est fort domestique, car on la pris vers Nubia fort petit, et dit on qu'il croistra encore. Sa course est merveilleuse et surpasse de beaucoup celle de tous autres animaux; on en auroit fait un présent a un grand et insigne Morabut de cette ville fort mon ami, des mains duquel je l'ay tiré pour vous l'envoyer, vous assurant que ceux qui l'ont veu et le connaissent me disent qu'il est fort rare. . . . Un personnage principal d'icy m'en a offert un bon et grand prix pour l'envoyer au grand duc, mais j'estime plus M. de Peiresc que le grand duc et toute sa Toscane." D'Arcos to Peiresc, June 30, 1634, Fauris de Saint-Vincens, "Suite," 143-144.

⁹⁰ Giuseppe Olmi, "Science-Honour-Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, (Oxford, 1987), 8.

⁹¹ ". . . chargé de tant d'obligation." Peiresc to d'Arcos, Aug. 3, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 129.

⁹² Peiresc to Aycard, July 26, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres de Peiresc* 7: 325-326.

⁹³ Peiresc to d'Arcos, Aug. 3, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 129-138.

⁹⁴ Peiresc to D'Arcos, Dec. 18, 1634, Tamizey de Larroque, *Lettres* 7: 144.

lines of ink to the fact that even gardeners and bookbinders made valuable observations.⁹⁵ Peiresc emphasized new observations rather than data copied from ancient authorities would add credibility to the book on Africa.⁹⁶ But the reasoning fell on deaf ears. D’Arcos maintained his gout and ineptitude prevented him from observing the heavens.⁹⁷

Peiresc planned to publish some of D’Arcos’s works, but, as he wrote Aycard, the author’s change in “habit” would force readers to evaluate his work on the basis of his conversion.⁹⁸ In a letter to D’Arcos (March 1637), Peiresc addressed the conversion in explicit terms for the first time:

I had always maintained a very high opinion of your probity and natural goodness from the time I was honored with our first meeting, but this must put beyond all doubt that all your intentions are good, hoping that God will give you the grace to get to know him even better some day, and upon this belief, thanking you very humbly of the honor you have given me and for the contribution of your noble and worthy thoughts, offering to serve you without reservation in anything at my disposal.⁹⁹

Peiresc provided an update of ransom efforts made by redemptive priests to procure the freedom of captive Lange Roustan, and he asked that D’Arcos assist in the ransom efforts whether through prayer to God or through his influence in the Moorish community, the meaning of which is unclear.¹⁰⁰ In a letter written a month before he died, Peiresc thanked D’Arcos for his letter as well as one from the “slave” Lange Roustan, writing about the individuals who promised to pay Roustan’s ransom and adding a request for more chameleons. He also announced Aycard’s death.¹⁰¹ Peiresc died on June 24, 1637.

⁹⁵ Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 30, 1636, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 169.

⁹⁶ Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 30, 1636, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 176-178.

⁹⁷ D’Arcos to Peiresc, Oct. 19, 1636, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Correspondants* 2: 223-224.

⁹⁸ Peiresc to Aycard, Jan. 6, 1635, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 329, 330.

⁹⁹ “J’avois toujours conceu une tres bonne opinion de vostre probité et bonté naturelle dez le premier honneur que j’ay eu de vostre connoissance, mais cecy nous doit bien mettre hors de tout doute que voz intentions sont toutes bonnes, esperant que Dieu vous donnera la grace de le faire congnoistre encores mieux quelque jour, et sur ceste confiance, en vous remerciant tres humblement comme je fait de l’honneur que vous me faites, et de la participation de voz plus nobles et plus meritoires pensées, m’offrant tout a vostre service sans reserve de chose quelconque qui soit à ma disposition.” Peiresc to D’Arcos, March 24, 1637, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 190.

¹⁰⁰ Peiresc to D’Arcos, March 24, 1637, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 191.

¹⁰¹ Peiresc to D’Arcos, May 20, 1637, Tamizey de Larroque, ed., *Lettres* 7: 191-193.

Conclusion

D'Arcos presented a paradox for his European correspondents. Conversions generally took place during captivity, but D'Arcos converted after he had regained his freedom. A conversion signaled a rejection of the country and religion of origin. While he might have lost status in European circles, this "change of habit" enabled him to enhance his personal prestige in Tunis. D'Arcos was considered a hybrid in that he blended with various religious groups. He maintained contacts with Europe and the Moriscos considered him an oracle, which may have referred to his linguistic or administrative abilities, or even his erudition. D'Arcos's hybrid quality and status enabled him to procure curiosities and information with little personal investment.

D'Arcos provided no explanation for his change in *habit*, but he used letters to fashion his identity as a Catholic with ties to the French public. To announce his release from captivity, he quoted a passage on deliverance in Latin from Psalm 124. However, rumors soon spread about his conversion. D'Arcos avoided an explicit reference to the conversion in writing Peiresc by saying the courier would provide the "news," and he promised to serve in "whatever state." This letter created ambiguity in their relationship, which had been characterized by the exchange of gifts, dedication of manuscripts, and offers to serve. In subsequent letters, D'Arcos downplayed the significance of his conversion, which he expressed as a change of condition or *habit*, but never a change of faith. He differentiated between his external dress, which showed identity and affiliation with a religious and social group, and his inner spiritual conviction. He showed his faith in the afterlife by using a prayer from St. Augustine. He participated in arranging for the release of other captives. Interestingly enough however, D'Arcos did not attempt to draw extra attention to these actions, which did demonstrate his ties to Christian Europe. In manuscripts he authored on Christianity, D'Arcos remained ambivalent—he did not present Christianity in more favorable terms than the Muslim faith, a major shortcoming Peiresc attributed to external causes rather than to intentional subversion.

When Peiresc learned D'Arcos had adopted the Muslim dress, attended the mosque, and changed his name, he attributed these transformations to the environment: the hardships in Barbary and a woman. He addressed D'Arcos as if no transformation had taken place, preferring instead to use subtle tactics (e.g., he sent Christian works) to cleanse his mind in hopes

that he could return to the faith. In one of his last letters, however, he finally explicitly wrote hoping D'Arcos would return to the faith. In correspondence with members of the Republic of Letters, Peiresc continued to refer to D'Arcos as a former captive or former secretary to a cardinal rather than as a convert. He stressed the length of D'Arcos's captivity was eight or ten years rather than the nearly five years D'Arcos appeared to have been enslaved. This dissimulation suggests Peiresc hoped D'Arcos would return to Catholicism, or he feared a negative reaction from members of the Republic of Letters to the idea that D'Arcos converted after being freed, or that information provided by a convert would not be considered credible.

D'Arcos's framing of his conversion differed depending on correspondents and time period. Following the conversion, Aycard, who left few letters, served as an intermediary for more than a year to communicate news between Peiresc and D'Arcos. In writing Aycard, D'Arcos used his Muslim name and addressed the implications of his conversion: the reaction of Peiresc and members of the Republic of Letters and his feelings of being abandoned by Peiresc. However, even then, D'Arcos described his conversion to Aycard as a change of dress rather than a change of faith. Peiresc's reaction went from shock to an attempt to reconcile the change with D'Arcos's actions (e.g., his book on Christianity).

In response to Peiresc's frequent and detailed requests for information, D'Arcos portrayed the "other" culture in negative terms, according to the stereotype—worthless, ignorant, or deceitful.¹⁰² He complained incessantly about the lack of competent workers and attributed most of their beliefs (e.g., in talismans, in giant's bones) to superstition or musings. Peiresc saw the value in learning about other cultures, but he too dismissed some of the artifacts and accounts as folklore. When he sought accurate information to share with the European community, he requested that a Morisco or even a captive be hired for the task rather than a trusting it to a native.

In letters to Peiresc, D'Arcos was respectful, almost obsequious. The offers to serve increased in intensity and frequency following his conversion. However, he did little to provide specific information (e.g., Punic inscription, astronomical data) requested by his French correspondent. In recompense, he sent exotic and unique gifts (e.g., chameleons, a gazelle).

¹⁰² Weiss, "Back from Barbary," 280.

For gifts Peiresc dismissed as trifles he attempted to add to their uniqueness by citing tradition or local custom. D'Arcos communicated some information requested by his French correspondent, or he sent curiosities in lieu of requested data. Possibly D'Arcos had more mercenary intentions. He seemed to perform the minimum effort necessary to maintain contact with Peiresc, focusing on the exotic and conspicuous such as the Alzaron and large chameleons rather than the much-needed scholarship.

In writing Peiresc, D'Arcos used his Christian name and distinguished between his spiritual convictions (that he claimed to retain) and his external dress. He referenced Christian works and he compared himself to a cardinal (rather than a statesman or holy man) when he received the leather-bound volumes. Peiresc avoided explicit mention of the conversion in letters to D'Arcos (with the exception of one letter written in March 1637). However, in letters to Aycard, Peiresc questioned the way in which he should address D'Arcos and worried about the dedication of a work by a convert to a cardinal. He discussed his strategy to bring D'Arcos back to his "duty" and implied the convert had lost his ability to distinguish between religions. Ultimately, Peiresc decided to maintain contact: D'Arcos offered a pipeline to information on North Africa, and he could return to Catholicism one day.

In correspondence networks known for tolerance of diverse ideologies, Peiresc continued to verify, dissimulate, and withhold information. To ensure accuracy, he investigated claims on North Africa before forwarding that information to interested correspondents. He dissimulated news of D'Arcos's conversion by referencing him as a former captive or by saying the material on Africa did not meet expectations of the scholarly community. He contemplated publishing the book on Africa under a pseudonym. Finally, he maintained a hope that D'Arcos would return to Christianity.