

Article

Disentangling *Eben-Ezer*: William Okeley and His Barbary Captivity Narrative

Bernard Capp 

Department of History, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK; b.s.capp@warwick.ac.uk

Abstract: *Eben-ezer* (1675) was the most successful Barbary captivity narrative and remains the most challenging. This article engages with debates over its authorship, publication history, purpose, and significance, and offers new information and interpretations on each aspect.

Keywords: Okeley; slavery; captivity narrative; Barbary; providence; atheism; Islam; Catholicism

Eben-ezer; or a Small Monument of Great Mercy was the most successful of seventeenth-century captivity narratives, and the most challenging (Okeley 1675; page and signature numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.). Other editions survive from 1676, 1684, and 1764, with extracts also published in several late-seventeenth-century compilations (Capp 2022, p. 65). At first sight, it might appear conventional. Okeley's story follows a familiar narrative arc of capture, enslavement, suffering, and eventual return home. A woodcut depicts scenes of extreme Moorish cruelty, elaborated in the text. But in very many respects, not least its publication history, the work is far from typical. It was published a generation after the events it describes, and the narrative was reissued in a variety of forms for almost a century. Okeley's account was accompanied by a lengthy poem and an even longer preface which together comprise almost a third of the text. Moreover, the reader soon realises that denigrating the Moors and Islam was only one of its concerns. That was not unique in the genre; Richard Hasleton's account of his ordeal, published in 1595, described the cruelty of the Moors but went on to tell how Spain and its Inquisition far surpassed them in savagery (Hasleton 1595). Okeley, too, was a staunch Protestant, and *Eben-ezer* contains withering comments on alleged Catholic falsehoods. Some critics have seen his work as similarly driven by anti-Catholicism, but that, too, was only one of its concerns. Okeley's text was shaped by multiple agendas.

Eben-ezer has a tripartite structure, its parts, henceforth, designated as Poem, Preface, and Narrative. The unsophisticated Poem, introducing and commending the Narrative and its author, refers to Okeley throughout in the third person. The Preface, in Okeley's own name, explains that he had felt it essential for his rough text to be polished before it was fit to appear in print (B3-v). It bears the marks of very heavy polishing by an educated, perhaps clerical hand, with numerous literary, classical, and biblical quotations and references. The much simpler Narrative that follows appears to be primarily Okeley's own work, with only a few elaborate passages suggesting an editor's hand. The composite text was thus probably the product of at least three writers, with overlapping but not identical objectives. There are also six lines of verse at the very end, by someone addressing Mr William Okeley as his 'Ingenious Friend'. Celebrating his miraculous escape as akin to a 'Resurrection from the Dead', this verse functions mainly to compensate for the flat and banal closing lines of the Narrative.

The Narrative, in outline, tells the story of Okeley's capture in 1639 on board the *Mary*, on its way to a puritan settlement on Providence Island, which lies east of what is now Venezuela. His captors, Barbary corsairs, took him and his companions back to Algiers and sold them into slavery. After five years of bondage, he persuaded a small group of friends to join in a hazardous, indeed foolhardy escape bid. Constructing a flimsy canvas



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boat, in secret, they set out to row across the Mediterranean to Mallorca, and miraculously succeeded. Many theories now exist about the significance of the published account, though it was the escape itself that attracted readers.

Much of the critical literature has focused on the Poem and Preface rather than the Narrative. George Starr, who pioneered analysis of this genre, argued that captivity accounts generally sought to edify and entertain the reader and raise awareness of the plight of remaining captives (Starr 1965, 29:1 35–52). Okeley's escape certainly entertained, while both the Preface and Narrative spelled out at great length the story's moral lessons. Starr also observed that many texts presented the enslaved Englishmen as displaying qualities of endurance, ingenuity, and strength of purpose. Several later commentators, noting these tributes to the Englishman's sterling qualities, have interpreted Okeley's own Narrative within an Orientalist, colonial, and/or proto-capitalist framework. Nabil Matar has argued that the captivity narrative is designed to show cruel, naïve, backward Moors outwitted by native English ingenuity. The Englishman, even in captivity, 'was heroic because he had qualities the "Mahometan" lacked.' (Matar 2006, p. 152). Joe Snader, in a pioneering survey of British and American narratives, saw the British texts as celebrating the nation's innate superiority over barbaric or oppressive captors. And this, he argued, suggested to readers that 'self-reliant Western captives possess a natural right to resist and control the alien cultures that have enslaved them'. In this reading, later endorsed by Daniel Vitkus (Vitkus 2019, pp. 68–69), Okeley's versatility, as seaman, weaver, and shopkeeper in Algiers, demonstrated 'entrepreneurial skills' that served an 'implicit nationalist and colonial agenda' (Snader 2000, pp. 23, 34–36, 58, 87, 137, 153, and passim; Snader 1997, pp. 267–98). We should note, however, that while Okeley did indeed become a canny and successful shopkeeper, he admitted that he had 'understood nothing of the Mariners Art' and had proved a useless, 'bungling weaver' (15, 37). Moreover, his general picture of the English captives in Algiers is far from nationalistic, as will appear. Snader acknowledges that Okeley's text stands apart from other narratives in its deeply religious spirit, and places it within the framework of the spiritual autobiography. But that too is problematic. Okeley is a committed Puritan from the outset and undergoes no conversion experience. The text is not about discovering God but demonstrating his power and love, to convince sceptical or indifferent readers.

Other commentators, by contrast, have placed *Eben-ezer* within the very different context of English domestic politics and religion. Vitkus sees it as prompted by mounting anti-Catholic fears and suspicion of the Crown's intentions (Vitkus 2001, p. 125). Catherine Vigier has pursued that idea further. In a brilliant analysis, she demonstrates how the Poem and Preface contain numerous echoes of Andrew Marvell's *Rehearsall Transpros'd*, both in ideas and language. The Poem and especially the Preface contain many sly allusions and coded jibes aimed at Samuel Parker, future bishop of Oxford, and other High Anglicans demanding strict censorship of the press and the suppression of Dissent. Nathaniel Ponder, the publisher of both Marvell and Okeley, played a central role in a campaign to counter and discredit Parker and stand up for tolerance, liberty, and press freedom. Ponder also published many of the works of the leading Independent cleric John Owen, once a pillar of the Cromwellian Church. The purpose of Okeley's narrative, Vigier argues, was 'making the case against religious tyranny within the framework of slavery in Barbary' and bringing it to the attention of a wider Nonconformist audience. Indeed, she suggests, 'William Okeley' may never have existed, and his miraculous escape may have been merely a fictional device. Andrew Marvell may have been the real author (Vigier 2016, pp. 193–210).

Vigier's analysis of the political and ideological context that generated the Poem and Preface is persuasive, but it reduces Okeley himself to a ghost and his own Narrative to little more than fiction. She acknowledges that the Narrative is 'overwhelmingly religious' in tone (Vigier 2016, p. 205) but gives little attention to this key section of the work. Ponder and Marvell may well have seen Okeley's Narrative as a vehicle for their own concerns. But that does not necessarily invalidate the facts it reports or cast doubt on his existence.

This article revisits *Eben-ezer* and the debate that now surrounds it and gives proper consideration to the Narrative portion of the text. It looks again at the issue of authorship, the work's complex publication history, and the aims of its author or authors. And it examines the work's depiction of the Other (whether Muslim or Catholic) and the religious issues at its core.

We need first, however, to sketch in the context of Okeley's experiences and of his printed account. Capture was a fate shared by tens of thousands of Europeans at the hands of the Barbary corsairs. Their operations were a legacy of the clash between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires in the sixteenth century. A century later, the Barbary states were effectively autonomous, making war with European powers as they wished, driven by the search for plunder, slave labour, and ransom money. European corsairs, many based in Malta and Italy, waged similar predatory attacks on Muslim shipping (Davis 2003).

Okeley's text must clearly be considered within the wider context of 'captivity narratives'. The genre was strongly religious and often nationalist in tone. Writers depicted Islam (and often also Catholicism) as false and evil. Their own God was a firmly Protestant God who had enabled them to survive and ultimately triumph over adversity. They, or their editors, moulded the accounts to conform to this model. Literary scholars have argued that the narratives are accordingly of very little if any value as historical evidence. Daniel Vitkus dismisses them as 'merely figments' and scolds leading historians such as Robert Davis and Linda Colley for taking them seriously (Vitkus 2001, 2019; cf. Starr 1965; Vigier 2016). Historians, using archival sources as well as printed material, have remained unconvinced, while acknowledging the constraints of the genre (Matar 2001, p. 34; cf. Colley 2002, p. 92). They draw on archival material and narratives that were never intended for publication, and so remained untouched by an editor's hand. A good example is the account by Edward Coxere, a simple seaman probably unaware of the existence of the literary genre (Meyerstein 1943). Each text's reliability deserves to be assessed on its own merits, where possible utilising other sources to confirm the 'facts' it presents.

Okeley's Narrative and its terminology also need to be understood within the context of the period. One current school of thought, strongest in the US, restricts the language of 'slavery' to the particularly brutal and racial system of Black African slavery in North America and the Caribbean. It relabels Mediterranean slaves as merely 'captives', equivalent to prisoners-of-war. This approach ignores the fact that slavery had existed in multiple forms and with varying degrees of severity for millennia, including Ancient Greece and Rome. The early modern world had its own understanding of slavery, naturally very different from that of modern scholars with views shaped by the later Black African experience in America. William Okeley did not see himself as a mere 'captive'. He described being sold in the slave-market and later resold, and throughout the Narrative he refers to himself and his fellows as slaves, not captives. He also feared, with good reason, that he was likely to remain in bondage for the rest of his life. Okeley was emphatic that his condition was that of a slave, and it would be disrespectful and anachronistic, centuries later, to tell him he was wrong.

Eben-ezer offers a good test-case for some of the issues outlined above. How far can any of its 'facts' be verified? How far was it a mere literary construct designed to serve a religious, political, and racial agenda? Did Okeley even exist? Catherine Vigier argues that the narrative could have been written by anyone familiar with other narratives and with the Providence Island venture. That hypothesis does not stand up to scrutiny. In the Narrative, Okeley describes his close relationship with several Englishmen also enslaved in Algiers who can be identified in other sources and of whose existence a writer of fiction would have been unaware. Among them was Devereux Spratt, an English minister, whose account of his own experiences remained unpublished for two centuries (Spratt 1886). Okeley also names an enslaved surgeon, Sampson Baker, and the 'very wise and Religious' Robert Lake (19–20, 33, 43). Both were ransomed a few years later, as was Okeley's close friend John Randal, who can also be found in other sources (Kupperman 1993, pp. 159, 174). And it would have been rash for a fictional narrator to mention a friendly encounter with Captain

Goodson at St Lucar on the journey home (B2v-3, 85). William Goodson, a prominent shipmaster, had later become a Cromwellian vice-admiral. He was still alive in the 1670s, living in London and a prominent Nonconformist (Capp 2004).

So Okeley was real, even if we know little about him. He was a young man from an apparently modest background. If he had hoped to be ransomed, he was to be disappointed; 'Friends failed', he commented tersely (B4). He had been sailing on a voyage promoted by the Providence Island Company, established in 1630 to establish a Protestant colony and trade in the Caribbean. Its leading promoters were the puritan lords Warwick, Brooke, and Saye and Sele, together with John Pym. The agricultural experiments did not flourish, and by the later 1630s, the colonists were turning to anti-Spanish privateering. The *Mary*, carrying six guns, was to have joined in privateering operations after unloading its cargo of linen and cloth (Kupperman 1993, esp. 281–84). Okeley probably planned to settle, as a planter's servant, and take part in the privateering. The call to arms came much sooner than he had expected. The *Mary's* company of sixty had tried to fight off the corsairs, losing six killed and many wounded. In the Narrative, Okeley declared that death and wounds were 'beautiful and glorious' to those that fight, so we can assume he had been in the thick of the action (7–8).

The miraculous escape from Algiers gave Okeley a wonderful story to tell. At some point, he composed an account that circulated among friends. So why did he wait decades before publishing it in print? And what brought his change of heart? Okeley himself addressed both questions. He explained that arriving back in England in 1644, with civil war still raging, he thought people had far more pressing concerns (B3). And he, too, had more pressing concerns, though he did not spell them out. Providence Island had been captured by Spain in 1641, the Company no longer existed, and many of its leaders were dead. Though free, Okeley now had to find a new livelihood. It may also be that his initial uncertainty about the wisdom of the escape plan had been reinforced by subsequent events. Within a few years of his escape the Long Parliament had ransomed most of the Britons enslaved in Algiers (Capp 2022, pp. 129–30, and sources there cited). In the later 1640s, readers might have been inclined to ask whether his miraculous exploit had been unnecessary as well as hazardous.

On his change of heart, a generation later, Okeley explained that he had been urged on by ministers and others in both city and country. The Poem (unpaginated) reports that he had found publication a painful experience, had vowed never to appear in print again, and wished 'press-oppressors' would follow his example. That last comment may well be, as Vigier suggests, a swipe at the Anglican polemicists (Vigier 2016). But the earlier comments may have been literally true if he and his editors had rather different views of the work's central purpose. Vitkus suggests, very plausibly, that the work's publication in 1675 was a response to the rising tide of concern about popery. The conversion of the king's brother and heir James was now public knowledge. The Poem is indeed full of virulent anti-Catholicism, and proclaims defiantly that 'This book is Protestant'. In Okeley's own Narrative, by contrast, anti-Catholicism is conspicuous by its absence, a point examined further below. Vigier would see Okeley (if he existed) as prodded into publication by Marvell or his associates as a useful weapon in their campaign against Anglican censorship and the repression of Nonconformists following the cancellation of the king's Declaration of Indulgence in 1673. The Preface stresses the vital importance of liberty and the need to defend it, though it also insists on the duty of servants and subjects to obey their superiors (A7-v). By contrast, Okeley's own Narrative studiously avoids any hint of the author's own political or ecclesiastical identity, beyond his firmly Protestant faith.

There is a further complication. We now know that Okeley's story had first appeared in print several years earlier, probably in 1668, when it was advertised in a list of titles published by Nathaniel Ponder. A second edition had followed in 1672–3. Though also now lost, its existence is proved by a summary in a compilation which refers to a visit to Mallorca in 1671 by Okeley's friend Mr Robert Hales (Capp 2022, 65 n11; Wanley 1673, pp. 642–43). The existence of these earlier editions has an obvious bearing on the argument

that *Eben-ezer* was triggered by domestic politics and echoed Marvell's *Rehearsal Transpros'd*, a work not published until 1672-3. Rather than Okeley's Narrative being edited to fit the agenda of Ponder and his circle, it appears more likely that they had seen the success of Okeley's tract and decided to capitalise on it by attaching the Poem and Preface to a new, modified edition in 1675. A less likely possibility that would also fit the known facts of publication is that the Preface had been an original feature of the work, and that its language and ideas fed into Marvell's poem, rather than *vice versa*.

The text acknowledges editorial polishing but insists on the truth of the events it describes (A-A2). Early modern readers viewed much of the sensational 'news' they found in print with justifiable scepticism. Several recent narratives had been invented or heavily embroidered, notably one bearing only the author's initials (T. S. 1670), and the Preface identifies other accounts of alleged marvels it dismisses as fraudulent (A-2v). At one level, we might see Okeley's Narrative as a riposte, intended to leave no doubt that his own miraculous escape was wholly true. And that was an essential requirement because his own primary concern was to demonstrate God's omnipotence, a divine power that governed everything that happened on earth. The 'true intent, and meaning' of *Eben-ezer*, the Preface explains bluntly, was to demonstrate 'a watchful Providence (as well as the Being of a Deity,) over all Affairs' (A3v). That would serve both to comfort oppressed Nonconformists and counter a perceived rising tide of 'atheism', a worldly outlook that interpreted events as produced by secular causes or mere chance (Hunter 1985, 2003; Spurr 1991, chap. 5-6). One response, by champions of 'natural religion', was to argue that the wondrous nature of the creation proved the existence of an omnipotent creator. Another, more populist, assembled striking examples of divine providence to demonstrate that God was active in human affairs at every level (Wanley 1673; Turner 1695; cf. Walsham 1999). *Eben-ezer's* Preface draws on the argument from design, and ends with a stern warning against 'obstinate unbelief' (A3-v, B4v). Okeley's Narrative focuses instead on his miraculous deliverance, as conclusive proof of divine providence and omnipotence. Atheism, we might note, was also one of Ponder's concerns (Wolseley 1672, 1675, both published by Ponder). The Poem had already trailed the theme by inveighing at length against an 'Arm'd Atheism' that cynically brushes aside even the miracles of Moses dividing the sea and Noah's ark. The Narrative returns repeatedly to the assault on worldly scepticism. 'Whatever there is of Contingency as to us', it insisted, 'there's nothing accidental to God' (40-1).

Eben-ezer's concern with atheism has been largely overlooked. Its preoccupation with a very Protestant conception of providence, by contrast, is always acknowledged, though seldom given the weight it deserves. Divine providence pervades all three sections of the work. In the Narrative, Okeley sees the hand of God at every point in his story, not merely in the escape. When the *Mary* ran aground off the Isle of Wight, it was God's guidance of wind, tide, and currents that averted disaster (2-3). It was God who answered the captives' prayers and brought a Protestant minister to serve them in Algiers. It was God who delivered Okeley into the hands of his second, kindlier owner. And God preserved him and his companions throughout the escape itself, despite their leaking boat, contaminated water, and lack of food. God provided the turtle that saved them when they were on the point of dying from hunger and thirst. Looking back, Okeley thought that God had used all these setbacks to demonstrate his wondrous power. If the Almighty had allowed a friendly ship to rescue them at sea, he reflected, the impact of their miraculous delivery would have been much diminished (A5).

Okeley's faith in divine providence presented him, however, with a troubling problem. If he was, as he hoped, one of the elect, why had God allowed him to be captured and enslaved? Was it to test his faith, like Job, or to punish his sins, or a sign that God had in fact rejected him? Reflecting on Psalm 128's promise that God protects all who walk in his ways, he asked himself if he had been walking in God's way when he sailed for Providence or had strayed. He was able to convince himself that the venture had been legitimate, but throughout his time in Algiers, he remained anxious about walking 'in God's High-way' (B). His initial response to enslavement by infidels was a defiant assertion of Christian

truths. When his owner's father ridiculed Christianity, he retaliated with gestures mocking Mahomet and Islam, provoking a beating that nearly cost him his life. He explains that he soon learned to moderate his behaviour and ignore offensive blasphemies. And in a striking passage he describes how he learned to separate his inner and outer selves. When 'the Body is a Slave' and 'the whole out-ward Man is in Bondage', it was necessary to speak and act with discretion (14). But the spirit remained free, and it was still his duty to follow God's commands as best he could. That sentiment, of course, was also highly applicable to Nonconformists in Restoration England. When Okeley's master ordered him to serve aboard a corsair man-of-war, he saw it as a case of conscience: could it be morally acceptable to take part in an expedition in which fellow Christians would almost certainly be killed? In practice, he had no real choice; refusal would probably mean being flogged to death. He found some comfort in the thought that he would only be helping to sail the ship, not fighting (15–16).

The distinction between his inward and outward selves played an important role in the Narrative's climax: the plan to escape and the escape itself. Both raised issues concerning his duty as a Christian. First, to escape would be to deprive his owner of his lawful property. That might seem an unlikely issue of conscience, yet Okeley addresses it some detail. We might imagine that any enslaved Christian would feel a moral right, even duty, to endeavour to escape back to Christendom. To many contemporaries, especially in commerce and government, that was by no means the case. Any slave who escaped, rather than being properly ransomed and released, jeopardised commercial and diplomatic relationships between England and Algiers (Capp 2022, pp. 97–98). Okeley and his companions later discovered this for themselves, when they were now free but penniless and attempting to return home. In Spain, they encountered English merchants who dismissed them as little better than runaway servants and refused to lend any assistance (86; cf. Vitkus 2019, pp. 71–72). Okeley's scruples had another, more personal dimension, for his current owner was a kindly man who treated him well. Would it be an ungrateful betrayal, to repay him in this way? Okeley pondered this and convinced himself that his flight was morally justified. His owner was old; and when he died, Okeley would be sold to another, perhaps very different in character. And could slavery itself ever be morally legitimate? That huge question did not detain him long: 'My Patron's title was rotten at the Foundation', he decided. 'Man is too Noble a Creature to be made subject to a deed of bargain and Sale' (47–48). But he did not develop this enlightened thought into a more general assessment of slavery. Like most of his contemporaries, he appears to have viewed it as a fact of life, across time and across continents. And like most others, he focused only on himself, his companions, and his countrymen. He would probably have seen a principled denunciation of slavery as almost meaningless.

The escape plan raised another moral issue, relating more closely to his personal relationship with God. The plan was so rudimentary and hazardous that it hardly deserved the name. It involved constructing a flimsy vessel in secret, transporting it to the sea undetected, and then setting out with what little food and water they could carry in the hope of encountering a friendly ship or surviving long enough to reach a Christian shore. Discovery would mean a brutal flogging or death. Would such a venture be an act of faith and fortitude or a foolhardy and possibly blasphemous gamble, relying without warrant on some extraordinary divine protection? The Narrative shows Okeley seeking advice and reassurance, while the Preface suggests that he also anticipated some criticism from readers. But he secured the approval and blessing of Devereux Spratt and others he respected. And in a rare flash of anger, he rounds on critics and says that anyone refusing to participate in such a venture would have been swayed by cowardice, not conscience (B-v, 43).

Documenting God's providential power was not Okeley's only concern. His work was a 'captivity' as well as 'escape' narrative, and he presented his readers with a depiction of Algiers and its world, and his own experiences there. In some respects, his account conforms to the conventions of the genre; in others, it departs significantly from them.

The frontispiece, woodcut scenes of tortures and hideous executions, was very much in line with conventional accounts of Moorish barbarity. But an early section, offering a brief description of Algiers, is far from the dismissive Orientalism of a later age. Okeley was clearly awed by the city's size, impregnable defences, beautiful private residences, and magnificent mosques. He sought to counter his sense of English inferiority by pointing to the Moors' moral and religious shortcomings. The city's wealth was the product of tyrannical slave-trading, the sumptuous houses had been built with cheap slave labour, and the 'temples' were far too good for their false religion, which they moreover profaned in their daily lives (6–8). Okeley's account of the slave-market was naturally damning. He described in painful detail how new captives were hawked by the vendors, poked and prodded like animals by prospective buyers, and deliberately dehumanised (8–11).

Another section supplied short ethnographic observations on Moorish society and culture, some positive, others hostile. He noted the Moors' disgust at any public debauchery, including by drunken Christian slaves or renegades. Like other writers, he emphasised the savage punishment of offenders, whether Muslim or Christian, with amputations for trivia, the bastinado, and gruesome forms of public execution. Islam itself he dismissed as a mere superstition, concocted from a melange of early Christian and Jewish heresies. That charge, as Vigier has suggested, was probably provided by his editors (Vigier 2016, pp. 203–4), but his assault on Muslim hypocrisy appears to be based on his own (no doubt biased) observations. He conceded that the Moors observed Ramadan strictly, but compensated at night with excesses of food, drink, and riotous behaviour. He was also struck by the Moors' belief that Christians and Jews as well as Muslims could be saved, if each followed the rules of their respective faith, and 'all March over a fair bridge, into I know not what paradise'. But as that dismissive phrase suggests, he saw such an idea as delusional (26–33).

Many of Okeley's general observations on Moorish society and religion are thus largely conventional, if less damning than some. But elsewhere, his account departs significantly from the conventions of the genre. One example is the notable absence of pressure to 'turn Turk' by adopting Islam. He also acknowledges that the authorities had allowed Devereux Spratt to act as chaplain to the English slaves. And he describes how he was then able to hire a cellar and use it for regular Christian worship, without any interference from Moorish neighbours (23–25). That was in striking contrast to the intolerance of Charles II's England, where even Nonconformist Protestant services were illegal and suppressed. Marvell, Ponder, and their friends would have found it a useful debating point.

Okeley brushes aside the constraints of the genre most clearly when he turns to individual Moors. Instead of tarring them all with the brush of brutality and oppression, he is careful to differentiate. His first owner he does initially characterize as cruel and bad-tempered. As part-owner of a man-of-war, he made Okeley serve as a sailor, ignoring his plea that he knew nothing of seamanship and would be beaten for incompetence. Yet Okeley was scrupulous in providing a balanced account. His owner had paid him well for the unskilled labour he performed in the shipyard and had spoken to the captain to ensure that at sea he would not be unfairly punished for his lack of knowledge. He gave Okeley money for his pocket, bought him clothes for the cruise, and supplied food to supplement the very basic allowance. After the cruise proved a failure, Okeley was ordered to remain ashore, find a way to earn his own keep, and pay a monthly tribute to his owner. Having no skill in any trade, Okeley feared he would starve, but again he sought to be fair. When another enslaved Englishman invited him to join in running an illicit shop, he explains that his owner advanced him money to buy stock (15–19). Later, Okeley describes how he and his friend John Randal were wrongly accused of trying to escape, and how Randal was then bastinadoed by his brutal owner with three hundred blows which left him unable to walk. Okeley's owner, by contrast, was content to curse him as 'Dog and Jew' and left him unpunished. Okeley never liked his owner and was pleased to see him later ruined by debt (34–37). But his balanced assessment was far removed from a stereotypical picture of Moorish barbarian. Instead, he depicted a Moor who, like Europeans, was a compound of very individual attributes.

After three or four years, Okeley's debt-ridden owner was forced to mortgage and eventually sell all his slaves. Okeley and another became the joint property of two Moors, who then had to decide who should have which. One, an artisan, was reputed to be 'brutish', the other a 'grave old gentleman', said to be good-natured and moderate. It was decided by lot, and to Okeley's huge relief, he fell to the 'gentleman' (a striking choice of noun in this context). He acknowledges that his new owner always treated him with kindness and even love, more like a son. Okeley continued to run his shop, paying his monthly fee and hiding his profits. It was an easy life, and he concedes that the longing for freedom faded. He would have heard of the civil war raging in England, another incentive to be content with his situation. That changed when his owner took him to his farm twelve miles inland, showed him how the markets operated, and was apparently planning to make him the farm manager. Okeley realised that living inland, and without his shop, any possibility of escape would disappear. And what if this kind owner died, and the next proved very different? It was these fears that prompted the plan to escape (39–42).

What emerges from the Narrative is thus a gulf between Okeley's largely conventional generalisations about Islam, Moors, and Turks, and a far more nuanced and discriminating account of individual Moors based on personal experience. There is an obvious parallel with Elizabethan and Stuart perceptions of Catholicism and Catholics. Many contemporaries damned popery as false, cruel, and absurdly superstitious and saw missionary priests and foreign Catholic monarchs as existential threats to the nation. Yet Catholic neighbours were often viewed in a very different light. Neighbouring families might still socialise, ignoring confessional differences, and the prospect of an advantageous marriage often overcame religious obstacles. Okeley's Narrative did not reject the stereotypes of the age, but he could see beyond them. Moors were not all bad, and in religion, Algiers was more tolerant than England. Later narratives by others who also endured long-term enslavement, especially Joseph Pitts and Thomas Pellow, were to demonstrate the same ability (Pitts 1704; Pellow 1751).

The Moors are not the only Other in the Narrative. When Okeley and his companions finally reached Mallorca, almost dead from thirst, hunger, and exhaustion, they were unsure what reception to expect. Catholic Spain had been England's enemy for over half a century. If they had heard of the fate of Richard Hasleton, who had escaped to Mallorca in the late 1580s, they would have feared the worst; arrested by the Inquisition, he had been tortured and faced burning at the stake as a heretic. Charles I had waged a recent war on Spain (1625–1630), and in 1639, Okeley had been sailing to Providence to plunder Spanish Catholics. He and his companions now had to throw themselves on the mercy of the Spaniards of Mallorca. And he acknowledges that, to their surprise and relief, they found only kindness, initially from a farmer who gave them water, bread, and hot pottage, and then from townsfolk who gave them money for clothes and shoes. Taken before the Viceroy, they found sympathy and kindness from him too; he paid for their care and provided them with free passage on a royal galley sailing to Alicante (79–87).

Okeley's assessment of Catholicism and of Catholics thus demonstrates again his refusal to let negative stereotypes or literary constraints override the very different reality he found. The Narrative is very far from an anti-Catholic or anti-Spanish diatribe. Indeed, in Algiers, he had admired and envied the efforts of the Spanish crown and private individuals to ransom enslaved Spaniards, far beyond anything Charles I and English merchants had done for his own countrymen (28). His experience in Mallorca probably transformed his perception of Spain. The Narrative insists that the Providence Island Company had a patent from Charles I, and that the *Mary's* expedition had therefore been legitimate, but he drew a discreet veil over its character and goals (B-v, p2). By the 1670s, of course, Spain was no longer the main enemy; it had been supplanted by the Dutch and then France.

The Preface elaborated further on the unexpected generosity Okeley had found on Mallorca from ordinary people and high officials alike. Though they were Catholic and knew Okeley's party to be Protestant, they showed only compassion. Despite their differences, Catholics and Protestants worshipped the same God, and 'God was seen in both' (B2v).

Those words, probably penned by Marvell or one of his friends, are a good example of how Okeley's experience had been harnessed to the cause of tolerance. They sit awkwardly, of course, with the Poem's fierce anti-Catholicism, further proof of *Eben-ezer's* multi-authored character. Almost all the Catholics who appear in the Narrative behave with a kind and Christian spirit. Indeed, one young Spaniard Okeley met in Mallorca told him that it was not the little boat that had carried him to safety; 'it was the great God that brought you over' (85). Okeley never forgot the words of a Catholic Spaniard who had understood the power of divine providence. By contrast, the English Protestants who feature in the Narrative often fail to live up to Christian values. He reproves several drunkards in Algiers, including his first partner in the shop, while the merchants he encountered in Spain showed no kindness and failed to grasp the religious significance of his story. He also alludes to how some English Protestants in Algiers, probably merchants, had used him so unfairly that the bitterness outweighed all the pains of enslavement. Though he refused to divulge details, the episode may have related to the dashing of any hope of being ransomed (B2v). Okeley's Narrative was very far from a hymn to the innate superiority of the English nation.

Eben-ezer found a highly receptive audience, mainly for the story of his miraculous escape. As this paper has argued, its three sections reflected diverse concerns and differing objectives. The Poem's virulent anti-Catholicism clashed with the tolerance evident in the Preface and Okeley's gratitude for the Christian kindness shown by the Catholics he encountered in Spain. Close analysis of the text in its entirety reveals Okeley as far more than a shadowy vehicle for Ponder and Marvell; he had his own priorities. All three sections agree, however, on the power of divine providence, a comfort for slaves and Nonconformists alike. The hand of God shapes all things both in the heavens and on earth, and 'there's nothing accidental in God' (40-1). On the Moors and Barbary, Okeley's text displays traditional antipathy while also recognising the inadequacy of that stereotype. Algiers impressed as well as disgusted him and contained good people as well as bad. He conceded that enslaved life in Algiers, running his shop, could be tolerable and that he had sometimes wondered whether England in the throes of civil war really offered a better prospect. But his shop could be taken away at the mere whim of his owner; that had happened once and looked likely to happen again. Freedom had once more beckoned.

We know little about Okeley's later life. He married, and mentions that his wife's brother, probably engaged in trade, visited Mallorca only a few years after his escape and saw the remains of the boat, hung up in a church (B4v). The anonymous editor of the work republished in 1764 states that Okeley had been bailiff or steward at Sir Danvers Osborne's estate at Chicksands, Bedfordshire, and had been 'esteemed as a very pious good Man'. The editor had confused the name, for Sir Danvers (1715–1753) belonged to a later generation. Okeley would have served under Sir Peter Osborne (d. 1653) and/or Sir John (d. 1699), 1st baronet and the older brother of Dorothy, the celebrated letter-writer (Okeley 1764, sig. A2; Moore Smith 1928). The Osbornes were royalists and later Tories, but Nathaniel Ponder, Okeley's publisher, had close links to the Bedfordshire Nonconformist John Bunyan, and to another ejected minister who preached only a few miles from Chicksands (Perrot 1671). Okeley explains that several ministers had urged him to publish his edifying account. Indeed, he adds that he had come to feel guilty for holding back for so long, when it could have helped in the war against atheism. It is at least possible, too, that his preoccupation with providence had grown stronger over the years. He hints at this in an intriguing passage where he says that God's mercies 'have not always their due weight upon our hearts at first'. Reverting to the first person, he adds that he had 'received signal Deliverances from eminent dangers' since the escape, which in combination amounted to an argument to convince even the most sceptical reader (B3). The Okeley who escaped in 1644 was not the Okeley of 1639, and the man who described that miraculous escape in print may also have differed from the one who had made it.

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