

Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean.

By Gillian Weiss.

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Straddling French colonial history and the history of French relations with North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* examines the practice of ransom slavery that was pervasive in the Mediterranean world between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gillian Weiss paints a vivid picture of the early modern Mediterranean as a world in which merchants, travelers, fishermen, naval personnel, and residents of coastal regions were vulnerable to abduction and enslavement in foreign lands. Their captors were North African pirates, operating autonomously or acting in the service of the western regencies of the Ottoman Empire, or Turkish, British, or French naval crews plying the Mediterranean on the lookout for galley slaves and conscripts. As Weiss observes, French historians, with the significant exception of Fernand Braudel, have paid relatively little attention to French maritime power and to France's presence in the Mediterranean. It is certainly striking that whereas several previous studies consider captivity and slavery in the Mediterranean from the point of view of Britain (e.g., Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* [New York, 2002]; and Nabil Matar, *Britain and Barbary, 1589–1689* [Gainesville, FL, 2005]), Weiss's book is the first to explore this issue from the perspective of France. Although it is too soon to tell how the events of the Arab spring and recent economic turbulence in the southern Euro zone will impact on historiography, recent French involvement in the revolutions in Tunisia and Libya confers a particular timeliness on Weiss's account of earlier dealings between France and its southern Mediterranean neighbors.

Slavery in the Mediterranean world took a wide variety of forms. Some unfortunate captives languished for years in the galleys, while others occupied high-level administrative posts. Even the orientalist fantasy of white women being sold to the harem had some basis in reality. The living arrangements of French captives in North Africa ranged from the benign to the intolerable. Weiss explains that while some prisoners lived in comfortable quarters and had access to writing instruments, others spent their nights in specially designated jails (*bagnes*) or chained together in *matamores* (airless subterranean silos; 21).

Redemption and emancipation also occurred through various channels. *Captives and Corsairs* charts a shift whereby the responsibility for liberating captives—initially assumed by two specialized religious orders, the Mercedarians and the Trinitarians—gradually devolved to the state. As France's overseas empire grew and international prestige and the protection of shipping became more pressing concerns, the release of French captives became an aspect of state building. The transfer of responsibility from church to state corresponded to a wider process of secularization. In the seventeenth century, Muslim captors were regularly accused of religious impurity and sexual deviance; in consequence, freed captives often had to undergo religious purification rituals in addition to medical quarantine. By the early nineteenth century, however, slave holders were more often characterized as African "savages" in need of the lessons of civilization.

Contesting the overall tendency of French historiography to disconnect the first and second colonial empires, *Captives and Corsairs* identifies several important continuities between the early modern and the modern periods. Weiss shows, for example, that argu-

ments for the colonization of Africa were ideologically rooted in French and British anti-slavery rhetoric. Although this rhetoric was initially directed against slavery in the European colonies of the Americas, it was soon turned against the practices of African slave traders and Barbary corsairs. She discusses several fascinating cases of shipwrecked French colonists or slave traders who, having been enslaved in Africa, subsequently became apologists for its colonization. *Captives and Corsairs* also provides an essential framework for understanding France's incursion into Algeria. When, in May 1830, a fleet of 675 warships was dispatched to subdue Algiers, it was not simply because France's domestic political troubles rendered a big foreign-policy initiative expedient (though Nicolas Sarkozy's recent adventures in Libya do come to mind). Rather, this expedition marked the culmination of animosities that had been brewing since the 1790s. The conflict between France and Algiers that had taken shape during the Revolution was exacerbated by Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt and by the Greek War of Independence. When the French fleet set sail for Algiers, General Louis de Bourmont admonished his men that "the civilized nations of two worlds have their eyes on you," that "the cause of France is the cause of humanity," and that "the Arab will see us as liberators" (166). The liberal, philhellenist, anti-Ottoman rhetoric that had coalesced over the previous three decades underpinned the occupation of Algeria.

Weiss's account of piracy and slavery in the Mediterranean invites comparison with *Captives*, Linda Colley's sweeping study. Weiss explores many of the same issues, albeit from the vantage point of France. There are also some notable differences, however. Colley views Barbary captivity as the "underbelly of empire," a zone of vulnerability that complicates the history of European imperial dominance. She argues, in particular, that the rise of the British Atlantic empire and colonial slavery led to the disavowal of captivity in the Mediterranean, a context in which Britons were often themselves enslaved. This approach reflects Colley's broader recent concern with pluralizing the historiography of empire and contesting the worldview postulated by postcolonial theory. Weiss, on the other hand, offers a more intricate and, in my view, more accurate account of linkages between slavery in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic worlds. My own recent work has proposed that in eighteenth-century French culture slavery was persistently orientalized and that this occurred in part because colonial slavery posed a moral dilemma that militated against its representation. Weiss's account contextualizes these patterns of representation to a much greater extent than does Colley's.

Like all studies of its scope, *Captives and Corsairs* has some weaknesses. At times Weiss gets caught up in a blow-by-blow historical chronicle and fails to pause for interpretation. Her book would have benefited, for instance, from greater attentiveness to the conceptual boundaries of slavery and captivity. In the introduction, Weiss observes that Mediterranean slavery, having been forgotten in the age of high imperialism, was later rediscovered and its victims perceived as captives or prisoners of war (4). Why did this happen? And what should we make of the gradual divergence in meaning between the terms *sklavus* and *captivus*? Weiss shows that by the early nineteenth century, the Atlantic model of slavery, grounded in racial determinism and understood as a matter of destiny rather than as individual mischance, had become the dominant lens through which experiences of enslavement were understood. But while this is an important point, it does not completely exhaust the question of the dividing line between captivity and slavery. Was the experience of eighteenth-century French slaves/captives closer to that of colonial slaves or to that of political hostages? And on what basis could we form a judgment?

Though Weiss skillfully interweaves sources of various kinds—archival documents, political speeches and directives, travel narratives, fictions, and visual representations—

she does not say much about how these different modes of representation relate to one another. Since, as Khalid Bekkaoui's recent study, *White Women Captives in North Africa: Narratives of Enslavement, 1735–1830* (New York, 2011), reaffirms, Barbary captivity was an important topos of orientalist narrative, more reflection on the dialogue between experience, fantasy, and representation would have enhanced Weiss's contribution to the postorientalist study of contact and conflict in the Mediterranean world.

These concerns aside, *Captives and Corsairs* is a well-researched and engagingly written book. Weiss's work complicates and enriches our understanding of the modern history of slavery and brings a valuable *longue durée* perspective to our understanding of early modern relations between France and North Africa.

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Between Crown and Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean.

By Junko Thérèse Takeda. Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 129th series, volume 1.

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Junko Takeda has set herself the impossible challenge in *Between Crown and Commerce* of addressing Marseille's relationship to the French state through the arguments deployed by municipal authorities and government officials after the city's conquest by Louis XIV in 1660 and the outbreak of plague in 1720. The thriving port is thus approached through the jousting between municipal authorities and the Control General in Paris over local fiscal privileges, contested by the centralizing state here as elsewhere. If Marseille's status as free port was reinforced, the nobility was excluded from municipal office, leaving local governance to the merchant elite. What interests Takeda in this process is how Marseille "reimagined" itself within this new framework—most specifically, how it reconciled its inherited "republican" civic ethos to the expectations that it contribute to national, and not just local, welfare.

Marseille's quasi autonomy depended on its status as free port and on its monopoly of trade with the Levant. Despite its mistrust and resentment of the finance minister, Colbert proved far more sympathetic to the city than his more financially strapped successors did, although he established some government oversight of the lucrative trade. Takeda does not discuss the Company of the Levant that Colbert created in 1670, and altogether trade itself is a poor second to rhetorical construction in this work. Underlying the book's various arguments is the contention that discourses "enabled" commercial activities, a claim that is especially frustrating in light of the pedestrian nature of those discourses and the long commercial history of the city. The crisscrossing of petitions and edicts, sometimes satisfying and sometimes thwarting local demands, cannot be denied, and the uneven successes of the absolutist state in asserting its power are now widely accepted. The claim that we can best get at the relationship between the Crown and the provinces through rhetoric fails to persuade, especially since the verbiage was intended to envelop "base" financial stakes in elevated sentiment. Thus, although the amount is relegated to a footnote, one would think that the 100,000 livres spent by Marseille's representative at Versailles were much more effective than any discourse in persuading the Crown to restore the port's privileges in 1703, which it had abolished out of fiscal expediency.

Justifications and condemnations of commerce, merchants, the balance of trade, government oversight, greed, disloyalty, and the public good were invoked during Louis XIV's