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Some seventy years ago, Fernand Braudel looked beyond imperial borders of the Mediterranean to examine an underlying unity rooted in climate, topography and social custom. Braudel's influence has endured through waves of interpretational study. Today the interest is upon the actions of ordinary folk seen through a lens of hybridity. In the work at hand, Daniel Hershenson examines a particularly downtrodden group, seventeenth-century Christian and Muslim captives. The early modern era produced as many as three million of these slaves, more than their sub-Saharan counterparts in the New World. Some were ransomed, a few escaped but the overwhelming majority lived out their days as chattels in an alien world. Hershenson's focus is on the minority that attempted freedom through the payment of a ransom. While there is some discussion of the mechanics of ransoming, the major focus of this study is the political economy of ransom. This is the sum of political, market, social and religious protocols that bound ordinary people – captives, families, captors, intermediaries -- together in cross-border networks.

A beginning point is the Ottoman-Hapsburg truce of 1581, which for some historians signaled an abandonment of the Mediterranean by the great powers. Others have argued that the arrival of Dutch and English Protestants eliminated the social and religious character of medieval ransoming, reducing it to a purely economic transaction. Hershenson rejects both interpretations, arguing that cross-border interactions between the Maghreb and Hapsburg Europe actually increased in the seventeenth century as corsairs, who replaced the imperial fleets of the past, swelled the ranks of captives. These captives, in turn, anxious for their own liberation, opened channels of communication to their homelands, facilitated the development of trade, provided their home governments with military intelligence, and appealed for assistance to their families, community and coreligionists.

The great strength of this work is its effective use of anecdote to illustrate larger themes. For example, to demonstrate the rippling effect of a seemingly minor cross-border incident, there is the story of Fatima. She was a Muslim girl taken captive in Italy, ransomed by her father but then baptized in Corsica. Her failure to return home led to nearly twenty years of retaliation, negotiation and frustration as her father and Christian authorities drew lines in the sand. Fatima becomes a metaphor for the complicated and wide-ranging entanglements characteristic of the seventeenth-century Mediterranean.

Because Muslim and Christian captives in the Mediterranean lived in proximity to their homeland, contact with their families, communities and rulers was not only possible, but encouraged. Given the vagaries of archival survival, we know much more about Christian

contacts with Europe than we do of Muslim communication with the Maghreb. Hershenzon, however, believes these to be similar. The primary difference seems to be one of gender: Muslim captives were predominately female, while Christians tended to be male.

Once taken, captives were sold at public auction. From there, Hershenzon traces the fates of several captives, as they moved from one owner to another or were rented out by the day or season. They became domestics, workers, artisans and galley slaves. There was a financial incentive not to convert captives by force as this would preclude the possibility of ransom. There were voluntary converts, who might hope for better living or working conditions or greater freedom of movement that might facilitate escape. For the most part, the religion of the captive was respected. Indeed, captors on both sides of the Mediterranean permitted places of worship for their slaves.

Ransoming became a state enterprise, supported and licensed by the king of Spain. Favored were the two medieval redemptionist orders: the Trinitarians and Mercedarians. Other ransomers included members of other Catholic religious orders as well as merchants, who could be Christian, Muslim or Jewish. Charity paid the ransom of sixty percent of those freed by the friars, with private monies covering the rest. Because friars gave priority to these, some captives threatened to convert in order to persuade the friars to select them for ransom. Ransoming via the orders, however, was slow and uncertain, and so those with resources commissioned merchants to negotiate for their loved ones. There were those in Spain who decried the practice of ransoming as wasting funds that could be better spent on coastal and maritime defense. For most, however, the practice was a familial and religious responsibility. Prisoner exchange was an additional path to freedom. Before and after the seventeenth century such prisoner swaps were often included in treaties, but in this era most such exchanges were negotiated by private individuals as monarchs proved reluctant to give up their slaves.

A primary focus of Hershenzon's study is communication that grew out of the ransoming process. From the captor's perspective, this involved the setting of a ransom price that might range between three and five times the annual earnings of a laborer. Thus, captors tried to gauge the wealth of an individual by assessing the physical appearance of the captive, using purloined correspondence and paying informants. Captives understandably tried to minimize their value. To begin the process of liberation, captives were encouraged to write home. Families without means might seek a begging license; captured soldiers would petition the king for the ransom. Typically a captive would not be freed before the ransom was paid, but on occasion a captive was given parole to facilitate the collection of a ransom if a friar or spouse stayed behind as a hostage and guarantor. Friars, who did not demand reimbursement for a ransom, required freed captives to assist them in the raising of alms for future ransomings.

Hershenzon argues that captives remained members of their home communities, responsible for reporting deaths, martyrdoms and conversions. This gave closure to grieving families, permitted widows to remarry and warned of the danger posed by those who became renegades. Written correspondence was carried by cooperating merchants and the newly liberated, but rumor, gossip and word of mouth transmission also played a role. These grape vines also carried word of the execution or maltreatment of captives, significant because such information would occasion reprisals against a parallel group of captives held by the other side. Indeed, the threat of vengeance seems to have been a principal protection for captives against arbitrary violence. Another type of information was military intelligence sent by captives to their home governments, often with the promise of ransom. Friars, liberated captives and merchants

were also interrogated by Spanish officials about ships, corsairs and fortifications in the Maghreb.

Despite mutual hostility, Hershenzon argues that ransoming created a trans-national network that required the cooperation of officials, merchants, friars and captives on both sides of the religious frontier. Despite the Christian exclusiveness of Hapsburg policy, the system needed the assistance of Muslims, Christians and Jews. It created islands of Catholic culture to serve the captives of the Maghreb and of Muslim culture to serve slaves held in Spain. Thus, the author dismisses the so-called “forgotten frontier thesis” that argued that Braudel’s Mediterranean dissolved during the seventeenth century into a series of segregated spaces. Instead, Hershenzon believes that this trans-national political economy maintained commerce and contact as captives were moved from north to south and from south to north. This political economy, however, began to dissolve in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the arrival of permanent navies from Britain, France and eventually Spain. Trinitarians and Mercedarians mounted their last ransoming expeditions to North Africa in 1768-69. France’s conquest of the Maghreb in the 1830s finally brought to an end the commerce in captives.

There is a measure of supposition in this account of captivity. We have no accurate account of the numbers of individuals taken captive or of those who managed to regain their freedom through ransom or escape. The assumption is that most captives failed in this endeavor. Hershenzon ably sketches the life of a slave, as he moved from master to master, from job to job, while attempting to negotiate a ransom or escape. Many of his examples are likely from the upper levels of society, but even the illiterate could mount a plea for assistance. Hershenzon argues that these transactions created a force of integration as the business of captives stimulated economies and as the search for liberation opened channels of communication and knowledge between the Christian and Muslim worlds. This is a fascinating work that illumines the phenomenon of captivity at its apogee in the seventeenth century. My only quibbles are minor: his rendering of my name and an adherence to the mythology of Mercedarian origins.

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## **Author’s Response:**

The author was provided with an opportunity to respond to the review, but declined.