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Matar, Nabil. *Mediterranean Captivity through Arab Eyes, 1517-1798*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021. 293 pages, 15 color illustrations, \$155. ISBN 978-90-04-44025-8

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In this book, Nabil Matar returns to the topic of captivity, a signal feature of his many scholarly publications, explored here from the perspective of Arabs from the Maghrib. His aim is to allow us to hear their voices through translated texts as opposed to early modern literary fictions or mute works of art. The bulk of the case studies comes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a preponderance drawn from Morocco.

Matar notes that captive raids took place on both shores of the Mediterranean; for him, this does not make for a liminal contact zone, but rather a frightening space ringed by hostile powers. Throughout the book the emphasis is on the asymmetry of power between Arab states and Europe. The residents of the Maghrib were fearful of European attacks and ill-equipped for courtly diplomacy. The official pretext for taking captives may have been religion, but in fact commercial factors drove the practice and created a ransom economy as Wolfgang Kaiser, Daniel Hershenzon, and others have argued.

The Introduction outlines the differences between European and Muslim attitudes toward captivity, redemption, and conversion. While various European countries had residential factors in North Africa or ransoming orders operating on site, no Arab state had a permanent seat in Europe, nor did they have religious orders dedicated to rescuing captives. A further difference Matar notes, is that Christians might associate captivity and redemption with spiritual models, such as Jonah and the whale, while for most Muslims the experience was simply a worldly ordeal.

While captivity narratives became a genre in Europe, Arabic texts instead followed a set pattern, what Matar calls a “block,” that emphasized patience, adherence to Islam, and refusal to dwell on the kinds of horrifying details that so captivated European readers. Matar gleans his examples from “qīṣaṣ” or stories -- anecdotes often featuring miracles – from letters, and from ambassadorial reports. The case studies reveal a range of experiences, from outraged suffering at the hands of Christian captors, to creative resistance on the part of scribes copying or (mis)translating Arabic texts, to conversion and assimilation, including the example of a former captive who eventually joined the Jesuit Order.

If Mediterranean Muslims might be united by religion, they were split into Arabs and Turks. Matar shows how the Ottomans were not interested in redeeming their co-religionists from North Africa, nor did they share military intelligence or weapons with them. Fascinating

cases of mobile identities include an Armenian mistaken for a Muslim in London, and a Druse prince who redeemed Christian as well as fellow Druse captives. Readers interested in the early roots of phenotypic racism will be struck by mentions of skin color and identity in Arabic texts: black for sub-Saharan Africans, yellow for the Portuguese, and red for Native Americans.

The epilogue looks at “*esclaves turcs*,” but it is unclear how these relate to Arab captives, the central theme of the book. Sculptures in cities ranging from Santiago de Compostela to Budapest, made over several centuries, are treated as representatives of a generic, unchanging stereotype: chained, crouching, in submission. But the removal of each work from its specific context, function, patronage, and reception, erases any aspects that might trouble or complicate that iconography.¹

In the postscript, Matar surveys contemporary Arab responses to European sculptures that represent captives. These largely non-reactive, resigned, and dispassionate voices in the present provide an uncanny echo of the *qişaş* of the past. We can agree with Matar that pre-modern sculptures of captives, “...can be valuable because they offer enough distance in time and history to allow us to raise questions and explore answers – in the classroom and in public discourse...” (pp. 255-256)

Overall, the book contributes to the rapidly growing subfield of early modern Mediterranean captivity. Matar makes Arabic texts in translation available to all levels of readers from undergraduates to specialists. Given the frequent appearance of Arabic terms in the text, along with their translations, a Glossary would have been a useful feature.

¹ Readers might wish to consult: Jean Michel Massing, “The Mediterranean Scene,” *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 3:2, eds. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp.183-210; Ibid., “The Iconography of Mediterranean Slavery in the Seventeenth Century,” *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem*, ed. Elizabeth McGrath and Jean Michel Massing (London: Warburg Institute, 2012), pp.85-119; Palmira Brummett, *Mapping the Ottomans. Sovereignty, Territory, and Identity in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Cristelle Baskins, “The Play of Mistaken Identities on the Porta Nuova, Palermo,” *Jews and Muslims Made Visible in Christian Iberia and Beyond, Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. B. Franco and A. Urquizar-Herrera (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), pp.331-354; Paul H. D. Kaplan, “Monuments to Tyranny: Issues of Race and Power in Nineteenth-Century American Responses to Early Modern Italian Public Sculpture,” *Republics and Empires: Italian and American Art in Transnational Perspective, 1840-1970*, eds. Melissa Dabakis and Paul Kaplan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), pp.69-85; and Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss, *The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Galley Slavery in Louis XIV’s France* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2022).



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Response to Cristelle Baskins' review of *Mediterranean Captivity Through Arab Eyes*

Thank you, Professor Baskins, for your review.

While I agree that economic factors underpinned European and North African seizure of captives, in my book, I showed how Arabic sources can shed a new light on the study of Mediterranean captivity during Europe's early modern conquests and naval expansion. The Arabic poems, ambassadorial reports, theological polemics, and captives' letters furnish the most extensive descriptions of the European Other in the native language and idiom of the victims. Regarding the comment on my use of "esclaves turcs": As the footnote shows, I borrowed the phrase from Salvatore Bono and Gillian Weis. In most early modern European sources, "Turcs" was used as a generic term for Muslim Blacks, Moors/North Africans, Turks/Janissaries, and Arabs.

As for my description of the sculptures of captives, Professor Baskins commented: "the removal of each work from its specific context, function, patronage, and reception [which], erases any aspects that might trouble or complicate that iconography." These factors are crucial in historical discussions. However, my purpose was to describe how people today treated these works of past Christian triumphs. I sat in churches, cathedrals, parks, and museums and observed: many people touched or took pictures or lit candles; many others did nothing. Neither the African immigrant in Livorno, nor my son in Palermo, nor the students I met expressed concern regarding the complication of iconography or the provenance.

And yes, a glossary of Arabic terms would have been a good idea. Thank you.