Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean.* Stanford, Cal..: Stanford University Press, 2011. xi + 389 pp. Maps, tables, figures, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. $65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8047-7000-2; $65.00 U.S. (eb: PDF or EPUB). ISBN 978-0-8047-7784-1.

Review by Julia Landweber, Montclair State University.

Gillian Weiss takes up some big historiographical subjects in *Captives and Corsairs,* her study of piratical, diplomatic, and military engagements between France and North Africa during the period 1550-1830. She examines France's role as a Mediterranean power, the formation of French identity, slavery in Europe and Europeans enslaved, and relations between Islam and the West, just to name some of the significant issues addressed in this ambitious monograph. Between the sixteenth-century foundation of the Barbary regencies of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, and the nineteenth-century French conquest of Algeria, North African corsairs or pirates regularly seized French subjects found at sea (or sometimes on land), took them captive as slaves, and put them to work until such time as they could win freedom through ransom or other means. France responded by variously sending redemption parties, diplomats, or warships—or sometimes none of the above, depending on sentiment and finances. Having dug deeply into the archives as well as the primary and secondary literature, Weiss gives us a formidably researched and deeply informed *longue durée* analysis of France's relationship with North African polities and with slavery across three centuries, enlivened with myriad individual scenes of captivity and redemption drawn from the sources.

The French were hardly alone in being threatened by Muslim enslavement. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, Barbary pirates abducted well over one million Europeans into slavery, taking captives at sea, but also raiding the shores of Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, England, and Iceland as well as France.[1] Europeans similarly took an unknown number of Muslims hailing from North Africa and the Ottoman Empire as slaves during this era. A key element in these practices is the absence of race as a defining element of who could be considered a slave. For a very long time after Portuguese and Spaniards first began to tap into the sub-Saharan slave trade, and slave societies organized around race became common in the Americas, the French continued to define slavery without reference to skin color, race, or nature. Up to the late seventeenth century, slavery was viewed purely as a product of individual misfortune, coupled with religious identity, and it was presumed to occur between Christians and Muslims in roughly equal directions (pp. 90-91). Only in the eighteenth century did race enter the French imagination where slavery was concerned, and it was not until the early nineteenth century that race came to seem a key determinant of slavery, as popularly imagined by the French people (p. 154).

Why focus on the French experience of slavery, particularly? In the history of France's responses to North African enslavement, Weiss finds "ties between saving slaves and making Frenchmen, between destroying slavery and making colonies" (p. 5). Deciding what to do about French victims of Muslim corsairs, Weiss argues, had significant repercussions for developing ideas of French belonging and for defining the identity of the French state between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the beginning of the period under study, French subjects were comparatively untroubled by Muslim corsair predations, relative to their neighboring states. Chapter one recounts how during the 1530s, King

Francis I of France and Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I temporarily allied their states against the Habsburgs. This decision inadvertently bought subjects of the French kings some protection against raids by North African corsairs, whose polities were then in the process of coming under Ottoman jurisdiction. The Ottoman navy was, however, unable to police its dependents fully, and Marseille's commercial fleet still regularly fell victim to Barbary corsairs who captured ships, stole cargo, and killed, enslaved, or converted the crews (p. 9). To solve this problem, French consuls were established in North Africa, and Capitulation agreements between France and the Ottomans agreed to liberate captured French subjects. France's free-soil principle also dates to this period: "France, mother of liberty, allows no slaves," judged the Parlement of Guyenne in response to a 1571 case of several Muslim slaves for sale in France (p. 10). This judgment became the basis for aligning political theories of freedom with definitions of French identity. Despite these rulings and international agreements, however, French subjects continued to be abducted, and successive royal governments did little either to rescue them or to halt future problems.

Royal interest in rescuing French captives remained tepid until Louis XIV reached his majority in the 1660s. Previously, there had been too many other claims to royal attention and royal coffers, including the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century, and during the first half of the seventeenth century, "pan-European warfare, fiscal crisis, epidemic disease, food shortages, and…noble revolts" (p. 45). As Weiss narrates in chapters one and two, for a long time liberating French slaves in Barbary was the semi-private, semi-public business of individual captives' families; municipal and commercial authorities; and two religious groups, the Mercedarians and the Trinitarians, both founded to redeem lost Catholics (including Protestants who agreed to convert). Despite disinterest from the capital, these two redemption organizations unintentionally helped lay the groundwork for building and defining the early modern French state. Beginning in the 1630s, the rival Trinitarians and Mercedarians began to drum up support for their rescue missions through pamphlets and public processions which "demonstrate[d] to a broad audience the positive effects of Catholic charity and Bourbon rule, while defining French belonging against the negative mood of North African captivity" (p. 29). This tactic eventually led Louis XIV, as discussed in chapters three and four, to take direct military action against the Barbary regencies in response to a developing belief that French identity and Barbary captivity were incompatible concepts (p. 53).

Weiss, who seems to have counted every single French slave traceable in the archives, ably teases out shifting relations between social experiences and cultural attitudes toward slavery over time. She observes that "measured numerically rather than imaginatively, French enslavement in North Africa was largely a seventeenth-century affair" (p. 131). Thanks to Louis XIV's bombardment of Barbary ports, the rising incidence of mortality from disease in Barbary lands, and a diminished need for Muslim galley-slaves in the French fleet, by the early eighteenth century, the number of French captives in North Africa began to drop substantially for the first time since the problem began in the sixteenth century. At the same time, with France's American colonies growing in size and wealth, French subjects were increasingly more likely to own a black slave than to be in danger of themselves becoming enslaved in North Africa. Yet the rising awareness of black chattel slavery customs in the New World did not substantially alter French ideas about slavery in principle, as chapter five makes clear. To Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot and Rousseau, both forms of bondage were equally wrong, and equally deserving of abolition. Those who thought otherwise (and increasingly there were those in France and its colonies who did) were accused of "misplaced compassion" (p. 99).

Chapter six takes the story from the Revolution to the Napoleonic era. Redemption of French slaves in danger of succumbing to Islam had always been primarily seen as a Church responsibility. Following the suppression of all religious orders in France in 1791, the state now had to take charge of freeing its captured citizens. Barbary slaves were no longer either the numerical problem of past centuries (their numbers having dwindled from thousands to a mere 200 or fewer), nor necessarily the upright victims of former times. Whereas many had once been useful sailors, merchants, or even diplomats, by the late

eighteenth century those now languishing in North Africa seemed mainly "deserters, petty outlaws, shipwreck victims, and casualties of mistaken identity" (p. 118). Yet, even the captivity of these unsavory individuals was deemed an affront to the new republican ideology of liberty, fraternity, and equality. Rescuing them became a matter of national priority in 1792. It was also true that by offering to exchange Muslim galley slaves for captured French citizens, the new Republic could conveniently develop good will around the Mediterranean and especially with former Barbary enemies, who might in return provide a much-needed grain supply (pp. 121-122). This good will was very short-lived, however. Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power and attempted conquest of Egypt in 1798, coupled with the loss of Haiti in 1804, quickly combined to renew French interest in North Africa as a site for imperial expansion.

Chapters seven and eight carry the narrative to its chronological conclusion with the 1830 conquest of Algiers. Weiss explains how French fears surrounding North African slavery shifted in the 1820s from a centuries-old concern about religious apostasy to a new distaste centered on racial domination. The spark came from the question of French involvement in the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829), which "conflated the causes of Greek insurgents, sub-Saharan Africans, and European mariners." Additionally, following news of Greek Christian women being abducted in record numbers from Chios and other rebellious Greek provinces to be sold as slaves throughout the Ottoman Empire, in the French imagination "the archetypal victim of Muslim warfare changed sex" (p. 156). In former centuries fears centered on the abduction of young Christian boys and men who might be forced into sodomy, apostasy, and circumcision, but new worries shifted to visions of Christian women raped and forcibly converted to Islam, and worse, of the mixed-race offspring they might be forced to bear. As fears and tensions mounted, politicians increasingly conflated the problems of Greece with other troubles posed by North African states, in particular regarding an ongoing dispute with Algiers over payment of a debt dating to the French Revolution. The successful French conquest of Algiers in May 1830, it was hoped, would end centuries of piracy, display Charles X as the ultimate abolitionist of slavery, and bring ever-lasting peace to the Mediterranean. Of course, "the invasion of Algiers saved neither very many white slaves nor the Bourbon crown" (p. 169), nor did it unify the Mediterranean under a French flag. It was in truth a very sorry end to a long history of mostly balanced conflict.

Weiss has produced a beautifully written monograph based on phenomenal research. The endnotes alone, which account for over half the book's total length, will make valuable reading for the interested scholar. She has laboriously ascertained three centuries' worth of total numbers of enslaved and ransomed Europeans, yet by relegating the numbers to the notes and appendices, she offers a highly readable study not overly burdened with graphs and charts. Moreover, Weiss displays a charming flair for language throughout the text. For example, French fears about apostasy, sodomy, and plague in North Africa (the chief concerns for all who were held captive there) receive extended and loving attention. Sometimes, they are described almost poetically as the "perceived dangers of perversion and conversion" (p. 13). Elsewhere she refers to a group of redeemed captives as "potentially diseased, deviant, and disloyal subjects" of Louis XIV (p. 52), and of another victim, she writes that he "claimed to have sidestepped seduction, deflected the turban, and repelled the plague" (p. 65).

The pleasures of *Captives and Corsairs* extend beyond language to the fascinating narratives that abound, describing individual experiences of captivity, enslavement, and freedom regained. Some of Weiss's material is truly swashbuckling. She also finds occasional humor in her sources. But ultimately the sheer crush of numbers becomes too much, even for Weiss, to avoid losing the reader at times. By monograph's end, the ever-fluctuating policies of recovery and numbers of victims lost and saved decade by decade almost drown out the larger puzzle about what these interactions signified.

Its many fine qualities aside, this study possesses one significant flaw. Despite repeated references to the reciprocity of enslavement across the Christian/Muslim Mediterranean divide, Weiss maintains a highly one-sided focus on French victims of North African corsairs. From the sixteenth well into the

eighteenth centuries, untold thousands of Muslim slaves were also held captive in France. In fact, the French naval and commercial shipping interests were as eager for strong "Turks" to man their galley fleets as North African polities were for European captives to do *their* dirty jobs (p. 67). Likewise, the North African deys and sultans negotiated carefully and caringly for the return of their subjects, no less diligently than (and sometimes with more determination than) France worked to recover its subjects. Yet, other than mentioning such figures in passing, Weiss displays little interest in either their experiences or their fates. The problem of captives and corsairs was far more mutual that Weiss has room to discuss.[2]

This is a very different approach to the history of encounters between the Christian west and the Muslim east that have been appearing recently. Weiss devotes no space to European travelers' accounts of Ottoman lands (unless one includes captivity or redemption memoirs in that genre, which Weiss wisely does not), nor does she analyze any Enlightenment Orientalist fictions about Muslim "others" visiting France. Yet, Weiss's thesis, that centuries of interactions with Barbary corsairs and North African enslavement pushed France to develop a sense of national identity, shares many commonalities with other, more culturally focused, histories of France's early modern relationship with the Ottoman Empire.[3] *Captives and Corsairs* also amply demonstrates Weiss's interest in the Mediterranean as a historical zone of contact and shared experiences, as well as of conflict. This is another subject that has received renewed attention in the past decade, notably in the works of Molly Greene, Eric Dursteler, Michel Fontenay, and Christine Isom-Verhaaren.[4] Like them, Weiss is fascinated by the sea's ability to connect the worlds of Christianity and Islam. She rejects the "clash of civilizations" dichotomous model that—from Henri Pirenne to Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntingdon—would have us see the Mediterranean from the seventh century to the present day with an iron curtain sharply dividing the Christian west from the Muslim east (and south).[5] This satisfyingly tidy vision of binaries extends back to at least the sixteenth century (p. 25), but even then some had trouble believing in it. Weiss has set out to overturn "static interpretations of slavery, binary conceptions of the Inner Sea, and both centrist and domestic portraits of French history" (p. 3), and, to her credit, she has largely succeeded.

NOTES

[1] Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[2] See for instance André Zysberg, *Les galériens: vies et destins de 60,000 forçats sur les galères de France, 1680-1748* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), and Nabil Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[3] See Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France: Eurasian Trade, Exoticism, and the Ancien Régime* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008); Julia Landweber, "Fashioning Nationality and Identity in the Eighteenth Century: The Comte de Bonneval in the Ottoman Empire," *The International History Review*, 30 (1) March, 2008: 1-31; and Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[4] Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), and *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), and *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Michel Fontenay, *La Méditerranée entre la Croix et le Croissant: Navigation, commerce, course et piraterie, XVIᵉ-XIXᵉ siècle* (Paris:

Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010); and Christine Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: The Ottoman and French Alliance in the Sixteenth Century* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

[5] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), and *Medieval Cities*, trans. Frank Halsey (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956); Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

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