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NEW MIDDLE EASTERN REVIEWS

Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Early Fifteenth–Early Eighteenth Centuries)

Edited by Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor

Leiden, Brill, 2007, xx + 253 pp., €93 / \$129, Hardback

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The taking of captives for ransom or sale as slaves was a near universal phenomenon along Ottoman land and sea frontiers during the early modern period. It persisted through war and peace and affected Christian and Muslim populations on both sides of the political divide. Whereas the maritime dimension of this activity, especially the captivity of European Christians in North Africa, has received a fair bit of attention from scholars, its land-based parallel in Central Europe and the Balkans has been woefully underexplored. Moreover, comparatively little has been written about the plight of Ottoman-subject captives, whether they were carried off to one of the border fortresses in Royal Hungary or seized in the Mediterranean by Maltese corsairs. *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders* aims to rectify these imbalances. Exploring both sides of the phenomenon with a strong focus on sixteenth and seventeenth-century Hungary, this collection of studies edited by Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on slavery and captivity in the pre-modern Ottoman world.

Buoyed by the systematic exploitation of Ottoman court registers, students of Ottoman slavery have expanded their focus over the last thirty years beyond military/elite slavery and the child-levy (*devşirme*) to address a wide range of topics, including the origins of slaves, slave markets, taxation, importation of slaves, prices, forms of manumission, and involvement of slaves in industry. However, prisoners of war and captives held for ransom, those in the intermediate stages of slave-taking and slave-making—for whom little information can be found in the Ottoman central archives or the Islamic court records—have garnered less attention. These captives and the ransom industry that sprouted around them are the subject of this volume. Captives taken in cross-border raids in peacetime, just like prisoners of war—both known as *esir* or *tutsak*—would be sorted according to their rank and wealth. The *esir* was not yet, legally speaking, a slave, but he or she could easily become one. Those of means would be held, often not far from the frontier, in hopes of securing large sums of money for their release, while those of lesser station would most often be transferred to major markets and sold into permanent bondage. Captives who failed to redeem themselves could expect to find themselves enslaved as well.

This cross-border trade in lives peaked during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, along the way developing a complex system of customary law based on reciprocity. There were some constants. Captors negotiated with their captives over the ransom, often gathering intelligence across the border to determine the captive's means and employing torture to extract a higher price. Once the ransom was agreed, the captive made arrangements for payment, sometimes in installments, and he was frequently released at some stage to gather the rest of the money and goods on his side of the border. Provision of surety from relatives or fellow prisoners and collective guarantor arrangements were meant to ensure the paroled

captive's return with his ransom, as was border officials' mutual adherence to the customary code of conduct, which sometimes induced them to enforce the other side's claims to payment from delinquent parolees and even to return some to captivity. Nevertheless, this system was not static over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Ottoman and Royal Hungarian captors and captives responded to changing conditions with new procedures meant to streamline the process of ransom collection and prevent fraud, bail-jumping, and opportunistic begging by con men pretending to be paroled captives gathering ransoms.

The collection is anchored by Géza Pálffy's lengthy (nearly fifty pages) contribution, which, as Pál Fodor quite accurately states, depicts "more thoroughly than any hitherto, the daily pattern of ransom slavery as it flourished in the Habsburg-Ottoman borderlands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (p. xix). This is a valuable and comprehensive introduction to the complex mechanics of ransom slavery on the Hungarian frontier, the findings of which are broadly applicable elsewhere. The volume's other contributions consist primarily of detailed case studies, like Ferenc Szakály's fascinating reconstruction of the decade-long drama surrounding the ransom of Ali Bey of Koppány, or close examinations of source sets (like lists of ransomed prisoners with prices paid) that will be of particular interest to specialists, who may be able to mine the wealth of previously unretrievable data on slavery, ransom, and the frontier military order for their own work. The volume's Hungarian authors have made a vast amount of Hungarian primary source material and scholarship accessible to the wider community of English-reading scholars.

Despite the book's general-sounding title, most of *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders*' twelve chapters are centered firmly on Hungary. This includes Mária Ivanics' contribution, "Enslavement, slave labour and treatment of captives in the Crimean Khanate," which is primarily focused on the Tatars' Hungarian captives, taken during raids in support of Ottoman military actions in the region during the sixteenth and especially mid-seventeenth centuries. The main exception to this, and the volume's only foray onto the water, is Pál Fodor's excellent study of French participation in the ransoming of Ottoman captives from Malta in the 1620s ("Maltese pirates, Ottoman captives and French traders in the early seventeenth-century Mediterranean"), a reprinting of his 2001 *Turcica* article "Piracy, Ransom Slavery, and Trade" which also supplies a concise overview of the contours of Mediterranean piracy and slave-raiding in the early modern period. The inclusion of Fodor's piece helps to illustrate some of the striking commonalities between ransom slavery as practiced in Central Europe and the ransom-oriented amphibious slave-raiding of pirates and corsairs in the early modern Mediterranean.

The book's broad title might have been better justified by including articles on ransom slavery in the Ottoman-Venetian-Habsburg frontier region, on the activities of the Catholic Uskoks of Senj (in present-day Croatia), or on ransom slavery in the much neglected Caucasus region, all of which would have provided useful points of comparison. The inclusion of maps—absent, except for one in Fodor's paper—would have gone a long way towards helping readers unfamiliar with the geography visualize the system of border defenses in Hungary and keep track of the many locales which appear repeatedly throughout the book. That aside, this fascinating book is an important addition to the small but growing literature on slavery in the pre-modern Ottoman Empire, and it offers valuable insights into the world of borderland relations and frontier diplomacy. One can only hope that its captivating studies will inspire further research on the topic.