



Arařtırma Notu / Research Note

Western Views on Muslim Slavery*

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Ogier De Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, trans. E. S. Forster (London: Eland, 2001), 69–70: *A Dutch diplomat in Istanbul in the mid-1500s notes that slaves were treated well; slavery was an effective means to prevent indigency.*

George Keith, 'An Exhortation & Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes,' in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1889), 13:265–70: *Christian slavery in the Americas gave a terrible image in the Muslim world.*

Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London: Edward Cave, 1738), 110: *Describing how, in the 1730s, the house slaves of the Mandinke in Senegambia 'live so well and easy, that it is sometimes a very hard matter to know the slaves from their masters or mistresses.'*

Charles Hamilton, trans., *The Hedaya, or Guide*, vol. 1 (London: T. Bensl, 1791), lxvii–iii: *In India slaves enjoy rights and are often treated more as friends or workers; the slave 'generally speaking, experiences in a very slight degree, if at all, the miseries which necessarily attend that state in some of the dependencies of Europe...;'* *'we shall be guilty of great injustice, if we form our ideas of Musulman slavery from the treatment experienced by Chistian captives among the barbarians of Tunis and Algiers.'*

* This material is meant to serve as a bibliographical resource and not advocacy for any position. It builds on an expanded footnote from my *Slavery & Islam* book (2019). For a conceptual framing of what Stefan Eklöf Amirell has called "The Good Treatment Thesis," see idem, "An Extremely Mild Form of Slavery...of the Worst Sort': American Perceptions of Slavery in the Sulu Sultanate, 1899–1904," *Slavery & Abolition* 43, n. 3 (2022): 517–32

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- Charles White, *Three Years in Constantinople*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1845), 2: 285–86; 297, 301, 304, 342: *A long-term British resident in Istanbul in the 1840s notes that manumission was frequent, slaves were rarely hit, ate the same food as their owners, and were cared for when sick. 'Divest it of the name, and slavery, as it exists in Turkish families, loses almost all its severity. Slaves, generally speaking, are more happy, better treated, and less subject to the vicissitudes of life than free servants in Turkey, and superior in these respects to the general class of menials in Europe.'*
- Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters*, ed. Clare Brant (New York: Everyman's Library, 1992), 166: *Lady Montagu (d. 1762) applauds Ottoman humanity towards their slaves, seeing them as better off than slaves in Europe.*
- Philemon de la Motte, *Voyage pour la redemption des captifs aux royaumes d'Alger* (Paris: Louis-Anne Sevestre & Pierre-Francois Giffart, 1721), 48: *'As for the Christian slaves in Algiers, they are not so unhappy... But they are still slaves....'*
- James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh: J. Ruthven, 1790), 393: *18th-century Scottish traveler to the Hejaz notes how slavery in there was 'much more humane' than in the Americas.*
- Thomas Thornton, *The Present State of Turkey* (London: Joseph Mawman, 1807), 376-77: *In slave markets in Istanbul and Crimea c. 1800 slave merchants treat female slaves well out of commercial interest.*
- John L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia* (London: J. Murray, 1822), p. 305: *Famous Swiss traveler notes 'slavery, in the East, has little dreadful in it but the name,' though he elsewhere details the cruelties of the Nile slave trade.*
- W. H. Macnaghten, *Principles and Precedents of Moohummudan Law* (Calcutta: Church Mission Press, 1825), xxxix: *EIC legal official notes 'In India... between a slave and a free-servant there is no distinction but in the name,' with the former not required to maintain himself.*
- Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1834), 1:342–43: *Scottish explorer and diplomat (d. 1841) notes how Persian slaves among the Uzbeks are not beaten but are clothed and treated as part of the family.*
- Thomas R. R. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery* (Philadelphia: T. & J. W. Johnson; Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1858), cxviii: *A Georgian, Cobb wrote in 1858 that Ottoman slave owners were considered by European visitors to be much less cruel than Europeans and that mukātaba was routine (I thank Michael Muhammad Knight for this citation).*

- John Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia*, rev. edn. (London: John Murray, 1861), 10–11: *A Scottish soldier and EIC administrator describes slaves in Muscat in the early 1800s as being treated as 'favoured domestics,' seldom put to hard labor and integrated into society.*
- Allan G. B. and Humphrey J. Fisher, *Slavery and Muslim Society in Africa* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1970), 83–85: *Gustav Nachtigal observed that, from Algeria to Zanzibar in the 1870s, 'Everywhere... Islam brings with it a mild administration of the institution of slavery.'*
- Gustave le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes* (Paris: Librairie de Fermin-Didot, 1884), 394–99: *'The condition of slaves in the Orient is effectively preferable to that of domestic servants in Europe.'*
- Jules Gervais-Courtellemont, *Mon Voyage à la Mecque*, 4th edn. (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 122–23: *In Mecca in 1894, slavery is mild and slaves are 'treated more like children....'*
- Joseph Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes and Back: the Narrative of the Royal Geographical Society's East Central African Expedition, 1878–1880*, 2 vols. (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1881), 1:17: *Slaves in Zanzibar in 1878 'have ten times more real liberty than thousands of our clerks and shop-girls,' though noting that conditions had been worse before.*
- J.C. McCoan, *Egypt* (New York: PF Collier, 1898), 305–8: *Perhaps the most extensive discussion of this sort; slavery in the Americas and in the Muslim Middle East 'have hardly a feature in common'; slaves were 'treated as members of the family,' though he notes that slavery is 'bad and indefensible under any conditions.'*
- William Shaler, *Sketches of Algiers* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard & Co., 1826), 69: *'Domestic slavery in these countries has ever been of the mildest character, implying rather the reciprocal rights of service and of protection, than of slavery.'*
- C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 21–22: *'Taken as a whole, the position of the Moslim slaves is only formally different from that of European servants or workmen.'*
- John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell, *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2002), 170: *Gordon Laing, a British explorer in North Africa in the 1820s, notes that slaves in a Saharan town are 'treated with so much kindness and have so many privileges that the remark "that slavery is but a name" might almost apply here.'*

- Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 202: *The French imperial explorer Louis-Gustave Binger 'doubted that the unemployed of metropolitan France were as well treated as the house slaves of African Muslims.'*
- Francis Rodd, *People of the Veil* (Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications, 1966), 135: *British traveler in Central Sahara in 1922 notes how Tuareg slaves allowed to own property, slavery there 'never did involve great hardship.'*
- Eldon Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia*, 2 vols. (London: G.P. Putnam, 1928), 2: 91: c. 1925, *Islamic ethics result in slaves being generally well treated, 'as junior members of the family,' it is 'scarcely correct' to apply the term slave in Muslim context.*
- Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959), 63-64: *Famous traveler observes that Bedouin 'treat a slave, however black, as one of themselves' and honor them.*
- Freya Stark, *Southern Gates of Arabia* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1936), 34: *Famous traveler notes 'they enter a household and become part of it.'*
- David Santillana, *Istituzioni di diritto musulmano malichita con riguardo anche al sistema sciafito*, 2 vols. (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1926-38), 1:116: *slavery is closer to domestic labor.*
- C. M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, 2 vols. (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), 1:554: *In the Hejaz in the 1880s 'The condition of a slave is always tolerable and is often happy in Arabia,' with frequent emancipation and marriage made possible.*