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Culture as Capital: Slavery as an Instrument of Cultural Exchange in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Ottoman Empire

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Abstract

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire and European states clashed during warfare, resulting in mutual enslavement and the collision of cultures. The first-person accounts from enslaved Europeans and Ottomans and the secondary works of historians suggest that, despite losing freedom and experiencing poor treatment and violence, captives adapted to their captors' culture and could actually gain opportunities for social mobility, power, and agency through cultural exchange. Living and working within an otherwise unknown culture, they participated intimately in a cultural exchange that included learning and applying new languages, skills, and customs. This cultural exchange did not stay solely with individual experience. As they used and shared what they learned, through interpersonal relationships, literature, and diplomacy, captives changed both the new culture and their own. The impact of these captives' cultural exchange reverberated throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire, in their own time and in centuries to come.

In 1688, a young man, Osman of Timişoara, in present day Romania, was just establishing a life for himself in the military of one of the world's most powerful civilizations, the Ottoman Empire. The son of a mid-ranking army officer, Osman had means to a bright future, until captured by the Hapsburgs and sent as a slave into the starkly different culture of western Europe.[1] He lost everything but his ingenuity, and over the twelve years of living and working among Europeans, Osman observed, adapted, survived, and learned. When he returned home at last, Osman had become versed in two civilizations otherwise largely unknown to each other and transferred what he had learned in Europe to rise from mere squad leader to leading diplomat and translator for the Ottoman Empire.[2]

Given his intelligence and character, Osman would surely have found success without ever leaving his homeland, but it is less likely that he would ever have achieved the high level of influence and social class had he not first lost everything—his freedom, his home, his choices. He was not the only one. Enslavement between Ottoman and western Europe created an opportunity for exchange between two vastly different and otherwise closed cultures. These substantial cultural differences, including language and religion, provided a means for captives to gain, transmit, and benefit from cultural exchange.

For the Ottoman Empire, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were times of instability and warfare, particularly along the western frontier. Early in the sixteenth century, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent renewed western expansion, capturing Belgrade in Serbia and Cyprus, defeating the Hungarians, and fighting the Hapsburgs.[3] In the seventeenth century, the Ottomans

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[1] Osman Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels: The Memoirs of an Ottoman Muslim in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, trans. Giancarlo Casale (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 27; Giancarlo Casale, introduction to *Prisoner of the Infidels: The Memoirs of an Ottoman Muslim in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, trans. Giancarlo Casale (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 1.
[2] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 155–156.
[3] Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire: A Short History*, trans. Shelley Frisch (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 62, 63.

fought Venice and the Hapsburgs, each for over twenty years. Ultimately, the Hapsburgs regained Hungarian territory, including Buda, the Ottomans' Hungarian capital city, resulting in mutual enslavement and the collision of cultures.[4]

Enslavement had been a fact of life in the Mediterranean since ancient times, serving primarily as an economic practice, often as a product of war. During this period in the Mediterranean, prominent forms of enslavement included ransom slavery, galley slavery, and harem slavery. These slaves often became renegades, converting to their captors' religion, embracing the captors' culture and relinquishing their original identity to start a new life in a new land.

There is an abundance of first-hand slave narratives written by Europeans who experienced captivity in the Ottoman Empire. These memoirs of former captives tend to follow a Christian narrative, emphasizing the author's Christ-like suffering and martyrdom.[5] In contrast, there are very few Ottoman captivity memoirs, perhaps because in the religious tradition of Islam, captivity is understood as part of God's will.[6] Unlike Europeans, who sought to share their endurance with others as a sign of their virtue, it seems that Ottomans merely accepted it as a part of life. Historian Suraiya Faroqhi even writes that "virtually no memoirs of Ottoman ex-galley slaves have been found," which leaves a significant absence in primary source material from enslaved Ottomans.[7] Of these few first-person narratives, Osman's memoir *Prisoner of the Infidels* provides invaluable insight into his experiences in Hapsburg ransom slavery. Historian and translator of Osman's text, Giancarlo Casale, expands on the significance of *Prisoner of the*

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[4] Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire: A Short History*, 91–94.
[5] Stefan Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery in the Early Modern Habsburg Mediterranean," *History Workshop Journal* 87, no. 1 (2019): 160, 161; Nabil Matar, "Two Arabic Accounts of Captivity in Malta: Texts and Contexts," in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean: 1550-1810,* ed. Mario Klarer (London: Routledge, 2018), 261.
[6] Matar, "Two Arabic Accounts of Captivity in Malta," 261.
[7] Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 128.

Infidels in the introduction, describing Osman as a "literary pioneer"—for not only was Osman one of the few enslaved Ottomans who wrote captivity narratives, and with a strong "narrative voice" and "level of introspection," but his work is also one of the first Ottoman autobiographies ever written.[8]

Enslavement itself was a grim experience. Europeans and Ottomans alike report enduring poor treatment and violence during their captivity. Robert Adams, an enslaved European, describes being forced to work "at a mill like a horse, from morning until night" and "every day beaten to either turn Turk or come to my ransom."[9] Similarly, Osman describes the constant threat of violence while enslaved by the Hapsburgs, such as being harshly beaten by his captor with a cane, "relentlessly about the head, feet, flanks, wherever he could" to the point that Osman lost consciousness.[10] It is important to recognize the brutality that captives in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire experienced. However, Mediterranean slavery during this period was largely transactional; enslavement was mutable. Captives could buy their freedom or work their way into better positions. With their new skills and knowledge, they found upward social mobility and avenues to power, especially through the acquisition of languages, religious conversion, cultural practices, and the creation of literature. They transformed not only their own individual lives but affected international relations as a whole.

Ransom slavery, in which captives were released for a fee, was prevalent across the Ottoman-Hungarian frontier on both sides during this period. Nearly anyone could be taken into ransom slavery, and people were enslaved in large numbers; even conservative estimates suggest

[8] Casale, introduction to *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 13–14.
[9] Robert Adams, "Robert Adams to Captain Robert Adams," in *Privacy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus, 349.
[10] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 65–66.

tens of thousands of Ottoman Muslims experienced captivity in Europe.[11] Osman claims that a Hapsburg general "enslaved virtually every Muslim" from a single town, including "military officers, men of property, young men, boys, women, and young girls," and excluding only "around one hundred very poor old men and their wives."[12]

Ransoms varied based on one's perceived status; soldiers, for example, were worth more than civilians.[13] For the cavalryman Receb of Pécs, the ransom that the Hungarian captors demanded included cash, horses, animal skins, quilts, and carpets.[14] In comparison, Osman, a squad leader, was able to negotiate directly with and convince his enslaver that he "was a man of little reputation" to lessen his ransom to sixty gold pieces and to permit him to return to his home, Timişoara, to obtain the ransom.[15] However, if that ransom had seemed insufficient to the enslaver, it is possible that he might have threatened to send Osman to Vienna, a common threat by Europeans against their Muslim captives, since the geographic distance would practically ensure that they would never be able to return to the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, Ottomans would threaten to take high-status European captives to Istanbul to increase ransom offers, since Istanbul housed political prisoners—and the highest-status captives, both European and Ottoman, were political prisoners, who were therefore not ransomed and unlikely to be liberated.[16]

Galley slavery, which consisted of captives who provided the necessary labor to row a galley ship, which could be a commercial, military, or even piracy vessel, was another common

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[11] Casale, introduction to *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 13.
[12] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 34.
[13] Zsuzsanna J. Újváry, "A Muslim Captive's Vicissitudes in Ottoman Hungary (Mid-Seventeenth Century)," in *Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 145.
[14] Újváry, "A Muslim Captive's Vicissitudes in Ottoman Hungary," 146–149.
[15] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 27, 37, 38.
[16] Géza Pálffy, "Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman–Hungarian Frontier in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 43, 44, 45.

form of captivity during this period for both Ottoman and European captives.[17] Many lower status Europeans held captive in Istanbul were sold into galley slavery.[18] Ottomans enslaved by Italians frequently were made to work on Italian commercial galleys, and while there are no galley narratives written by enslaved Ottomans, Italian archives do contain records of Ottoman galley slaves attempting to flee at port or by boat.[19] Meanwhile, there are many European narratives about serving as galley slaves for the Ottomans, including the works of Balthasar Sturmer and Lewis Marott.[20] Since galleys had high mortality rates due to overwork and overcrowding, most galley rowers consisted of captives and prisoners.[21] While galley slavery appears to have been more isolated than enslavement on land, galley slaves still experienced cultural exchange.

Some female European captives could become enslaved in the imperial harem, which provided them with unexpected opportunities for power and social mobility. Since Islam forbids the enslavement of Muslims, the Ottoman imperial harem typically consisted of prisoners of war from non-Muslim states, and these women were often forced to convert to Islam, and therefore freed, after several years.[22] Hürrem, also known as Roxelana, is perhaps the greatest example of an enslaved European in the harem who transformed her captivity into power. Hürrem was a captive from Ukraine who became Suleiman's favorite member of the imperial harem, inducing him to marry her, which was the first time in Ottoman history that a concubine married the

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[17] Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 45, 127.
[18] Pálffy, "Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman–Hungarian Frontier," 44.
[19] Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 128; Pálffy, "Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman–Hungarian Frontier," 45.
[20] Mario Klarer, "Trading Identities: Balthasar Sturmer's Verzeichnis der Reise (1558) and the Making of the European Barbary Captivity Narrative," in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean: 1550–1810*, ed. Mario Klarer (London: Routledge, 2018), 25; Lewis Marott, "A Narrative of the Adventures of Lewis Marott, Pilot-Royal of the Galleys of France," (London: Printed for Edward Brewster, at the Crane in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1677), 16.
[21] Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 127.
[22] Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.

sultan—her captor.[23] She used this relationship to gain power and transform the harem into a political institution.[24] While enslavement in the harem has significant differences from other forms of captivity, it had the potential to provide enslaved women with an uncommon, distinct form of cultural exchange and social mobility.

While captive in each other's lands, those in various forms of slavery adapted to new customs and learned to communicate as a form of survival. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of cultural exchange experienced by enslaved Ottomans and Europeans was the acquisition of new languages, a vital skill for immediate communication and long-term adaptation in a foreign land. In his memoir, Osman recalls having difficulty communicating with his captors when first enslaved. When bartering for his ransom price, Osman and other captives had to make themselves "understood partly through signs," and, when seeking help after being robbed, he "had a very hard time" because he did not know the Austrians' language and "tried to mime out an explanation through all manners of signs and gestures."[25] His captors ultimately had to ride for "two or three hours" just to find a translator at an Austrian camp, a lengthy process illustrating how important clear communication was for both sides.[26]

William Okeley, an Englishman enslaved by Ottomans in Algiers, describes being unable to withstand the verbal abuse of his captors because he "had not been used then to such a language," and since he was unable to "express" himself in "the Moresco, or *lingua frank*," he instead relied on signs.[27] Despite not being able to speak the language, Okeley believes that his

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[23] Leslie Peirce, *Empress of the East: How a European Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 1, 4.
[24] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 1.
[25] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 37, 48.
[26] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 48.
[27] Nabil Matar, introduction to "William Okeley, Ebeneezer; or, A Small Monument of Great Mercy, Appearing in the Miraculous Deliverance of William Okeley (1675)," in *Privacy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 124, 125; William Okeley, "Ebeneezer; or, A Small Monument of Great Mercy, Appearing in the Miraculous

captors were casting insults at him for being a Christian, which suggests that either Okeley understood the language better than he claims, the content was clear enough without knowing Arabic, or that he is simply assuming what his captors said to him.

Even Hürrem initially struggled to read and write in Turkish, which impaired her ability to communicate with Suleiman at first, and thereby limited her access to power and social mobility.[28] Language gaps clearly made communication—of information, bargaining, and ideas—very difficult. Because interactions often required a translator or interpreter, enslaved people were likely motivated to learn the language of their captors and gain greater control of their circumstances themselves.

Many enslaved Europeans advanced beyond gestures to learn new languages while in captivity. Lewis Marott, a French sailor enslaved by the Ottomans for twelve years, seems to have learned at least some Arabic, as he describes communicating with his captors. Although he makes no specific claim of proficiency in Arabic, he clearly knows key vocabulary, as when he says, "in the *Arabick* Tongue, *Bissmylah*" and "*Einthalla*;" he translates what his captor has said—"*Allah he ill allah Mehmned Resall allah*; that is to say in *Arabick, There is no God but God, and* Mohamet *his Prophet*"—for his readers; and while planning an escape, he teaches his fellow captives Arabic words to serve as code and misguide their captors: "Em challah, *that is to say, And it please God*" and "Straffilla, *which is as much as to say, God forbid*."[29] Like Marrot, enslaved Europeans could undertake learning the languages in Ottoman captivity without surrendering their identities.

Deliverance of William Okeley," in *Privacy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 153.

[28] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 63; Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 4.

[29] Marott, "A Narrative of the Adventures of Lewis Marott," 24, 25, 26, 27.

Other captive Europeans acquired new languages as they more fully adopted Ottoman culture. The Englishman Joseph Pitts, despite claiming that he "can't pretend to a perfection in the Arabian language," appears to have at least gained proficiency, since he defines Arabic phrases and describes conversations with Turks, and he even—temporarily—converted to Islam.[30]

The Venetian Hasan Ağa, a renegade captive who converted to Islam, spoke Turkish, Frank, and Spanish, and, according to an account of the Venetian ambassador to Constantinople, Lorenzo Bernardo, seems to have remained fluent in Italian.[31] Hürrem, fully immersed in Ottoman culture, wrote her own letters to the Suleiman by the 1530s, indicating that her written Turkish had improved.[32] Her increased ability to communicate with the sultan likely strengthened their relationship, thus paving the way for her later rise in influence. This literacy, as historian Leslie Peirce suggests, also enabled her to serve as a kind of communication link between Suleiman and other members of his family, since he asked her to forward letters to them.[33] Another renegade, captive Venetian Pietro Vacazza, who forcibly converted to Islam, appears to have been grateful to learn a new language, writing to his father, "praise be to God who gave me a little bit of a brain so that I know how to read and write a bit in Turkish" and that

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[30] Nabil Matar, introduction to "Joseph Pitts, A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans, with an Account of the Author's Being Taken Captive (1704)," in *Privacy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 219; Joseph Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans, with an Account of the Author's Being Taken Captive," in *Privacy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 222, 232, 235, 249, 288, 289.

[31] Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 123, 124; It is unclear which language "Frank" refers to. In the primary source Dursteler cites, Bernardo writes that Hasan Ağa "spoke in Frank very comfortably, interspersing many Spanish words." It may refer to Italian or another European language.

[32] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 64; Previously, Hürrem likely used a scribe, since her early letters are written in a "high chancery style and in an elegant hand," according to Peirce on page 63.

[33] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 65.

he does "nothing but attend to exercising that art which could be of use to me," which historian Eric Dursteler interprets as appreciating the educational benefits of conversion and captivity.[34]

While enslaved in Europe, Osman appears to have learned Hungarian and German while in captivity.[35] A fellow captive Muslim he met had learned French, Italian, and German.[36] Certainly, knowing the language of their captors opened new avenues for greater authority and social mobility. For enslaved people on both sides, learning to communicate did not necessarily compromise their identity.

Gaining fluency in the language of their captors could even secure captives' safety. Marott, as previously mentioned, used Arabic words of prayer to trick captors into thinking that they were just praying when he was actually planning a revolt.[37] When a translator was told to translate Osman's letter to the general into Hungarian, Osman, who did not trust the translator, used his knowledge of German to write his own, additional, letter directly to the general, to ensure that his message was accurately conveyed.[38] Had Osman not known German, his safety would have been entirely reliant on the translator to correctly interpret and transmit Osman's words. While escaping enslavement, Osman also used his knowledge of German to pass as a German citizen, speaking only in German with his fellow escapees and agreeing to "never utter a word of Turkish" to hide their identities.[39] The German galley captive Balthasar Sturmer also attempted this strategy, speaking in Turkish while fleeing captivity to avoid recapture, which was

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[34] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 76.
[35] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 48, 55, 65, 71, 74, 75, 105, 107, 150, 154; Since Osman uses Serbo-Croatian early in his captivity in an attempt to communicate with his captors, it appears that he already knew some amount of Serbo-Croatian prior to captivity—indeed, Casale argues on page xvi that Osman "presumably" learned it in Timișoara, where it was "widely spoken," and since his parents were from present-day Serbia. Therefore, Osman may even be ethnically Serbian.
[36] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 113.
[37] Marott, "A Narrative of the Adventures of Lewis Marott," 19, 24, 25.
[38] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 150.
[39] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 114, 117, 121.

initially successfully until his "manner of speaking" about converting "made it obvious to them" that he was "no real Turk."[40] Therefore, acquiring the language of captors could actively empower, protect, and even disguise captives while in and escaping captivity.

Even as captives adapted to new languages, they retained their native languages and customs, maintaining communities even in the land of their captors, close connections that indicate a clear effort to retain their cultural identities despite gaining new foreign practices and knowledge. Osman met a fellow Muslim captive who "was on intimate terms with practically every captive—male or female—who found themselves in the city of Vienna."[41] These close connections indicate their clear effort to retain their cultural identities. Osman himself often met with his "countrymen for evenings on the town," "consulted with other captives in Vienna" about escaping, and even, with his "compatriots" collected money to pay for medical treatment for a captive who had converted to Christianity.[42] Despite being in a foreign land, Ottoman captives preserved their native language and allegiance through their shared cultural connections, even supporting members of the community who, by converting, assimilated to this new culture.

Shared native language could also serve to identify fellow Muslims in Europe. For example, Osman only realizes that a man is Muslim when he begins to speak "in the most fluent Turkish," because the man had a "half-Muslim and half-Austrian" appearance, so Osman "could not be sure" whether or not he was Muslim until he spoke the Turkish language.[43] Language served as false identifier—as when Osman used German while escaping to identify himself to others as a German—as well as an authentic one.

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[40] Klarer, "Trading Identities," 25, 38, 39.
[41] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 99.
[42] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 109, 113, 126.
[43] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 64.

Europeans in the Ottoman Empire, including captives and renegades, also maintained their native languages and communities. As aforementioned, Hasan Ağa remained fluent in Italian, and other renegades, such as Ca'fer, who became involved in the Ottoman government, also retained their native language after captivity and conversion.[44] He even wrote to Venetian diplomats in Italian, providing updates about the Ottoman government.[45] Another renegade, Gazanfer Ağa, despite his conversion and political position in the Ottoman Empire, even explicitly identified as Venetian, reportedly saying, "I am still Venetian because I have an interest in that blood."[46] Even when Europeans adapted to captivity in the Ottoman Empire, by converting and taking on new cultural customs, they seem to have retained both emotional and more concrete connections to their native land through use of their language.

These adaptations, of maintaining communities, acquiring new languages, as well as recognizing captors' culture and customs, actively led to significant opportunities for captives, during and especially after enslavement. In Hungary, Ottoman jailers selected one from the "senior" captives to serve as a spokesman for all the captives, representing and communicating on their behalf, and another captive to serve as a clerk, managing documents and letters.[47] Historian Géza Pálffy implies that many Ottoman jailers spoke Hungarian, which is unsurprising, since the Ottomans held land in Hungary, by noting that the jailers did "not always" speak Hungarian.[48] However, he does not clarify how the spokesmen would communicate with the jailers who did not know Hungarian, but since Pálffy later mentions that the clerk may also read out and translate letters to the captives into Turkish, it seems that some captives did know or

[44] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 124, 168, 165.
[45] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 168.
[46] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 121.
[47] Pálffy, "Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman–Hungarian Frontier," 69.
[48] Pálffy, "Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman–Hungarian Frontier," 69.

learn Turkish while in captivity.[49] In the early eighteenth century, taken into captivity by Maltese pirates**,** Suleyman Chalabi was appointed by "the sultan of Malta," who "knew no other language except his mother tongue, Spanish," to "assist the Muslim captives" by serving as a translator.[50] Therefore, captives could rise to a position of authority by having a common language that enabled them to communicate with their captors and advocate for themselves.

Once freed, many former captives—both European and Ottoman—found opportunities using the language skills they gained during captivity. Formerly enslaved Venetians who had learned Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and other languages while in Ottoman captivity became brokers, helping Ottoman merchants trade in Venice.[51] Others worked in diplomatic roles, like the formerly enslaved Spanish merchant Alfonso di Strada who settled in the Ottoman Empire after being freed and helped liberate the imperial ambassador Frederic Kregwitz, and like the Venetian Marino Cavalli Bailate, who served as an interpreter for the Venetian diplomat and negotiated for the freedom of enslaved Venetians.[52] The freed slave Pietro Brea used his knowledge of Turkish and customs to become a scribe for the slaves of Ulugali, and later took another position in Constantinople; despite his freedom from Ottoman captivity, he remained professionally tied to the Ottoman Empire.[53]

Osman, similarly, continued working with the same people who once enslaved him. After his return home, Osman began working for the governor of Timişoara as a translator for Austrian visitors, and eventually the local government requested that the central government approve

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[49] Pálffy, "Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman–Hungarian Frontier," 70.
[50] Matar, "Two Arabic Accounts of Captivity in Malta," 263, 265, 266; These Maltese pirates were the Knights of St. John, also known as Knights Hospitallers, who ruled Malta at the time, and, according to Matar, the Maltese "sultan" described in this account refers to Ramon Perellos y Roccaful.
[51] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 76.
[52] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 77.
[53] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 77.

opening a permanent interpreter position in Timişoara.[54] This government intervention to create a permanent position suggests that few people were fluent in other languages as Osman was. His proficiency in many languages led to a long, respected career with the Ottoman government. He held the position for seventeen years, in charge of "official correspondence, negotiations, and many other charges," and was even sent to "Transylvania, Arad, Szeged, Petrovaradin, and other places all over the map to meet with Hapsburg generals about matters of the highest importance."[55] This work contributed to making him "quite rich," clear material benefits resulting from learning foreign languages while enslaved.[56] While working as a translator, Osman even met one of the men preventing his escape, the Hapsburg general von Nehem, as equals.[57] Acquiring languages during enslavement transformed Osman's life, leading him to a high-level position that allowed him to live and prosper, traveling the world and significantly influencing politics through diplomacy.

Knowledge of local customs—including religion, appearance, and food—also helped captives in many ways during and after enslavement. Captives describe using their knowledge of their captors' religion to assist with their escape plans. While escaping enslavement, Osman, for example, used his knowledge of Christian sects to explain why he was not attending Eastern Sunday mass by telling a suspicious innkeeper that he was Lutheran, and therefore had "different observances" and did not attend churches of other sects.[58] Marott used his gained knowledge about Islam to determine the best time to escape. He knew that "*Friday* amongst the *Turks*, is what *Sunday* is amongst the Christians" so "the greatest part of the *Turks* were at their Prayers,"

[54] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 153, 154.
[55] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 155.
[56] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 158.
[57] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 157.
[58] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 120.

making it more likely to flee undetected.[59] Through religious cultural exchange, captives could use acquired knowledge from their captors against them.

Converting to their captors' religion—forcibly or voluntarily—was a way for captives to achieve freedom and even gain opportunities for social mobility in the land of their captors. In the Ottoman Empire, enslaved Europeans who converted to Islam could join the military, gaining freedom and legitimate social status in exchange for dedicating themselves to the land of their former captors, and therefore relinquishing their ties to their homeland.[60] According to a 1554 Ottoman military payroll register, twenty-four out of 3,412 soldiers in Hungary were "other Europeans"—excluding Hungarians—including two western Europeans and four Germans; similarly, a 1558 payroll register indicates that there were five "other Europeans" out of 814 soldiers.[61] This data indicates that some formerly enslaved Europeans were willing to convert and even actively fight on behalf of the Ottoman Empire—their former enslavers—in exchange for freedom, income, and social mobility.

Indeed, converting to Islam could lead to significant opportunities for captive Europeans. Pere Bedellia, for instance, was a European who converted after being captured as a child and served loyally as a janissary in the military for thirteen years. When captured by Christian Europeans, he even refused to save himself by declaring his European origins or denouncing his conversion.[62]

Gazanfar Ağa, a Venetian captive-turned-renegade, worked intimately in the Harem for over thirty years and advised three sultans, serving as chief of the gate and the white eunuch

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[59] Marott, "A Narrative of the Adventures of Lewis Marott," 27, 28.
[60] Klára Hegyi, "Freed Slaves as Soldiers in the Ottoman Fortresses in Hungary," in *Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth Centuries* ed. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 87, 88.
[61] Hegyi, "Freed Slaves as Soldiers in the Ottoman Fortresses in Hungary," 88, 89.
[62] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 117.

gatekeepers, and chief of the Privy Chamber.[63] Gazanfar used his political power to help family in Venice, even leading the Venetian senate to forgive his sister's debt.[64] Even when Gazanfar was executed in 1603, the sultan allegedly "wept fiercely."[65] As a Muslim convert, Gazanfar ascended to high-level positions in the Ottoman government and became so closely involved with—and directly advising—sultans that he was openly mourned.

The Venetian Ibrahim Paşa, who was taken captive by corsairs, converted and eventually became friends with Sultan Suleiman.[66] He was appointed Grand Vizier in 1523 and led military invasions for the Ottomans.[67] Perhaps since he saw how significantly conversion changed his own life, Ibrahim convinced his parents to convert and found his father and brother jobs in the government as well.[68] Ibrahim, despite his own conversion and later conversion of his family, continued to have a vested interest in Venice and the European arts, using his newfound influence, as a Muslim, to support them.[69]

Hasan Ağa, another Venetian captive, converted to Islam, became a corsair, and eventually became the governor of Algiers.[70] As governor, he became involved in the gold and silver trade and became so wealthy that it gained the attention of the sultan, who confiscated some of his wealth.[71] Hasan even used his power, gained from converting to Islam, to attempt to get his Christian Venetian brother-in-law a position in Venice's senate.[72] Captive Europeans who converted to Islam could find substantial upward social mobility in the Ottoman Empire, gaining

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[63] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 120.
[64] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 122.
[65] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 121.
[66] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 127; Ibrahim was born on the Greek island Parga, which was Venetian territory at the time.
[67] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 127, 128.
[68] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 128.
[69] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 128.
[70] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 123.
[71] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 124.
[72] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 124–125.

wealth and power, and helping not only themselves, but also their Christian family members still in Europe and their homeland nations.

Hürrem's conversion to Islam was essential to her rise in status and power. She converted at a young age, soon after taken into captivity, and with it gained a new name; in essence, this conversion stripped her of her original identity, but in exchange, she gained power and agency.[73] Hürrem became a patron of architecture, commissioning the Haseki Hürrem complex in Istanbul, which consisted of a mosque, madrasa, imaret, and a hospital.[74] The mosque in the Haseki Hürrem complex was not the only mosque she had built—she also commissioned mosques in Edirne, Ankara, and Svilengrad.[75]

Perhaps, by supporting the construction of mosques—especially the one in a complex explicitly named after her—Hürrem sought to portray herself as a devout Muslim supporting the faith, despite her Christian origins. Indeed, architectural historian Muzaffer Özgüleş writes that the buildings "symbolized both Hürrem's faith and the dynasty's religious protectionism." Furthermore, she was the first "haseki," meaning the favorite of a sultan, to build a mosque complex in Istanbul.[76] Her frequent patronage of architectural buildings, particularly mosques, serves as both an expression of power and wealth, and an expression of Muslim faith.

However, from Hürrem's kind treatment of and charitable work for enslaved people, it seems that she never forgot her origins as a captive Christian. For example, she had an endowment made to provide enslaved people with footwear and jugs and seemingly allowed her own slave to renovate a small mosque with leftover material from Hurem's complex

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[73] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 33, 192.
[74] Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders: The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Turhan Sultan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 78.
[75] Thys-Şenocak, 81; Muzaffer Özgüleş, *The Women Who Built the Ottoman World: Female Patronage and the Architectural Legacy of Gulnus Sultan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 46.
[76] Özgüleş, *The Women Who Built the Ottoman World*, 45.

construction.[77] Hürrem also actively trained young slaves and even arranged marriages for enslaved people in the palace.[78] Her continued involvement with enslaved people suggests that she remained invested in the issues of slavery even after gaining status and power, likely because of her own experience as a captive. Conversion granted Hürrem great opportunities—including the chance to help other captives—and she sought to visibly associate herself with Islam by commissioning several mosques, including one in a complex named after her, directly using her power to tie herself to the Muslim faith.

Those who resisted conversion were well aware of the opportunities they would have received. Osman was explicitly told twice that if he converted, he would be given his freedom as well as a higher position. His master's wife once said, "if you were to adopt our faith" her husband "would make you his head of wardrobe," and another time, a steward told him that the master and his wife "think so highly of your service that they hope to free you and make you their protégé," adding that "they would have done so already if you had shown any inclination to embrace our faith."[79] A captive Englishman, John Rawlins, directly ties conversion to wealth and power, describing renegades as "seduced with the hopes of riches, honor, preferment, and suchlike devilish baits."[80] Despite these offers of upward mobility, contingent only on conversion, Osman and Rawlins resolved to return home and adhere to their own religion.

From the slave narratives on both sides, it becomes clear that those who did not convert held those who did in contempt. Francis Knight remarks upon how "facile doe these professe the new Religion, priding themselves in Turkish ceremonies, and in a faith once execrable unto

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[77] Peirce, *Empress of the East,* 193.
[78] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 211.
[79] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 93–94, 114.
[80] John Rawlins, "The Famous and Wonderful Recovery of a Ship of Bristol, Called the Exchange, from the Turkish Pirates of Argier," in *Privacy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 117.

them," criticizing converts' faith as superficial and hypocritical.[81] Although Osman and other captive Muslims help pay for the medical treatment of a female Christian convert, Osman still criticizes her for converting and directly attributes her ailments to the religion. He implies that her weakness is both spiritual and physical, a willingness to convert to Christianity and to engage in improper behavior, for "after her capture she had acquired a taste for Christian customs, to the point of becoming a notorious whore," which led to her contracting the syphilis requiring treatment.[82]

Similarly, Okeley, a Christian, characterizes converts as having poor behavior and a lack of conviction. He writes about one captive Englishman whose faith did not have "firm hold of the heart" which made him "let go his hold of religion," converting to Islam and becoming a renegade, and who went from a "drunken Christian" to a "drunken Turk" during Ramadan—although Muslim officials did punish the drunk convert for his behavior.[83] Rawlins' description of renegades as "seduced with the hopes of riches, honor, preferment, and suchlike devilish baits" also characterizes them as greedy and weak to temptation.[84] While converting could bring about many advantages and opportunities for success and even significant power, it might come at the cost of one's reputation, character, and community.

Those who kept their original religion in captivity remained devout, and it appears that their Muslim captors continued to let them practice freely. Okeley and his fellow captives held service three times a week and "never had the least disturbance from the Turks or Moors," which Okeley attributes to not disrupting their captors' "superstitions" and following their captors'

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[81] Francis Knight, "A Relation of Seaven Yeares Slaverie Under the Turkes of Argeire, Suffered by an English Captive Merchant," (London: T. Cotes, 1640), 2.
[82] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 126.
[83] Okeley, "Ebeneezer," 163.
[84] Rawlins, "The Famous and Wonderful Recovery of a Ship of Bristol," 117.

demands.[85] Michael Heberer, a galley slave enslaved by the Ottoman navy, even claims that Muslim Ottomans sought Christian prayer.[86] According to Heberer, an old Turkish man gave him and other galley slaves money and asked them to pray to the Christian god for him, and the sultan's wife gave each Christian galley slave on the ship money in exchange for praying to the Christian god for her.[87] He also mentions that the sultan even ordered that a destroyed church in Alexandria be rebuilt in "more beautiful" and "more splendid fashion" than before, which suggests clear respect and tolerance for Ottoman Christians.[88] This tolerance—and even occasional encouragement—of enslaved Christians who continued practicing their religion is unsurprising. Islam's concept of *Ahl al-Kitab*, meaning People of the Book—referring to other Abrahamic religions—grants some protections for Christians and Jews, such as not forcing them to convert.[89] In the Ottoman Empire, specifically, non-Muslim populations could receive protection in exchange for paying taxes, and capitulations sought to maintain peaceful relations with non-Muslim states.[90] Christianity and Judaism were recognized by Ottoman sultans as legitimate, if lesser, religions that people could practice freely.[91] Therefore, the Ottoman Empire, at least ostensibly, practiced religious tolerance.

Osman and other captive Muslims in Europe were also able to adhere to their original religion, in practice, identity, or both. Osman describes himself as "a Muslim by birth and belief" and continued the Muslim custom of not eating pig products, telling Europeans that he would not

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[85] Okeley, "Ebeneezer," 159.
[86] Robert Rebitsch, "Michael Heberer: A Prisoner of the Ottoman Navy," in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean: 1550–1810*, ed. Mario Klarer (London: Routledge, 2018), 167.
[87] Rebitsch, "Michael Heberer," 173, 174.
[88] Rebitsch, "Michael Heberer," 178.
[89] Radu Dipratu, *Regulating Non-Muslim Communities in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire: Catholics and Capitulations* (Oxford: Routledge, 2022), 3.
[90] Dipratu, *Regulating Non-Muslim Communities*, 3–4, 5.
[91] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 292.

eat anything "with pork or pork fat."[92] After peace was announced between the Ottomans and Hapsburgs, Osman writes that "most Muslim captives," including "those who had converted as well who had not," sought to return to their homelands. Both those who succumbed to conversion and those who withstood pressure or temptation to convert sought to return to their predominantly Muslim home. Osman even escaped with a man described as having pretended to convert.[93] Despite intense pressures to convert, it was possible for Muslim and Christian captives to maintain their original faith.

Religion could express itself through aspects of appearance, especially clothing and hair. Captives learned to modify their appearance to their advantage, to reveal or conceal their identity. To avoid extortion from Austrians early in his enslavement, Osman "disguised" himself in a variety of local European clothing, including "a green felt cloak of the kind worn by the local peasants."[94] Osman also used knowledge of local clothing to assist his escape, trading clothes with some local shepherds "so that no one would know" he was a Muslim, and, since he knew German and "planned in advance and dressed appropriately," he could pass as a German.[95] With his group of fellow escapees, Osman had "long black hair" and "a Genoese linen vest with white stripes, trousers, thin stockings and matching shoes, and a blue broadcloth cape," which made him look "like any ordinary military officer," claiming that "no one would ever have supposed from my appearance that I was a Muslim," and the others wore "clothes in the Austrian style appropriate to their rank."[96] Even when caught and under suspicion, Osman describes local Europeans as "astonished," exclaiming, "Who would ever guess that people dressed like this

[92] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 14, 69.
[93] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 113.
[94] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 36.
[95] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 76, 114.
[96] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 117.

were Muslims?"[97] Knowledge of the captors' clothing customs, and the value they themselves placed on it, enabled Osman to pass as a European during his escape and, eventually, reach freedom.

Osman appears to have learned much about European dress and its importance from the captors themselves. They imposed their clothing customs upon him and other Muslim captives, perhaps intending to strip them of their original customs and identity. Osman's captors gave him a variety of local clothing, including an outfit consisting of "his own gray cloth robe, trousers, boots, and a blue cape lined with fox fur," "a Hungarian robe" for him to "wear as a mourning garment" for the general, and a "*haiduk* outfit of blood-red broadcloth."[98] Casale notes the complexities of the term "*haiduk*," with various possible meanings and connotations, including Christian bandits and Serbian or Hungarian ethnicity, which therefore associates the clothing with non-Ottomans.[99] As Osman was made to wear European clothing for work and even mourning by his captives, he may have been temporarily stripped of his own customs and identity; however, it ultimately provided him with a method for escape.

Enslaved Europeans frequently described Ottoman hair care, some admiring the practices, and some applying that knowledge for social mobility and escape from captivity. Captive Johannes Wild described how Ottoman women used ointments to remove pubic hair and commended the skills of Ottoman barbers, and captive Hans Ulrich Kraftt observed the medicines of Ottoman barbers.[100] Some enslaved Europeans even directly learned haircare from the Ottomans, such as a Dutch man enslaved in North Africa and Hans Jacob Riedle, who did his

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[97] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 121.
[98] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 71, 85.
[99] Casale, introduction to *Prisoner of the Infidels*, xix; By the nineteenth century, *Haiduk* began to mean "freedom fighter" against Ottoman rule, further complicating—yet emphasizing—Christian or anti-Ottoman connotations; furthermore, on page 27, Osman refers to *haiduks* as "allied with the Austrians" against the Ottomans.
[100] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 162.

barber apprenticeship while in Algerian captivity, which likely contributed to their careers both during and after captivity, and, therefore, also provided a means of social mobility through money.[101] Appearance itself also could benefit enslaved Europeans' social mobility: in 1564, a legal scholar praised German captives for their appearances and therefore recommended them for "high services."[102]

In Ottoman enslavement, hair was used as a means for both humiliation and autonomy. Ottomans shaved Hapsburgs captives' heads, a degrading act that, according to Wild, made him weep "inconsolably."[103] However, this intended humiliation led some captives to reclaim autonomy by acting first, such as shaving their own beards before their captors could forcibly do so.[104] Just like Osman, captive Christians could also manipulate their appearance to aid escape. Johann Matthaus Fuchs used an Ottoman recipe to dye his hair blond, using "*Cunna* . . . with which Turkish women dye their hair," wore "different" clothes, and added a knotted artificial hairpiece to disguise himself, actively using Ottoman methods learned in captivity against them.[105] Adapting their hair, clothing, and overall appearance, particularly using customs learned from their captors, could significantly influence the success of escape, social mobility, and personal agency.

Trade skills and apprenticeships, such as the captive barbers in Ottoman North Africa, could benefit enslaved people, both in captivity and when freed. Riedle, who came from a family of barber-surgeons, was taken captive by Ottomans and continued to develop his skill set in captivity. Although treating his captors, according to his writings, caused him emotional turmoil,

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[101] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 165.
[102] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 167.
[103] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 167.
[104] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 185.
[105] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 163.

it gave him necessary experience which enabled him, after gaining freedom, to pass exams and eventually even be made one of the guild's examiners.[106] His enslavement did not derail his career and in fact contributed to his rise as a leader in his field. Okeley also mentions William Adams, who "had learnt and used the trade of a bricklayer" in captivity, gaining skills that had "serviceableness" in their escape.[107] Adams' bricklaying experience in captivity likely continued to serve him after liberation, providing him with a new trade, and therefore new opportunities, when he returned home. Enslaved European women who were to be sold to the wealthy elite were trained in the arts, including sewing and embroidery, playing the harp, and singing, which, in the short-term, gave slave-dealers greater profit, since talented slaves were more valuable, but, in the long-term, provided these women with a higher-status placement and a skill set that could increase their agency and improve their social status; furthermore, later in life, retired palace women could use this skill to earn income, providing a source of autonomy.[108] The Old Palace, which housed the women of the sultan's family, slaves in training, servants, and administrative staff, who were from a variety of places and spoke a variety of languages, was the only place in the Ottoman Empire where women could receive a systematized education, another means of personal empowerment and social mobility that Hürrem and other palace slaves may not have otherwise received.[109]

Osman also gained trade skills while in captivity. His masters sent him to be "an apprentice to a confectioner," the "best in Vienna," from whom he learned how to make everything within just a year, and then was "transferred to a shop," where he continued to use this newfound skill set and enabled him to work "in the service of a restaurateur and a pastry

[106] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 165–167.
[107] Okeley, "Ebeneezer," 170.
[108] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 31; Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 39.
[109] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 27, 41.

chef" for around five years.[110] This skill set, gained only in captivity, opened an entire new field of experience and potential career for Osman—and an additional opportunity for advancement.

Food was more than just a means to a skill set learned in captivity. It could also serve as a medium of exchange and a way to make interpersonal connections. From the flour rations given to soldiers, Osman made bread—specifically, loaves similar to "pogaca"—at first for himself, and later, after getting the attention of others, for other captives and even the corporeal and all his guardsmen, and in exchange for his labor, Osman kept some of everyone's flour for himself.[111] In this instance, food provided Osman with an opportunity to acquire, tangibly, more flour, but also more agency, respect, and status—just as, later, working as a pastry chef also increased his skill set and opportunities.

Food also provided a means for captives to exchange customs with their captors. Osman, for example, describes a Serbian home, in which there lived "Serbs from many different families and from different places," but just one kitchen, where they "all cooked for themselves at a single hearth" and apparently had a "Spartan" diet.[112] That Osman took the time and effort to detail this home and how and what the residents ate suggests that this was something Osman was unfamiliar with—or that his audience would be unfamiliar with—and therefore was worth describing in detail.[113] Osman shared his own diet with them, informing them that he would not eat anything "with pork or pork fat," in order to maintain his religious practices, implying that he did not expect them to already know about this dietary restriction, and therefore he participated in cultural exchange by sharing his custom just as they shared theirs.[114] Osman became close

[110] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 94, 109.
[111] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 59, 60.
[112] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 61.
[113] However, since Osman's own parents were from current-day Serbia, it is possible that he already had some knowledge of how Serbian households functioned.
[114] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 69.

with these locals, who would directly invite him "to their homes to share food and drink;" furthermore, every day, someone would "be charged with bringing a meal" to Osman.[115] Therefore, food and drink provided an avenue through which Osman could bond with locals, sharing each other's customs and practices, and, possibly, lessening tensions between two warring groups.

The captive Sayyid Ali ibn al-Sayyid Ahmad spent Ramadan with a dignitary in Malta during Ramadan, where he and other captives fasted by day and when "breaking" fast every night, ate "over twelve kinds of succulent foods, including bee honey" and his captor's wife "prepared a grand dinner" for "the Ramadan Feast" for the captives.[116] Ahmad's anecdote demonstrates how food functioned as both a means of religious cultural exchange and of interpersonal connection between captor and captives.

Pitts also appears to have learned about his captors' customs around meals and food, since he dedicates a chapter in his book to the topic. He relays observations about Ottomans' dining culture, including sitting "cross-legged" at a "low round table," saying a prayer before and after eating, the absence of "knives or forks," and washing hands and mouths after the meal.[117] Pitts appears to describe a recipe, including the cooking methods and ingredients, and even explicitly states that he is "well acquainted with" the Ottomans' "victuals and their manner of cookery."[118] He also references the "well known" fact that consuming wine and "swine's flesh" is forbidden by Islam, but expands on it for his readers, informing them that while "a person of figure and reputation" would never drink wine due to his "principles," and because it would be a "scandal to his reputation," some Muslims do drink wine. He also shares that Ottomans primarily

[115] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 68.
[116] Matar, "Two Arabic Accounts of Captivity in Malta," 266.
[117] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 235–236.
[118] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 235.

drink water, are "great coffee drinkers," and sometimes create "a sherbet with water and sugar."[119] In this chapter, Pitts describes Ottoman Muslim dining customs to a European audience, providing them with greater insight into a foreign culture through his own observations and knowledge gained from captivity.

However, Pitts uses food to not only inform European readers of Ottoman customs, but also to demean and discredit Ottomans. He claims that while "among us"—presumably referring to the English or Christians—there are "good-natured drunkards," there are none among Ottomans that consume alcohol, who instead become "extremely abusive and quarrelsome, sometimes even to murder."[120] Pitts mentions the absence of forks and knives twice, a repetition that suggests Pitts found it particularly surprising or noteworthy, and perhaps even implying a sense of judgement, that there is something abnormal about not using forks, knives, or even "trenchers."[121] Pitts lingers on and emphasizes the differences between European and Ottoman dining customs, portraying Ottomans as a strange, foreign other.

Former captives significantly impacted literature, both nonfiction and fiction, through works recalling their experiences in captivity, which subsequently affected their readers' knowledge of foreign lands and culture, contributing to broader cultural exchange. For formerly enslaved Europeans, memoirs provided a means to regain the trust of their homeland by proving they had not betrayed Christianity by converting to Islam and by emphasizing their suffering and martyrdom in a non-Christian land, mimicking the suffering of Jesus.[122]

Pitts, who actually had converted to Islam, used nonfiction writing to redeem himself; according to scholar Nabil Matar, Pitts' books were primarily seeking "to provide firsthand,

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[119] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 236.
[120] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 236.
[121] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 235.
[122] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 160, 161; Matar, "Two Arabic Accounts of Captivity in Malta," 261.

ethnographic reportage about Islamic culture, religion, and customs" to essentially clear his name and become reintegrated into Christian society.[123] These nonfiction accounts of enslavement in the Ottoman Empire likely contributed to both a negative construction of the Islamic world, given the emphasis on Christian suffering and the foreign other, and to the transferal of cultural exchange experienced by captives through reportage of Muslim customs and practices.

Casale suggests Osman himself may have been influenced by European literature. During the same period Osman was enslaved by the Hapsburgs, autobiographical writing was popular, especially in German, and considering the lack of an Ottoman tradition of autobiographical writing, it seems possible that Osman's decision to write a memoir was influenced by European autobiographical writing he experienced while enslaved in Europe.[124] Since *Prisoner of the Infidels* exists today as a single, handwritten manuscript, there are no references to the work throughout the eighteenth century, and it appears that no copies were ever made, it is unlikely that Osman's memoir was read by others at the time, and therefore, Osman did not get to spread this European writing style to the Ottoman Empire.[125] However, even though it was presumably never published, that he wrote his own autobiographical work, likely influenced by the European works he encountered during enslavement, still serves as an example for how enslavement impacted Ottoman literature.

The Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, most famous today for *Don Quixote*, was captured by barbary pirates and held in prisoner houses in Algiers for five years.[126] The impact of enslavement is clear in many of Cervantes' works, particularly the novel *Don Quixote* and the play *El trato de Argel*. In *Don Quixote*, the titular character is taken captive in Ottoman galley

[123] Matar, introduction to "Joseph Pitts," 218, 219.
[124] Casale, introduction to *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 13.
[125] Casale, introduction to *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 22.
[126] María Antonia Garcés, *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive's Tale* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 1.

slavery, where he meets real historical figures, such as Occhiali, also known as Kılıç Ali Paşa, "the king of Algiers, a daring and successful corsair," Barbarossa's son, Sultan Selim II, and Hasan Ağa.[127]

Since Cervantes himself was enslaved in Ottoman galley slavery, it is possible that he met these people or heard stories from others about them. Cervantes even provides insight into Hasan's rise to power, writing that "a cabin boy" was taken by Occhiali and was "so much beloved by him" that Hasan became "one of his most favoured youths" and, ultimately, became "the most cruel renegade."[128] Occhiali himself was a Calabrian Italian who became a successful Ottoman renegade and corsair and was called "mangy" by captives for his chronic scalp infection.[129]

According to a deposition with Cervantes, Hasan had once intercepted letters between Cervantes and the governor of Spanish Orán, with whom Cervantes had been communicating about escaping, and ordered a punishment of "two thousand blows" for Cervantes, although this punishment was never executed.[130] This deposition, in addition to witnesses' depositions, provides evidence that Cervantes did have real experience with Hasan.

Other fictional works about real people at the time, such as how Ibrahim, a Venetian-born Ottoman renegade who became grand vizier and a friend of Suleiman, inspired European literature at the time, including three plays and a fourteen-volume work, *Ibrahim ou l'Illustre Bassa*, about his life.[131] While *Don Quixote* is fictional, Cervantes' own experiences certainly

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[127] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote* trans. John Ormsby (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2014), 398–399, 404.
[128] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 404.
[129] Arrigo Petacco, *La croce e la mezzaluna: Lepanto 7 ottobre 1571: quando la cristianità response l'islam* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), 25, 32.
[130] Garcés, *Cervantes in Algiers*, 49, 50.
[131] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 127, 128.

shaped it, and it contains real people, like Hasan, that Cervantes himself may have met while in captivity.

Cervantes' other fictional works reflect ideas and themes present in nonfiction memoirs by other Europeans enslaved in the Ottoman Empire. In the play *El trato de Argel*, which follows captive Spaniards and their Muslim masters in Algiers, Cervantes' characters play out the various ways enslaved Europeans struggled with questions of identity, faith, and conversion. The captive Francisco resists taking on a new name, Mamí, when given to a new master, asking, "Why change the name, if my faith has not changed?", and his mother begs that no "threats," physical punishment, schemes and agreements, or "pleasures and gifts" may "move" him to "abandon Christ" for Islam.[132] However, while Francisco resists, his brother willingly takes a new name, Solimàn, and wonders whether there is "anything better than being a Moor," for he had received a "beautiful suit," a "splendid and polished" brocade, and food and drink, like "tasty couscous," "cold sweet juice," corde, and pilau, all from his master, after converting.[133] Solimàn insists that they should take his "good advice" and convert, and then they "will see" themselves "improved."[134] A fellow captive, Aurelio, even recognizes Solimàn's conversion as "for his own benefit;" Solimàn converted not for belief in Islam, but for tangible, material benefits.[135]

Similarly, the captive Pedro in *El trato de Argel* seeks to convert for the advantages it would bring. He admits, "my conscience already is blaming me," but he desires "so much to leave from here," although, religiously, he claims to be neither "denying Christ" nor believing in

[132] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *El Trato de Argel* trans. Pamela A. Peeks (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1994), 129, 130–131.
[133] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 181, 182.
[134] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 182.
[135] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 179.

Muhammad. Pedro claims that he will become a Muslim in "speech and appearance," but "upon landing on Christian soil," he will flee.[136]

A fellow captive, named Saavedra—and it may not be a coincidence that Saavedra is one of Cervantes' names—criticizes Pedro's desire to convert for liberation, calling it a "very great evil and horrible sin," and claiming that Pedro is falling for the devil's "greedy, empty traps" that show him "an apparent false benefit, that is having freedom."[137] Saavedra also casts doubt that Pedro would ever return to Europe, arguing that Pedro, like the "many" others Saavedra had observed convert for freedom, would delay escaping to Europe after liberation, and that even if Pedro did return, it would be shameful to have taken "so wicked and false measures," namely, conversion.[138]

While both Pedro and Solimàn seek conversion for spiritual reasons, the character Pedro wishes to convert to provide himself with an opportunity for liberation, just as converting gave Solimàn material benefits. Aurelio pities converts, describing them as falling for the devil's traps, the "false sect of Muhammad," that catches "young Christian boys and even old men," and exclaiming, "How easily it conquers the innocent!"[139]

As with real-life European captives-turned-converts, through his characters, Cervantes illustrates the various motivations for converting and adapting to Muslim appearance and speech. Like real captives, Solimàn accepts clothing and a new name; Pedro asserts he will portray himself as Muslim through speech and appearance—obvious, visible ways to indicate conversion and subsequent rise in social status. Cervantes depicts these characters as morally weak,

[136] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 200.
[137] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 200–201.
[138] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 201.
[139] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 183.

suggesting either that he himself had a negative opinion of converts, or that he knew his audience would, as Christian slave narratives did.

The escape in *de Trato* closely resembles the testimonies of one of Cervantes' own escape attempts, another indication that Cervantes' fictional works were influenced by his own experiences in enslavement. Early into his captivity, Cervantes attempted to reach Orán by foot, which was 200 miles away through the desert.[140] Like Cervantes, Pedro attempted to escape through the desert, describing the environment—a "long road of bushy and craggy ground and mountains" with "the continual roar of wild beasts" and the dark making him lose his way—along with his physical and mental state—clothing "torn by brambles," his shoes "torn apart," thirty and starving, and his determination "used up"—which forced him to return to Algiers.[141] While Cervantes' works are fictional, they include elements of Cervantes' real experiences in captivity and follow similar issues, attitudes, experiences, and historical figures present in nonfiction accounts of captivity, sharing individual experience—and with it, exposure to Ottoman culture—with the broader public, made vivid through literature.

The general European public appears to have learned a great deal about the Ottomans through the literature of former captives, including transfer of language, religious insight, and geographic descriptions, which may have had an impact on a greater scale. For example, Fuchs provides German readers with a list of Ottoman vocabulary related to hair, and Marott uses and defines Arabic phrases in his memoir, which supplies Europeans readers with access to different, foreign languages.[142]

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[140] Garcés, *Cervantes in Algiers*, 40.
[141] Cervantes, *El Trato de Argel*, 189–190.
[142] Hanß, "Hair, Emotions and Slavery," 165; Marott, "A Narrative of the Adventures of Lewis Marott," 24, 25, 26, 27.

It seems that Europeans had to tread carefully when writing of their experiences, lest their curiosity and admiration be misconstrued. Former captives introduce Muslim practices to their Christian audience and hasten to reassure readers that Christianity is the true religion. Heberer defends Ottomans from the popular European opinion that Muslims were immoral by describing how Ottomans punished sins of fornication; however, he also asserts that Muhammad is a false idol and Muslims do not know the Holy Trinity, and therefore they lack the real faith and knowledge that Christians have.[143] Pitts explicitly writes that the reason for writing his story was to do some good to one or other" and to make "restitution and reparation" for his "past defection," and claims that he made the work so it "should be for everybody's reading."[144] He also seeks to correct the mistakes of other authors and to "be as exact as possible" when describing Muslims' "faith and worship."[145] Pitts' writing makes clear his intention to accurately share Muslim customs for reader, spreading the cultural exchange he experienced on an individual level as a captive to the English public at large. Beyond literature, on a personal level, Europeans who had never traveled themselves may have also gained insight into Ottoman culture through Muslim captives themselves, like how a toll collector in Kapfenberg specifically asks Osman about "the unnatural vices of the Turks that he had heard spoken of."[146]

Enslaved Europeans and Ottomans alike also offer geographical descriptions of their captors' land to readers, further contributing to cultural exchange for populations who had never even directly interacted with each other. Pitts describes Algier in objective, militaristic terms, describing it as "a very strong place and well-fortified with castles and guns," which may suggest

[143] Rebitsch, "Michael Heberer," 178.
[144] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 221, 222.
[145] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 222.
[146] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 84.

that he felt his information would be valuable for England in case of war.[147] While Pitts does include some military information about Bilda, such as how the Ottomans "make a progress" through the plains in the area, he also describes the city with more subjective terms, describing it as "exceedingly pleasant and delightful" place with "handsome farmhouses."[148] Additionally, Pitts praises the workmanship of a mosque in Tlemcen.[149] For Pitts' readers, they gain both practical and romantic descriptions of Ottoman geography.

Osman, indicating none of the ambivalence of European captives, praises several European cities in his work. He describes feeling "amazed" by Granz, a "truly grand city" that was "unlike any other" he "had ever seen" and had a "great palace" in the middle of the city.[150] Kapenferg, according to Osman, was "a pleasant place" with "gardens" and "local artisans and town notables" and efficient administration, with toll collection for products heading to Vienna through the city and the "fixed times" that residents must pay poll tax and duties in the town center.[151] The description of the geography and urban life of each other's land may have contributed to broader intrigue and cultural understanding for readers.

However, perhaps the greatest impact of cultural exchange resulting from enslavement is its effect on international relations. Venetian renegades, who chose the Ottoman Empire over their homeland, still supported Venice from within the Ottoman government. Gazanfer, for example, continued identifying as Venetian and supported Venetian policies in the Ottoman government, allegedly promising a Venetian magistrate that, "as a Venetian," he would "protect the negotiations" and "provide every favor possible."[152] Similarly, Ibrahim, who was the grand

[147] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 229.
[148] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 229.
[149] Pitts, "A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 230.
[150] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 83.
[151] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 84.
[152] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 122.

vizier for thirteen years and had significant political influence, remained biased towards Venice in political and diplomatic situations, which Venice used to its advantage during negotiations.[153]

Even as a woman,, Suleiman's wife Hürrem, who established her power by giving birth to six children, Suleiman's heirs—and thereby brought her both intangible and tangible benefits—became involved in diplomatic affairs with the Poles, her origins serving as a source of connection between them.[154] She also participated in diplomacy with the Safavids, which included lying to them about Suleiman's intentions behind a military campaign in Safavid territory.[155] Hürrem used skills learned from her time in captivity, including how to navigate palace politics, gaining favor of the sultan and therefore power, and learning new languages. By doing so, Hürrem not only influenced diplomacy during her time, but also even after her death, as she set a new standard for female successors to follow, including her daughter, by expanding the diplomatic role for royal women in the Ottoman Empire.[156] These former captives, despite converting and acculturating to the Ottoman Empire, used cultural exchange to influence both domestic and international diplomatic relations, impacting politics, changing norms, and influencing history on a large scale.

According to Osman, his involvement in European diplomacy contributed to brokering peace between the Hapsburgs and the Ottomans. Osman writes that the Hapsburg generals "had such a degree of trust and deference" in him that they typically wrote directly to Osman rather than the governor.[157] It seems probable that this trust and relationship that the Hapsburg generals had with Osman was based on a shared knowledge and understanding of Hapsburg, including its

[153] Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 127, 128.
[154] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 38, 55, 56, 72, 251.
[155] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 251, 296.
[156] Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 253, 254.
[157] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 156.

language and customs, which Osman gained during his twelve years in Hapsburg captivity. This knowledge continued to benefit both Osman's career and the people of the Ottoman Empire and Hapsburgs during diplomatic negotiations. Osman was given "full responsibility" for negotiations regarding territorial disputes between the Ottomans and Hapsburgs; the negotiations had gone on for sixteen months without success, but once Osman took charge, the issue was resolved "within a month."[158] He also "took care of" a naval dispute with the French, ending with "both sides" feeling "extremely pleased with the outcome."[159] The ripples of Osman's international diplomatic work undoubtedly had effects on populations in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire, shaping international order and politics.

Enslavement was unquestionably painful. Captives endured danger, hardship, and loss, and met with conflict and contempt. As humans, however, they demonstrated resilience, ingenuity, empathy, and curiosity. Living and working within an otherwise unknown culture, they participated intimately in a cultural exchange that included learning and applying new languages, skills, and customs. This cultural exchange did not stay solely with individual experience. As they used and shared what they learned, through interpersonal relationships, literature, and diplomacy, captives changed both the new culture and their own. The impact of these captives' cultural exchange reverberated throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire, in their own time and in centuries to come.

[158] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 157, 158.
[159] Ağa, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 158.

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