

Géza David and Pál Fodor (eds.): *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Early Fifteenth–Early Eighteenth Centuries)*. The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, vol. 37. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007. 253 p. ISBN 978 90 04 157040.

This book had been announced in an earlier volume compiled by the same authors (*Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe. The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*. Leiden: Brill 2000). All contributions are part of a project launched at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Although most articles thus concern Hungary during the time under Ottoman occupation, other articles refer to the Habsburg Empire and to the Ottoman Empire itself.

The authors state in the introduction that “slavery is one of the most permanent phenomena of human history” (in fact according to UN sources the number of slaves has never been higher than at the present time). But they remark that Islamic slavery was different from that current in the ancient world. Muslim owners employed slaves as eunuchs, guards, concubines or domestic servants primarily in order to ensure their own comfort. These “domestic slaves” often occupied important positions in trade as well as in cultural life, as for example as singers, dancers, musicians and actors. Also the military use of slaves grew in importance, gaining in parts of the Turkish world control of the political sphere in its entirety.

Fodor draws attention to the important fact that slaves in Islamic societies generally were in a better position than the slaves of earlier ages, as according to Islamic religious law, the natural human state is freedom and thus it is forbidden to enslave human beings. Thus for example a Muslim of whatever condition cannot be enslaved, a free man cannot fall into servitude because of debt, and he cannot sell himself into slavery. After giving a lengthy introduction into the different kinds of slaves and their activities in the Ottoman Empire, Fodor comes to a special kind of slavery that, as he says, has still not received the attention that it deserves (p. XVIII). With this remark he arrives at the topic of the book: the prisoners of war and more particularly ransom slavery, with other words, captives acquired in wartime or even in kidnapping operations conducted during periods of truce. Especially in regions close to the border, the most significant

and flourishing trade was ransom slavery.

The twelve studies in this volume concentrate—in rather different ways—on these themes: the acquisition of war prisoners, kidnapping and ransom slavery. While the geographical focus lies on Hungary itself, the area under scrutiny extends from the Crimea to Malta. This guarantees a broad perspective in that the contributors do not only examine Christian slavery in the Ottoman Empire, but, using Western sources, also provide greater insight into the tribulations of Ottoman slaves in the Habsburg territory.

Several of the contributions show that they are based on analyses of one or just a few documents, treating the fate of single persons. These are titles like: “Miraculous escapes from Ottoman captivity” (Tringli), “A list of ransom for Ottoman captives imprisoned in Croatian castles 1492” (Nógrády), “Catholic missionaries as Turkish prisoners in Ottoman Hungary in the seventeenth century” (Tóth), “Ransoming Ottoman slaves from Munich (1688)” (Varga).

While many of the contributions treat individual cases of ransom slavery, the entirety of the articles gives an interesting insight into a kind of slavery that has—as was mentioned in the introduction—up to now not found the interest it deserves. In this sense the book enriches our knowledge of the relations between the Ottoman Empire and its neighbours.

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Veronica Veit (ed.): *The Role of Women in the Altaic World*.
Permanent International Altaistic Conference 44th Meeting,
Walberberg, 26–31 August 2001. Asiatische Forschungen
Bd. 152. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007. 335 pp.
ISBN 0571-320X.

The PIAC is a rather old institution in the field of Oriental studies. The tradition of dealing with such diverse topics as Turkish, Mongolian, Manchu etc. has been questioned, but it did not threaten the continuation of this conference, although the arguments against an “Altaistic” institution might not be unfounded, if the activities are