

Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss, *The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Galley Slavery in Louis XIV's France*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2022. xi + 244 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-60606-730-7.

Authors' Response by Meredith Martin, New York University, and Gillian Weiss, Case Western Reserve University

We are both gratified and humbled to read these reviews of our book and to have four terrific anglophone scholars praise its collaborative, interdisciplinary approach, one that made *The Sun King at Sea* rewarding and fun to write but that also posed some challenges. Individual humanities scholars may be increasingly co-authoring across disciplines, but our respective fields have been slower to accept such a shift, and we probably would not have dared embark on the project if we had not already had tenure. University presses in the United States, meanwhile, continue mostly to divide their publishing lists along disciplinary lines, and when we began to explore options, several seemed unsure where our book would fit. Thankfully, the Getty Research Institute did not have such qualms, but we did have one peer reviewer give us genre trouble, complaining that in emphasizing representations of *esclaves turcs*, we had written not a book about maritime art, as the title ostensibly claimed, but rather indulged in an exercise of North American political correctness. All that to say, getting the manuscript into print was, at times, an uphill battle, so we are all the more grateful to the American Council of Learned Societies for supporting us through their (unfortunately, now defunct) Collaborative Research Fellowship program, as well as to the GRI, the Éditions de l'EHESS (which released a French translation in September) and our own departments and universities for championing the project.[1]

By contrast, the process of writing the book was relatively devoid of drama: a good thing, since our families are intertwined and the stakes of falling out were high. Our strengths and neuroses turned out to be complementary, and despite sometimes falling mercy to each other's schedule or the vagaries of Dropbox, we both feel sure that the final result is more than the sum of its parts. We find it amusing that readers cannot detect two distinct voices in the text; neither can we. In fact, we no longer remember exactly who wrote what, and it is not quite accurate, as Ian Collier suggests, that the art historian wrote the sections on artworks whereas the historian wrote the sections on archival documents. Given that we often switched disciplinary hats and became energized by artifacts more typically associated with the other's domain, it is exciting to see the same pattern among the historians and art historians who contributed to this forum: to read Robert Wellington, for example, describe his response to the disturbing combination of beauty and violence contained in a naval register page. At the same time, we are inspired to read how the reviewers connect the book to aspects of their own research, particularly Katherine Calvin, whose comments about the intersections among art, *esclaves turcs*, and economic risk we found especially astute.

Several reviewers understandably wish we had written more about certain subjects, objects, and individuals. While some omissions are deliberate, a few stemmed from uneven source materials. Julia Landweber, for instance, noted that we had overlooked a famous pamphlet that employed a language of slavery to condemn Louis XIV for his persecution of Protestants. We too had initially hoped to spend more time on *forçats pour la foi*, but we had a hard time finding ample visual (as opposed to textual) evidence.[2] In the end, we opted to keep the focus on the presence and portrayal of *esclaves turcs*, but we acknowledge that the analysis of galley slavery in ancien régime France could take different directions, and we hope that future scholars will follow them up. Likewise, Collier is absolutely correct that oared vessels based in Marseille (as well as plying the Versailles Grand Canal) served “as a kind of ‘laboratory’ in which practices of enslavement were tested and shaped.” While we started to address this point in a recent short article that highlights the movement of protocol (including regulations for the enslaved) and personnel between France’s Mediterranean galleys and its Atlantic colonies, there is much more to be said about links between these two spheres and their systems of enslavement, particularly in terms of visual and material migrations.[3] Common pan-Mediterranean practices and representations of gallery slavery is another rich topic we intend to examine further.

We also would have liked to have expanded on the ways *esclaves turcs* “understood and responded to their captivity,” as Collier puts it, and we agree that “it would be fascinating to hear what an Ottomanist or North African specialist would make of this miniature Muslim society that emerged in the port cities of Marseille and Toulon.” On the first point, scholars of the early modern Mediterranean have long been publishing fragmentary texts and the rare descriptive memoir or ego document by Ottoman and Moroccan subjects enslaved across Christendom, or else mining Inquisitorial records and archaeological remains in an attempt to get at that very question. Indeed, Nabil Matar’s most recent book is entitled *Mediterranean Slavery through Arab Eyes*. [4] Yet in the French context, despite a small corpus of letters written in Arabic, Turkish and different European languages, the view of enslaved Muslims still remains elusive, and virtually no images from their perspective, apart from some possible remnants of graffiti, appear to survive.[5] On the second point, we are planning to collaborate with the historian of North Africa M’hamed Oualdi (Sciences-Po Paris) on a future project, possibly an exhibition, whose goal is to center the voices and lived experiences of enslaved Muslims in Europe during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Then there’s the matter of the book cover. Wellington suggests that featuring the Charles Le Brun medallion—a canonical painting by the Crown’s most celebrated artist for the Hall of Mirrors, which sparked our collaboration—somewhat undercuts our message, not only because it seems to reaffirm the media hierarchy that we purport to challenge, but also because it was made for the center rather than the periphery. We concur. Yet the prominent placement of the painting at Versailles does illustrate our point about the circulation of Mediterranean galley imagery from coast to capital, while serving as one of the most striking embodiments of how such representations juxtaposed “the most and least powerful residents in seventeenth-century France...to think through portrayals of power,” to borrow Landweber’s phrasing. It is also notable that the subject matter of Le Brun’s medallion remains contested. The château de Versailles, which has conducted extensive research on the Hall of Mirrors decoration over the years, claims on its website that the painting “certainly evokes the creation of [France’s] East and

West India Companies in 1664,” whereas in our view it appears more emphatically to celebrate Louis XIV’s ability to subjugate and to “cleanse the seas” of so-called Barbary pirates.[6]

Another type of image that comes under scrutiny depicts French court women with enslaved attendants who, we argue, may represent or evoke Mediterranean galley slaves rather than individuals linked to the transatlantic slave trade, as is often assumed. In our view, some of these double portraits, besides flattering the fair complexions of female aristocrats, may also commemorate their success in evangelizing a portion of the enslaved Muslims who served them. Landweber wishes we had expanded on the relationship between such painted portraits and related fashion prints – as we did in a separate piece published in 2020 – and taken into account the work of Anne Lafont and Lise Schreier. In fact, we do cite Lafont’s important book, *L’art et la race*, in our footnotes, and regret the missed opportunity to engage with Schreier’s 2022 article, which had not been published when we went to press.[7] Perhaps Noémie Ndaiye’s new book *Scripts of Blackness* might also have helped us think through the possible suggestion of enslaved attendants “as simultaneously spiritual and commercial commodities” through metaphors like pearls, deployed visually by artists like François de Troy and textually by the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary Alonso de Sandoval to reflect on pure souls hidden within enslaved bodies.[8]

Speaking of religion and commerce, we very much appreciate the positive responses to our argument about galley slaves and the visual culture of the 1720 Marseille plague, in particular Calvin’s comment that we “convincingly demonstrate how anxieties about both international trade and domestic systems of speculative finance were displaced iconographically onto Levantine cloth and the bodies of *esclaves turcs* as contaminating agents, physically and morally.” This is true of Michel Serre’s canvases, but it is arguably even more true of Jean-François de Troy’s ca. 1722 painting of galley slaves throwing infected corpses into the sea. In our book, we only briefly discuss this monumental work, in part because we could only see it in a severely deteriorated state. Now fully restored and hanging at the Marseille Musée des Beaux Arts, it shows the blindingly white bodies of female plague victims being engulfed by *esclaves turcs* with brown skin, stereotypical facial features, and foreign accoutrements like the blue and white striped sash that one porter has tied around his waist (Fig. 1 and 2). Although this type of fabric, which loosely resembles textiles from North Africa or West Asia, would later become identified with Marseille’s domestic textile production, at the time it could still conjure the bolts of foreign cloth blamed for introducing disease into the city, as well as broader fears of corruption and contamination signified by *esclaves turcs*. As the inventor of the *tableaux de mode* genre around 1724, de Troy would soon come to celebrate the French adoption of exotic fashions as markers of elite, cosmopolitan sophistication, as his father François de Troy had earlier done with his portrait of the Princess Palatine and her enslaved attendant. Here, however, he seems to focus on the risks of overseas trade, perhaps prompting a reconsideration of his libertine “fashion pictures” and the role of French artists in a post-plague era of speculative capitalism, along the intriguing lines that Calvin suggests.

While Calvin also pushes us to think about the deliberate suppression versus the banality of gallery slavery, Collier asks bluntly: “Why did *esclaves turcs* not succeed in challenging their enslavement in the metropole, when in numerous cases enslaved people of African descent won their freedom on the principle that there were “no slaves in France””? As an initial way of

approaching that question, we would say that the successful eighteenth-century freedom suits that Sue Peabody studied in her 2002 book *There Are No Slaves in France* should not blind us to the forced labor of other enslaved Africans in metropolitan French territory, as well as the regular return, not liberation, of fugitives to slave holders in cities like Paris.[9] Other explanations might include the status of enslaved Turks as state rather than personal property and subjects of foreign powers whose enslavement was recognized if not sanctioned by bilateral treaties. While the liberation of Muslims on foreign galleys in fact formed part of the very basis of a free soil tradition elaborated during the sixteenth century, and while the detention and harsh treatment of Muslims on Louis XIV's galleys troubled some members of the Gallican Church, the Crown's commitment to keeping "infidels at the oar" mostly overrode scruples and silenced critics.[10]

In conclusion, it has been deeply rewarding to read these responses from scholars whose own work we so admire. We hope *The Sun King at Sea* encourages more revisionist, critical accounts of Louis XIV's reign that likewise attempt, from an art historical standpoint at least, to move away from Paris and Versailles and to account for the human costs of creating maritime spectacles and other artworks that glorified the Sun King. At a time when academics, activists and artists are confronting the legacy of slavery around the globe and in several recent exhibitions in France, and when the Mediterranean is becoming a more central element of the French national curriculum, we hope that the history and representation of galley slavery, and especially *esclaves turcs*, will be part of an even broader reckoning.[11]



Figure 1. Jean-François de Troy, *The Chevalier Roze at La Tourette during the Plague Epidemic of 1720 c. 1722*. Marseille, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Image courtesy of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille.

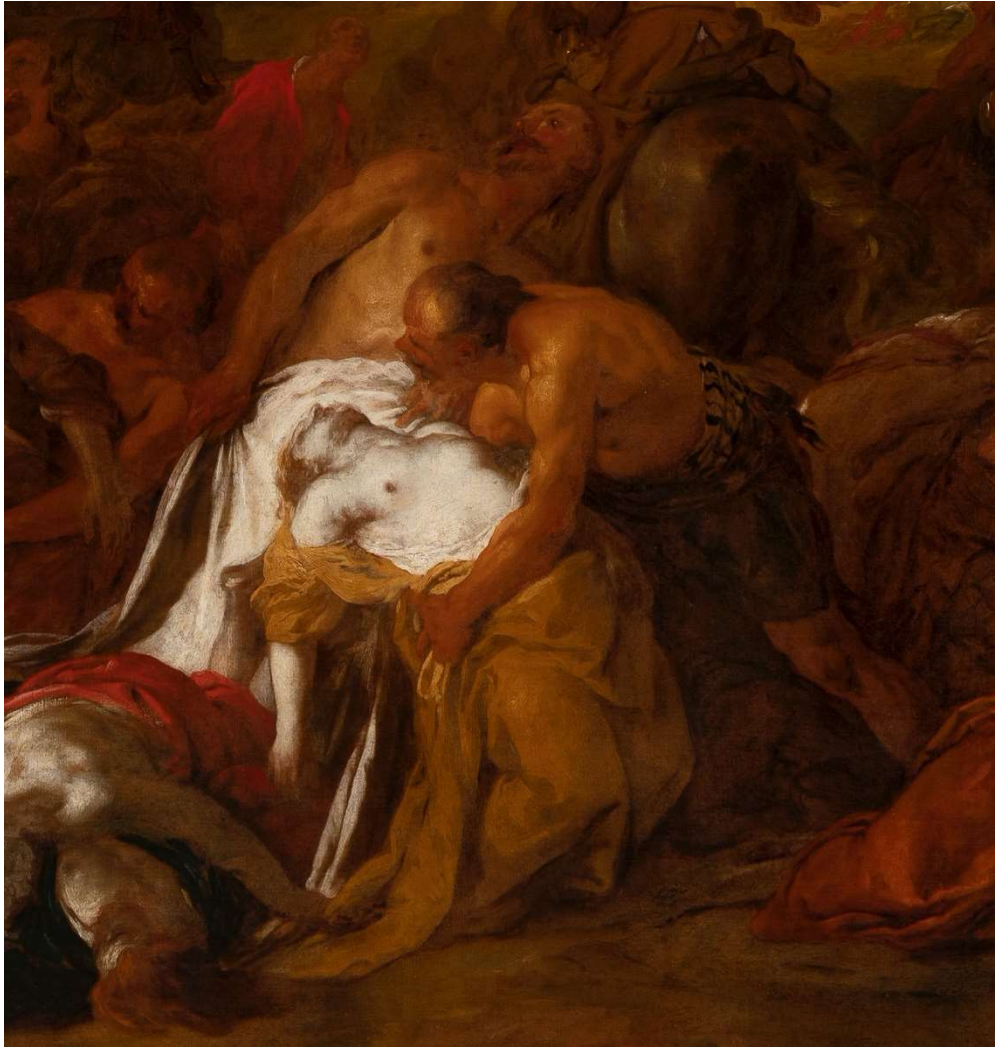


Figure 2.

Jean-François de Troy, *The Chevalier Roze at La Tourette during the Plague Epidemic of 1720* (detail), c. 1722. Marseille, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Image courtesy of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille.

NOTES

[1] Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss, *Le Roi-Soleil en mer: art maritime et galériens dans la France de Louis XIV*, trans. Élise Trogrlic (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2022).

[2] One compelling object that we considered including was a c. 1688 satirical medal depicting the persecution of Protestants in France: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_G3-FD-247

[3] Martin and Weiss, “Mediterranean Migrations to the French Atlantic,” *Age of Revolutions*, July 18, 2022. <https://ageofrevolutions.com/2022/07/18/mediterranean-migrations-to-the-french-atlantic/>.

[4] See, most recently, Cesare Santus, *Il "Turco" a Livorno: incontri con l'Islam nella Toscana del Seicento* (Rome: Officina libraria, 2019); Nabil Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity through Arab Eyes, 1517-1798* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Alex Mallet, Dionisius A. Agius, and Catherine Rosemary Rider, *Magic in Malta: Sellem Bin Al-Sheikh Mansur and the Roman Inquisition, 1605* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Giancarlo Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels: The Memoir of an Ottoman Muslim in Seventeenth-Century Europe by Osman of Timișoara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); and Russell Palmer, "Slavery, Captivity and Galley Rowing in Early Modern Malta," *Antiquity* 95, 383 (2021): 1280-1297.

[5] For a historical reference to graffiti in Rhodes, see Joshua White, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017). Within a large literature on early modern graffiti discovered throughout the Catholic Mediterranean, see Palmer, "Religious Colonialism in Early Modern Malta: Inquisitorial Imprisonment and Inmate Graffiti," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology Volume 20* (2016): 548-561; and Giovanna Fiume, "Soundless Screams: Graffiti and Drawings in the Prisons of the Holy Office in Palermo," *Journal of Early Modern History* 21, 3 (2017): 188-215.

[6] The phrase "cleansing the seas" comes from Jean-Baptiste Massé, *La Grande galerie de Versailles, et les deux salons qui l'accompagnent peints par Charles Le Brun . . .* (Paris, 1753), 12: "on voit à ses pieds divers Corsaires enchaînés; ce qui fait allusion . . . à la défaite des Pirates dont il avoit nettoyé les Mers." For the château de Versailles website description, see <https://galeriedesglaces-versailles.fr/html/11/collection/c15.html>: "La composition évoque certainement la création des compagnies des Indes orientales et occidentales en 1664."

[7] Anne Lafont, *L'art et la race: l'Africain (tout) contre l'œil des Lumières* (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2019); Lise Schreier, "Setting the Tone: Commodified Black Children and Slave Imagery in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Fashion Press," *H-France Salon* 14, 8 (2022): #6. See also, Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss. "Enslaved Muslims at the Sun King's Court" in *The Versailles Effect: Objects, Lives, and Afterlives of the Domaine*, ed. Robert Wellington and Mark Ledbury (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), chap. 10.

[8] See François de Troy, "Elisabeth Charlotte of Bavaria, princess of the Palatine, duchess of Orléans, 1680: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#01734dec-d5f7-4069-9e18-9fca3069f4fa>;" and Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 73.

[9] Sue Peabody, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Miranda Spieler, "The Vanishing Slaves of Paris: The Letter de Cachet and the Emergence of an Imperial Legal Order in Eighteenth-Century France" in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 230-245.

[10] Weiss, "Infidels at the Oar: A Mediterranean Exception to France's Free Soil Principle," *Slavery & Abolition* 32, 3 (2011): 397-412.

[11] See, for instance, the exhibition *L'abîme* (2021-22) at the Musée d'histoire de Nantes (<https://www.chateaunantes.fr/expositions/labime/>), as well as the Musée du Quai Branly's "Black Indians de la Nouvelle-Orléans" (2022-23), which explores the history and legacy of slavery in French colonial Louisiana (<https://m.quaibranly.fr/en/exhibitions-and-events/at-the-museum/exhibitions/event-details/e/black-indians-from-new-orleans-39606>). As for the French national curriculum, the topic for the 2022-24 "agrégation" in modern history is "Communautés et mobilités en Méditerranée de la fin XVe au milieu du XVIIIe": https://media.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/file/agreg_externe/66/2/p2023_agreg_ext_histoire_1425662.pdf (all web links accessed November 29, 2022).

Meredith Martin
New York University
msm240@nyu.edu

Gillian Weiss
Case Western Reserve University
glw@case.edu

Copyright © 2023 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Forum,
Volume 18, Issue 2, #5