

Reference

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Schiavitù Mediterranee: corsari, rinnegati e santi di età moderna, by Giovanna Fiume, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2009, xvii + 349 pp., €22.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-6159-119-6

This book by Giovanna Fiume, Professor in Modern History at the University of Palermo, analyses the phenomenon of slavery in the Mediterranean area. It is organised in four chapters which, as the author explains, crosscut and interweave. Slavery, which has been extensively studied by historians in the modern era, developed in two periods, the medieval and modern ages, and in two different but closely interconnected contexts, the Christian and Muslim worlds.

Fiume points out how:

The ambiguity of the lexicon itself, which in the late medieval era was still often using synonyms such as *servus* and *mancipium* ... goes back to the vocabulary inherited from the Latin tradition of the imperial age which assigned each term ... a different degree of loss of liberty. ... The position of the *captivus*, on the other hand, is hybrid and therefore especially delicate. (p. 16)

Captivi were often taken as booty in warfare; having lost their liberty, they were forced to provide unpaid labour and services. As Fiume writes, the slave ‘undergoes a real metamorphosis: he crosses from the realm of human beings to that of goods, losing in the process his legal capacity ... he is an “incomplete” and vulnerable being, totally relegated to the condition of a “thing”’ (p. 61).

The Mediterranean area, characterised by war between state-backed private armies, became the main arena for engagements at sea. Many different sorts of people fell into the hands of pirates and were then enslaved. The coasts of Sicily, a nerve centre and key site for interaction due to its geographical position between different cultures and populations, were attacked by pirate raids from ships originating in North Africa. The prisoners were subsequently sold as slaves. Within the phenomenon of ‘Mediterranean slavery’ reciprocity seems to have been a constant feature: Christians became slaves of Muslims, and vice versa.

Slaves often renounced their own faith to embrace another, or waited for someone to ransom them. Fiume skilfully explores the issue of the apostasy of many captives and of their possible reconciliation once back in their own country. She suggests that the renunciation of one’s religion in favour of another was one way of trying to deal with the ‘identity crisis of displacement by captivity’, and can be regarded as ‘a tool for social and cultural integration’ (p. 115). Fiume breathes life into this complex and intricate interplay of conversions, renunciations and exchanges within the Mediterranean area, which itself was in constant geographical, social, economic, political and religious evolution.

Fiume also analyses the important role played by ecclesiastical institutions in relation to slavery. The Church’s position was that ‘the control of man over man is a consequence of sin, and the task of the gospel is not so much to transform servants into free men, but more to

transform bad servants into good ones' (p. 18). In addition, Fiume addresses the important issue of the martyrdom of several Christian monks, including Brother Berardo and Juan del Prado, who journeyed to Morocco as missionaries. Fiume analyses various hagiographies which narrate the key moments in the process of canonisation of such martyrs. Among the most famous is that relating to Juan de Prado, written by Matias de San Francisco, whose work stands out from others of the same period because, after telling the story of this martyr's life and death, it goes on to examine the Franciscan mission in Marrakesh. Matias describes the hard labour and prison conditions that missionaries experienced, and the cruelty of the sultan towards Christians. There were many Christian martyrs in Africa, but through their missionary work the Franciscan monks managed to convert many Moors and help Christians maintain their faith. Their work came to have great political importance in that it established a dialogue between the different cultures living together on African soil.

Fiume's work emerges from careful and painstaking research on documents, letters, hagiographies and other sources. These demonstrate the involvement of secular and Church bodies in the medieval and modern ages, and tell stories that have never before been told. It makes an important contribution to Mediterranean studies, and especially to research on the subjects of piracy, slavery and relationships between Christianity and Islam.

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Commemorating the Holocaust: the dilemmas of remembrance in France and Italy, by Rebecca Clifford, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, xii +292 pp., £65.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-967981-2

Commemorating the Holocaust provides a detailed and captivating comparative history of the development of national Holocaust commemorations in France and Italy in the post-Cold War years. As Clifford explains in the introduction, the comparative approach finds its justification in a number of crucial similarities in the 'dilemmas of remembrance' in the two countries, namely, the uneasy questions regarding national responsibilities of wartime crimes; the creation and use of 'mythic narratives of the Resistance' (p. 7); and the notions of the *bons Français* and the *italiani, brava gente*, which reinforced the thesis of the collaborations with the Nazis as 'parentheses' in both national histories.

The book contains six chapters in which the histories of French and Italian Holocaust commemorations alternate and proceed chronologically. The first two chapters, covering mostly the decades during the Cold War, begin by offering a concise yet quite comprehensive review of the measures adopted against the Jewish population in both countries and the roles played by Vichy on the one hand, and the Fascist state and the Repubblica Sociale Italiana on the other. Two of the most thought-provoking distinctions proposed in these first chapters concern the roles that narratives of resistance against the Fascists and the Nazis played in the two countries. France