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Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss

The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Galley Slavery in Louis XIV's France

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Contrary to the legal maxim that there were no enslaved people in France, during the reign of Louis XIV acts of enslavement were visualized in an array of artistic media. For instance, Charles Le Brun's design for the sculptural ornamentation of the stern of the flagship *Royal Louis* (ca. 1680) features a gilded bas-relief of the king in the guise of a Roman conqueror, flanked by two manacled figures whose characteristic topknot and turban respectively identify them as *Turcs*; beyond allegory, this image invokes a real practice of enslavement. Art historian Meredith Martin and historian Gillian Weiss confront the tension between national ideals of liberty and evidence of human bondage in early modern France in their book *The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Galley Slavery in Louis XIV's France*. Their collaborative research makes an important contribution to the analysis of images representing enslaved people beyond the Atlantic world as well as to the growing body of scholarship that challenges the assumption that racialized thinking and race making did not exist prior to modernity. This book also offers a corrective to the romanticization of mobility in art—both in its depiction and its making—which often belies underpinnings of labor and violence. As artists and their depictions of slavery circulated between coast and capital, so too did the enslaved subjects. Reckoning with legacies of slavery, colonialism, and xenophobia, the authors connect this neglected history to present debates about immigration, religion, commerce, and pandemics.

The royal fleet of Louis XIV included forty galleys, each manned by hundreds of rowers. Up to 25 percent of these rowers were *Turcs*, a designation applied to over ten thousand people captured or purchased by French agents. Martin and Weiss helpfully preface their narrative with a definition of the historical classification *esclaves turcs*, denoting a distinct administrative category of purchased or captured *galérien* (galley rowers). The use of the term *Turcs* in French archival documents is fluid, since it could refer to people from the Ottoman Empire, Morocco, West Africa, or North America, along with Muslims, Orthodox Christians, pagans, or Jews; similarly complex is the designation *Maure*, often used by bureaucrats to describe oarsmen from North Africa.

Martin and Weiss each contribute a different method to this seamless text. Their collaboration unites visual analysis with extensive archival research, topical expertise that Weiss brings from writing her book *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford University Press, 2011). While historians have previously explored France's relationship to slavery and imperialism, *The Sun King at Sea* adds a more sophisticated analysis of images and a critical narrative of top-down visual propaganda. Treating artworks and objects as sources of historical knowledge, the authors analyze ship sculpture, palace decor, maritime manuals, weapons, paintings, medals, and prints, as well as ephemeral and mobile productions including nautical festivals and galley-slave processions. While focusing on France, Martin and Weiss frequently weave in comparative Dutch and Italian artworks, such as Pietro Tacca's *Quattro Mori* (Four Moors) as an important precursor at Livorno. They make effective use of visual and written sources to reconstruct the material conditions of the enslaved in the maritime Mediterranean and to illuminate early modern debate around issues of imperialism and slavery.

The book is organized into four roughly chronological chapters exploring different facets of the early modern politics of display in maritime art. Galleys, in Martin and Weiss's words, functioned as "evolving emblems of naval supremacy, religious triumph, sovereign authority, and imperial ambition" (8). The first chapter focuses on maritime activities and artworks in the port cities of Marseille and Toulon, demonstrating the collaborative labor of artists and enslaved workers to craft diverse objects of royal propaganda. With deep consideration of the enslaved labor integral to the artworks' creation, the authors reveal that the *esclaves turcs* contributed to their self-representation not only as models but also as craftsmen. The following chapter moves from the coast to the Parisian capital and the royal court to explore why maritime representation was desirable in the political center of France. Participating in a long French tradition of images of captives and ships as symbols of royal authority, some representations circulating in Paris and Versailles sought to glorify Louis XIV as emperor of the sea while others satirized the king's hypocritical crusading posture. Chapter 3 reveals multiple and conflicting political, religious, economic, and personal desires expressed in shipbuilding manuals and maritime rituals produced by naval officers and religious orders to justify the continuation of the galley corps and rowers' enslavement. The final chapter examines xenophobic anxieties about religion and global commerce as they relate to the *esclaves turcs*: the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes signaled a rising tide of intolerance that crescendoed during the 1720 plague that ravaged Marseille. *Turcs* were simultaneously treated with suspicion as the source of contagion and forced into the unenviable role of collecting plague-ridden corpses. After Louis XIV's death in 1715, images of *esclaves turcs* continued to evolve until the termination of the French galley corps in 1748 and the rise of new visual conventions, though "the establishment of *turquerie* did not mean the end but rather the redirection of fears about interacting with the Levant" (197).

Among their many strengths, the authors are to be commended for the great sensitivity with which they deal with difficult subject matter. Their attention to the material conditions and individual experiences of the *esclaves turcs* such as one Amet of Smyrna (35–36) gives agency to the overlooked subjects, rather than treating them as an abstract and anonymized corpus. Striking a challenging balance between vivid and voyeuristic, the authors weave detailed descriptions of this population's lived experiences throughout each section, such as their skillful recounting of the multisensory impact of ritual processions of chained *Turcs*. By focusing on the lives of people, Martin and Weiss provide clarity to the obscured histories of the *esclaves turcs* in France, aligning with recent efforts to consider wide-ranging visual evidence of lived experiences of slavery elsewhere in the Mediterranean, as in *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem* edited by Elizabeth McGrath and Jean Michel Massing (Warburg Institute, 2012) or Carmen Fracchia's *'Black but Human': Slavery and the Visual Arts in Hapsburg Spain, 1480–1700* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Previous publications on early modern European visualizations of slavery have often sidelined the roles of women, particularly in male-dominant histories of galley slavery. Joining scholars such as Anne Lafont and Kim Hall in offering a fuller historical picture of representations of race and slavery, Martin and Weiss refreshingly integrate women's participation as rulers, novelists, spectators, and portrait sitters. Like their male counterparts, their treatment of *esclaves turcs* ranged from sympathetic commentary on processions and monumental representations of *Turcs* to the commission of page portraits to flaunt their own wealth and status. The authors also urge reconsideration of the relationships between center and periphery, grounding discussions of global phenomena in local study. Their analysis of propaganda embedded in visual objects, such as maritime manuals, further contributes to critical reassessment of early modern images once categorized as objective or scientific.

Though the authors deftly analyze the carefully selected artworks and objects, regrettably the reader must continue to rely on the written description of some significant visual details due to the scale of the printed illustrations. One is pressed to locate key details such as the two enslaved figures at the feet of the *Princesse de Conti* in Jacques Le Pautre's engraving (92–93), an *esclave turc* kneeling before a cross during the baptism of a galley in Jacques Rigaud's print (140–41), or physiognomic signifiers meant to identify figures as Muslims or West Africans in Peter Paul Rubens's *Debarcation of Marie de' Medici at Marseilles* (13–14). The fourth chapter offers a greater number of figures that accentuate details of individual artworks to support the written claims, a practice that could have resolved the problem of visibility elsewhere in the book. As its primary goal is to give recognition to long overlooked *esclaves turcs*, it is unfortunate that they remain difficult to see in this printed format.

In this book, Martin and Weiss have achieved their aim of encouraging new ways of thinking about French art and power in the era of the Sun King. The authors resist prior assumptions that representations of *Turcs* are mere allegories or generic symbols, assumptions that "have missed the fact that in many cases these prisoners recalled the actual bodies of *esclaves turcs*" (56). With great agility they marshal an array of documents, artworks, and objects to demonstrate how "in different royal, precolonial, and colonial contexts . . . *Turcs* could function as unstable signifiers" (224). With its resonance to contemporary issues, thoroughly researched evidence, rich discursive endnotes, and lucid prose, *The Sun King at Sea* is an important resource for scholars and students alike, offering a deeper understanding of French art and politics through its retrieval of complex relationships among enslaved laborers, artists, and the aristocracy in the early modern Mediterranean.

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