

Magnus Ressel, *Zwischen Sklavenkassen und Türkenpässen. Nordeuropa und die Barbaresken in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, 834 pp., ISBN 978 3 11 028249 8).

Some things never change and piracy is one of them. Until a couple of years ago, pirates operating off the coast of Somalia, a failed state, managed to capture some of the world's largest oil tankers and subsequently obtained millions of dollars in ransom. Before the united navies of the European Union put an end to this practice, piracy had become a way of life for former fishermen on the littoral of the Horn of Africa. And they are not the only ones as part of the West African and the Southeast Asian coasts are also infested with pirates.

In the past, similar practices were common in the waters around Europe. In Western Europe, Dunkirk stood out as a centre of privateering, its ships capturing hundreds of Dutch and English merchantmen during the last decades of the Spanish-Dutch war. Malta, in the Mediterranean, also harboured many pirates, who sometimes had obtained an official licence for privateering against the Turks and Arabs. However, the difference between capturing ships for your own benefit (piracy) and that of the state (privateering) was extremely small.

In the early modern period the most feared pirates and privateers were those from North Africa. This extensive study shows how the European shipping nations tried to cope with this risk, and the author concentrates on the North German Hanseatic towns, Denmark-Norway, and the Netherlands. The author stipulates that the captured mariners were treated like slaves and not like prisoners of war as the latter were not usually forced to work for their victors at the time. And there can be no doubt about the legality of privateering as until the middle of the eighteenth century the Barbary States and the countries in Northwestern Europe officially were at war. Over time, however, most European states concluded peace treaties with their North African enemies. Unfortunately, the author is unable to contribute to the ongoing debate about the total number of European captives in North Africa, which now ranges between 300,000 and more than a million.

Among the European countries, the Netherlands stood out as a seafaring nation unable to organise a nation-wide institution for liberating its mariners. That is surprising as the Dutch were very active in the Mediterranean. In order to explain this anomaly, the author points to the Calvinist attitude towards charity favouring private initiatives. However, an economic explanation seems more likely as the land-locked provinces in the Netherlands had little interest in setting up a national ransom fund. Even

the seafaring provinces were divided on the matter. The ports in Holland sent more ships to the Mediterranean, and thus were more inclined to set up a national ransom fund than Zeeland that remained opposed to it.

The strength of this study is situated in the lengthy and carefully documented history of the diplomatic relations between the North German port cities and the North African states, the history of the ransom funds, the various naval wars against the North African states and the peace treaties between the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria and the Hanseatic towns on the one side and the Barbary States on the other. The last section of the book discusses the difference in attitude among the European trading nations towards their North African opponents pointing out that the Dutch were among the most ruthless as they drowned or executed the enemy crews right after capture.

In spite of its elaborate, slow narrative, covering more than 800 pages, the book is not comprehensive. There is no comparative information on pirates and privateers other than those from North Africa. The author has limited his study to European archives, and thus he cannot provide an insight into the effects of the large amounts of ransom money and of the presence of large numbers of European captives on the North African economy and society. How did the European crews spend their days in captivity, how did they inform their families, how many stayed and how many converted to Islam, how many returned, and how many died?

Of course, the author is perfectly justified in choosing to treat only two topics in depths: the impact of privateering on European shipping in the Mediterranean and the counter measures this provoked: the institution of ransom funds ('slave funds'), naval actions, and peace treaties. However in a book of this size, some space could have been devoted to informing the readers about the other aspects of this subject that now remain unmentioned.

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