

The other source of information about the MENA available to English readers in the eighteenth century was what is known as "Barbary captivity narratives" or "white slave narratives", including non-fiction, fiction and plays.

Pirate ships and crews from the North African states of Tripoli, Tunis, Morocco, and Algiers (the Barbary Coast) were the scourge of the Mediterranean. Capturing merchant ships and holding their crews for ransom provided the rulers of these nations with wealth and naval power (Gerard W. Gawalt, *America and the Barbary Pirates: An International Battle Against an Unconventional Foe*).

Cotton Mather called Barbary servitude "the most horrible captivity in the world" and described the "Hellish Moors" who held Americans in bondage as "worse than Egyptian taskmasters" (Paul Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity*), p 2.

Such captivity narratives, written by British and American men and women, had started in the 17th century with **Francis Knight** who wrote in 1640 *A Relation of Seven Years Slavery*, praising God's hand in his deliverance and lamenting the tribulations of a galleys slave: "there is no calamity can befall a man in this life which hath the least parallel to this of captivity, neither are the endurances of the captives equal, although the least without the divine assistance were insupportable, yet are they all easy in comparison to that of the galleys, which is most inhuman and diabolical".

Joseph Pitts, an Exeter boy, was captured by Algerine pirates at the age of 15 and sold as a slave in Algiers. He spent more than fifteen years in captivity and served three successive *Patroons*, or owners, with whom he travelled to Cairo and Alexandria, as well as to sacred Islamic sites at Mecca and Medina. Unlike many English captives, Pitts was never ransomed by a British consul and had to escape to recover his freedom after being made prisoner for refusing to join the British army. His *Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mahometans* (1704) is a mixture of captivity narrative and traveller's account.

From Chapter 7, "Containing an Account of the *Mohammetans* Pilgrimage to *Mecca*" [W]e came to a place call'd *Rabbock*, about *four* days sail

on this side *Mecca*, where all the *Haggas* (excepting those of the Female Sex) do enter into *Hirawem*, or *Ihram*, *i.e.* They take off all their Cloaths, covering themselves with two *Hirrawems*, or large white *Cotton Wrappers*; one they put about their *middle*, which reaches down to their ankles, the other they cover the *upper part* of the Body with, except the *Head*, and they wear no other thing on their Bodies but these Wrappers, only a pair of *gimgameea*, *i.e.* Thin-sol'd Shoes, like *Sandals* ... During this time they are very Watchful over their *Tempers*, and keep a Jealous Eye upon their *Passions*, and observe a strict Government of their *Tongues*, making continual use of a *form* of devout expressions. And they will also be careful to be *Reconcil'd*, and at Peace, with all such as they had any Difference with; accounting it a very sinful and shameful thing to bear the least Malice against any. They do not shave themselves during this time.

From Chapter 9, "An Account of the Author's turning *Mohammetan*, through the barbarous Cruelties and Tortures which he suffered. Of the Concern and Remorse he had thereupon": The Reader, I suppose, will expect an Account, how I became qualified to write such an *History* as this (though it may be guessed at by what has gone before) an and how I was let into the Secrets of the *Mohammetan Religion*, so as to be able to give such an exact Description, as is herein publish'd, of their Religion, particularly of that at *Mecca*... I spake something before of the Cruelties exercised upon me by the *Turks*, but now shall give a more particular Account of them; which were so many and so great, that I being then but young too, could no longer endure them, and therefore turn'd *Turk* to avoid them.

GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER!

...Then he took me by the Right-hand, and endeavoured to make me hold up the Fore-finger, as thy usually do when they speak those Words, [viz. *La illahi illallah Mohammed Resulallah*] which initiates them *Turks* (as I have related before) but I did with all my might bend it down; so that he saw nothing was to be done with me without Violence; upon which he presently call'd two of his Servants, and commanded them to tye up my Feet with a Rope to the Post of the Tent; and when they had so done, he with a great Cudgel fell a beating of me upon my bare Feet. .. but at last, seeing his Cruelty towards me insatiable, unless I did turn *Mohammetan*, through Terrour I did it, and spake the Words as usual, holding up the Fore-finger of my Right-hand; and presently I was had away to a Fire, and care was taken to heal my Feet (for they were so beaten, that I was not able to go upon them for several Days) and so I was put to Bed."

The Captives: Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers by **James Cathcart** is about an American youth of 17, first taken prisoner by the British and then captured by the Algerines on July 25, 1785. "An indomitable spirit of patriotism enabled him to rise from abject slavery to become Christian clerk to the Dey of Algiers" (Preface iii). "Had I known the different vicissitudes I was to experience, and the length of my captivity, I should have sunk beneath the weight of such accumulated woe. But hope, that sweet soother of all earthly cares, represented that our situation was really not so bad as we had expected, and that we had not been used worse than many of our fellow citizens had been during the Revolutionary war in the different British prisons; and, being confident that our country would immediately redeem us, I resolved to bear my captivity with as good a grace as possible and not give the Mahometans the satisfaction of seeing me dejected.. As I have promised to give a detail of the treatment that Christian slaves receive in Barbary, and as I have experienced a great variety of scenes myself, I will give the particulars as they occur..."

CHAPTER II. Economy of the Dey's palace will describe the situation of slaves in all the Grandees and rich peoples' houses in the Regency of Algiers, making allowance for the caprices of Masters, some being better and some worse, as in other countries. The Dey's palace is governed by two Hasnadars or Chamberlains' and two chief cooks.. The two chief cooks on my arrival at Algiers had thirty-three Christians of different denominations, under their command, besides a number of Moors for doing the out door work, the Christians only being permitted to go out twice a year, on the second day of their two chief festivals. Those Christians are employed in the different offices of the kitchen and magazines of provisions in the palace. The chief cooks only superintend the whole".

Captivity narratives were also written in the form of fictional works such as novels and plays.

The most famous novel is by American author **Royall Tyler: *The Algerine Captive, Or The Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill: Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines*** (1797). Chapter 39: "The Author Confereth with a Mollah - Defendeth the verity of the Christian creed and resigns his Body to Slavery to preserve the Freedom of his Mind". Upon the margin of a refreshing fountain, shadowed by the fragrant branches of the orange, date and pomegranate, for five successive days I maintained the sacred truth of our holy religion against the insidious attack of the Mussulman priest...

Author: our religion was disseminated in peace, yours is promulgated by the sword.

Mollah: My friend, you surely have not read the writings of your own historians. The history of the Christian church is a detail of bloody massacres; from the institution of the Christian thundering legion under Constantine the Great, to the expulsion of the Moors of Spain by the ferocious inquisition, or the dragooning of the Hugonots from France under Louis the Great. The Massulmans never yet forced a man to adopt their faith... we leave it to Christians of your Southern plantations to baptise the unfortunate African into your faith, and then use your brother Christians as brutes of the desert.

Here I was so abashed for my country, I could not answer him.

Mollah: ...You need not renounce your prophet, him we respect as a great apostle of God; but Mahomet is the seal of the prophets. Turn then, my friend, from slavery to the delights of life... Lift your finger to the immensity of space and confess that there is one God, and that Mahomet is his apostle.

...after five days conversation, disgusted with his fables, and almost confounded by his sophistry, I resumed my slave's attire and sought safety in my former servitude."

Susanna Rowson's play *Slaves in Algiers: or a Struggle for Freedom* (1794) is a comedy melodrama about a group of Americans held captive in Algiers. Rebecca is one of the main characters. In search of her captured husband, she "civilizes" Oriental women by teaching them about liberty. Fetnah is one of these women who also wants to escape. Finally, impressed by the Americans' willingness to die for freedom, the Dey has a change of heart, frees all the slaves and even abolishes slavery in Algiers. Rowson had never visited Algiers or any Oriental place, her vision of the Orient is rather negative, it is used to shed a positive light on American values.

The titles of these narratives, often fictitious, provide information about their contents, and are used to attract the audience:

The Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Velnet, Who was Seven Years a Slave in Tripoli, three of which she was confined in a dungeon, loaded with irons, and four times put to the most cruel tortures ever invented by man. To which is added, The Lunatic Governor, and Adelaide, or the Triumph of Constancy, a Tale, Mary Velnet (1828).

History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, who was six years a Slave in Algiers: two of which she was confined in a dark and dismal dungeon, loaded with irons (1807).