

CEYDA KARAMÜRSEL is a lecturer in the Department of History at SOAS, University of London. A historian of the modern Middle East, she specializes in the social, political, and legal history of the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic. She holds a B.A. in Economics from Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in History from the University of Pennsylvania, where she was also a postdoctoral fellow at the Middle East Center. Dr. Karamürsel’s research explores the practice of slavery and the complex, often elusive, meanings of freedom in the late Ottoman Empire. Her work examines how foundational concepts such as freedom and equality before the law—often taken for granted today—were understood, negotiated, and contested by Ottoman slaves, slaveholders, and the state. She is currently writing a book that situates these questions within a broader global political and legal framework. Beyond this, Dr. Karamürsel is engaged in several other research projects. One examines an international legal dispute between the Ottoman Empire and Greece over stolen personal property, using it as a lens to explore how different and seemingly conflicting legal systems interacted in shaping the evolving concept of international property rights. Another, which lays the groundwork for her second book, investigates how Ottoman notions of slavery circulated in the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century, tracing the sensationalized story of an American opera singer allegedly murdered in the imperial harem in Istanbul.

“I stumbled upon the Hafız Ağa Library on a pleasant July morning, many years ago. It felt like a treasure trove—its contents just out of reach—as I looked for, in the few hours I had, for any trace of the island’s ill-fated entanglement in the Ottoman Empire’s long history of slavery. I did not know then that what I was looking for would find me years later—not in the library’s books, but through the cherished and mourned family history of its founder and namesake. I am grateful to have been entrusted with the tender story of Şemsinur, whose captivity quietly bore and bound—and still binds—many worlds together.”

Ceyda Karamürsel

The Life and Times of Şemsinur

Slavery, Freedom and Gender in the Age of Revolutions

There exists a famous—or, more accurately, infamous—document preserved in the Ottoman State Archives that contains a lengthy list of captives taken from the island of Chios during the early years of the Greek War of Independence. Containing approximately 1,500 entries, this document is possibly only one surviving example of what may have been numerous others.¹ Notably, the list does not serve as a register of those who were captured and enslaved during this violent episode. Instead, it meticulously documents the names of their captors. For instance, a certain Mehmed Ağa from Izmir took six Chiots as captives—three male and three female—one of whom also had a one-year-old son with her. Similarly, Hacı Hüseyin from Manisa returned from the island with six captives, one male and five female, including a woman with a four-month-old child. Somalı Yakup brought back two captives, both women, one of whom had a six-month-old child. Bayındırlı Mehmed took only one captive, a woman who was accompanied by her six-month-old daughter.

The captors did not consist solely of those from the nearby mainland provinces but also included men—for they were unmistakably all men—that came from farther afield. Konyalı Deli Mehmed, Erzurumlu Osman, Tokatlı Hasan, and İstanbullu Ömer all returned from Chios with their share of human cargo, as did others who journeyed from as far away as Vidin, Tripoli, and Egypt. Some of these men may have belonged to regular troops, but the majority were likely irregulars, members of militia groups, mercenaries, or ordinary individuals seeking to exploit the unfolding crisis for economic gain.

The list extends across pages, offering little detail about the captives themselves apart from their gender and the occasional note of an accompanying infant. Its primary focus rests on documenting the infamous *pençik* levy, the tax exacted by the Ottoman state for each captive, which, in this instance, amounted to a mere 33 piasters per individual.² Given that the document originates from the registers of the Office of the Chief Accountant (*Bâb-ı Defterî Baş Muhâsebe Kalemî*), its emphasis on tax records is hardly surprising. What does warrant further explanation, however, is the way in which the Ottoman state classified and processed these transactions explicitly as “slave imports,” thereby revealing what the mass enslavement of Chiots was. Far from being an irrational or indiscriminate eruption of violence driven by a “jihadist fury,” this was a deliberate act that drew upon established legal-jurisprudential and economic frameworks to achieve two interlinked goals: the effective suppression of an uprising, while generating economic benefits for the state and its intermediaries at the same time.

Occurring just seven years after the Congress of Vienna, which had famously condemned slavery as “repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality” and for the first time enshrined

1 Ottoman State Archives (hereafter, BOA), Bâb-ı Defterî Baş Muhâsebe Kalemî Defterleri, D..BŞM.d. 8891, 14 – 24 May 1822.

2 The *pençik* tax (derived from the Persian *panj yak*) originally referred to the allocation of one-fifth of all war booty, including captives, to the sovereign. By the nineteenth century, however, the term had taken on a new financial and administrative meaning, functioning as an *ad valorem* import tax levied specifically on slaves. For a detailed discussion of its origins and evolution within Islamic jurisprudence, see A. Zysow and R. Gleave, “Khums,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., edited by P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2016). For its later, specifically nineteenth century significance, see Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800–1909* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), xiii.

the abolition of the slave trade into international law, the mass enslavement and trafficking of Chioti constituted a flagrant abomination that quickly escalated into a humanitarian crisis, one that set the racial and gender terms of humanitarianism in the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries.³ Eyewitness accounts from consular officials and other local observers, vividly describing the grim scenes of “men and boys being killed and mutilated in the presence of their wives and mothers ... women being dragged away into captivity ... [and] troops of young girls being driven along, to be sold like cattle,”⁴ flooded European newspapers, igniting widespread public outrage that ultimately culminated in an unprecedented act of European intervention.⁵

Beyond its humanitarian implications, this episode also constituted a blatant affront to the emerging legal order established by the Congress system. While the Ottoman Empire was not directly bound by this legal framework—having declined to participate in the Congress, to sign the Final Act, or to join subsequent bilateral and multilateral agreements addressing the slave trade—it had nonetheless been an active participant in the broader evolution of public international law.⁶ A series of legal developments throughout the eighteenth century, particularly those concerning the international law regulating wartime captivity, to which the Ottomans were party, had rendered the enslavement of war captives—one of the primary means of just enslavement in Islamic jurisprudence—largely obsolete.⁷ In this context, the explicit legal sanctioning of the enslavement of insurgents during the Greek War of Independence stands out as fairly anomalous, even by Ottoman standards. Why, then, did the Ottomans choose this course of action, which they even defended fervently, despite knowing it would place them at odds with the emerging international order?⁸ The explanation for this irregularity lies in the intersection of two distinct yet interconnected realms that the Greek War of Independence inadvertently brought together: first, the Ottomans’ ambivalent and uneasy relationship with revolutions and the broader revolutionary era,⁹ and second, the deep seated economic structure in which slavery and enslavement—in their distinctly gendered forms—were inextricably embedded.

3 For the full text of Act 15 of the Final Act of the Congress, “Declaration of Powers, on the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” see Clive Perry (Ed.), *Consolidated Treaty Series with Index 1648-1919* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 474-475. For slavery and slave trade’s entanglement with humanitarianism see Jenny S. Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

4 Alexander M. Vlasto, *A History of the Island of Chios A.D. 70-1822* (London: privately printed by J. Davy and Sons at the Dryden Press, 1913), 162-163. Official and unofficial accounts, news items, as well as documentary collections on the Chios massacre and mass enslavement are numerous, several of which, including Vlasto’s relevant chapters, are closely studied by Yianni Cartledge in this volume.

5 Alexis Heraclides, Ada Dially, *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 105-133.

6 Ozan Ozavci, “A Priceless Grace? The Congress of Vienna of 1815, the Ottoman Empire and Historicising the Eastern Question,” *The English Historical Review*, Volume 136, Issue 583 (December 2021); Ozavci, “The Ottoman Imperial Gaze: The Greek Revolution of 1821-1832 and a New History of the Eastern Question,” *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 21, No.2 (2023). For a broader and longer-term perspective on the Ottoman Empire’s involvement—albeit not without challenges—in the development of public international law, see Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 28-67.

7 Will Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

8 Will Smiley, “Rebellion, Sovereignty, and Islamic Law in the Ottoman Age of Revolutions,” *Law and History Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May 2022).

9 Yusuf Ziya Karabıçak, “Ottoman Attempts to Define the Rebels During the Greek War of Independence,” *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 114 (2019).

As historians have convincingly demonstrated, the Ottoman state traditionally categorized all non-Muslim war captives—whether soldiers or civilians—as slaves, a practice rooted in Islamic jurisprudence, which established the religious conditions necessary to legitimize enslavement.¹⁰ Captive-taking and enslavement were not confined to large-scale wars but extended to smaller skirmishes such as raiding, as well as rebellions against the Muslim Ottoman rule.¹¹ However, with the advent of the age of revolutions—most notably the French Revolution, which the Ottomans observed with ample unease—and the concurrent 18th-century developments that culminated in the emergence of an international order, this long-standing practice became increasingly at odds with the evolving political landscape of the Ottoman Empire and its growing investment in the emerging inter-state legal frameworks.¹² The evolving conventions, particularly regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, took on concrete form at the turn of the nineteenth century in a series of laws and legal practices that Will Smiley has termed the Ottoman “Law of Release.”¹³ By this time, the Ottoman state had effectively abandoned its earlier practice of categorizing all non-Muslim war captives as slaves, adopting instead a more nuanced understanding of war captivity, one increasingly informed by emerging international legal norms governing the treatment and eventual release of prisoners.

If this shift had already occurred and the Law of Release had become standard practice by the beginning of the nineteenth century, why, then, did the Ottoman state revert to its earlier methods during the Greek War of Independence, openly sanctioning the enslavement of so-called rebels by anyone willing to participate in the suppression of the revolt? The most straightforward answer lies in the Ottoman state’s perception of the conflict: it was regarded, at least initially, not as an international matter subject to inter-state legal frameworks, but as a domestic issue firmly within the empire’s sovereign domain. This perspective is evident in the Ottoman state’s reaction to foreign protests, particularly as news of the massacre of Chios spread across the globe, igniting widespread public outrage and escalating diplomatic discontent into mounting political pressure. For instance, when confronted by the British Ambassador Lord Strangford about the issue, Reisülküttap Canib Efendi (the chief scribe of the Ottoman court and de facto foreign minister), along with Şeyhülislam Abdülvehhab (the chief religious and legal authority), firmly invoked the Ottoman state’s sovereign right to interpret and implement Islamic law in addressing the matter.¹⁴ In essence, then, while the Ottoman state adhered to emerging international legal norms in cases of inter-state conflicts, it consciously excluded instances of domestic unrest—particularly rebellions by non-Muslim ethno-nationalist groups, such as the Serbian revolt of 1804—from these legal developments.¹⁵ Instead, it continued to rely on traditional and often brutal measures for suppressing such uprisings.

10 Will Smiley, “So novel in its character from any thing known”: Ottoman Antislavery Policy Under Mahmud II?” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Vol. 10, No 2 (Fall 2023), 99; Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, xx.

11 For a general overview of the practices in the previous centuries, see Geza David and Pál Fodor (Eds.), *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Early Fifteenth - Early Eighteenth Centuries)*(Brill, 2007).

12 Fatih Yeşil, “Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman eyes: Ebubekir Ratib Efendi’s observations,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 70, No.2 (2007); Smiley, “So novel in its character from any thing known,” 94; Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*; Karabıçak, “Ottoman Attempts to Define the Rebels During the Greek War of Independence.”

13 Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*, 63-79.

14 Smiley, “Rebellion, Sovereignty, and Islamic Law in the Ottoman Age of Revolutions,” 229; Hakan Erdem, “Do not think of the Greeks as agricultural labourers’: Ottoman responses to the Greek War of Independence,” in Faruk Birtek and T. Dragonas (Eds.), *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey* (Routledge, 2005), 70.

15 Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*, 174-176; Smiley, “Rebellion, Sovereignty, and Islamic Law in the Ottoman Age of Revolutions,” 230.

Enslavement of not just the combatants but of the general population, especially women and children, remained a deeply entrenched component of these methods.

As Will Smiley has insightfully argued, Sultan Mahmud II’s decision to send a fleet to Chios in 1822, with the stated aim of devastating the island, was driven by three key objectives: to assert and reaffirm the Ottoman Empire’s sovereign authority, to use the fear of death or enslavement as a means of deterring other rebellious communities, and to incentivize Ottoman forces by granting them opportunities for looting and taking captives. In other words, the Ottoman state’s reliance on Islamic jurisprudence and historical legal practices, while giving the appearance of a religiously motivated war, was not rooted in purely religious concerns. Instead, it functioned as a highly pragmatic and ultimately successful political and diplomatic instrument, strategically deployed to assert and solidify Ottoman sovereignty, while simultaneously drawing throngs of men to the island arriving—as vividly evidenced by the archival document that opens this chapter—from both nearby regions and distant provinces.¹⁶ Within mere weeks—the onset of what Yanni Kotsonis aptly described as the “violent birth of nationalism”—tens of thousands of Chiots were killed, while many more were captured and sold into slavery in newly established or repurposed slave markets near conflict zones, as well as in long-standing ones dispersed across especially the empire’s urban centers.¹⁷

While the officially sanctioned and centrally orchestrated massacre on Chios was relatively brief, the upheaval it unleashed on the island caused the highly lucrative enslavement “business” to spiral beyond the Ottoman state’s control. Even after the large-scale killing and enslavement had ceased, and the surviving population, scattered across the island’s villages, was formally pardoned by the imperial authorities—thus ostensibly regaining their protected *dhimmi* status—local and regional Muslim raiders continued to exploit the chaos. Fully aware that such actions could in no way be justified or defended under its sovereign right to interpret and implement Islamic law—and that they constituted nothing less than unlawful enslavement—the Ottoman state issued, in August or September of 1822, an imperial rescript (*ferman*) accompanied by a religious edict (fetva, Ar. fatwa), which prohibited the further enslavement of Chiots and mandated the return of those who had already been enslaved and transported to the Ottoman mainland.¹⁸ Yet, as Hakan Erdem aptly observed, issuing an edict was one thing; implementing and enforcing it was an entirely different matter.¹⁹ Not only were those who had entered slave owners’ households through individual or unofficial means nearly impossible to trace and recover, but many who had reaped substantial profits from the exceptionally high margins of the trade found ways to sustain it without interruption—drawing on the entrenched structures already in place, on the one hand, and exploiting nearby conflicts in the broader region, on the other.

One such contemporaneous conflict, the Caucasus War—unfolding with full intensity on the far end of the Black Sea since 1817—not only drew a significant number of Ottoman traders to the region but also fostered a market where arms, garments, and salt were regularly exchanged for captive

women and children abducted in conflict zones or during raids. This was to the extent that by the 1820s, the Caucasus War became a conflict funded almost entirely (on the side of the Caucasian clans) by the slave trade with the Ottomans, creating a power vacuum that allowed the trade to thrive during this period. This structure also shaped the fate of enslaved Greeks in the aftermath of the Chios massacre in 1822. Despite Ottoman decrees issued in 1822 and 1823 explicitly prohibiting the transport of Greek captives to Anapa and other Caucasian ports, these locations became notorious hubs for what Joshua White, in an earlier context, termed “slave laundering.”²⁰ An indeterminate number of Greek captives from Chios and elsewhere in Greece were brought to various coastal towns in the Caucasus, where they underwent a process that effectively transformed them into Circassian slaves. This “rebranding” not only increased their market value—Circassian women and children being valued and highly sought after as slaves—but also rendered their enslaved status legally unquestionable. By obscuring their true origins, the process also made their identification and potential reclamation by legal or familial means virtually impossible.

Besides such “laundering” operations, what often rendered captive Greeks, including those from Chios, impossible to trace and reclaim was the captives themselves. Once embedded within a household—whether as servants or, in some cases, as the mistress of the house—they were not always willing to return to their natal families, assuming their families even survived. Like Şemsinur, the central—albeit highly elusive, like all enslaved—protagonist of this section of the volume, many captives rebuilt their lives, begot their own children, formed new kinship ties, and sought to secure their lot as much as their circumstances allowed. Understandably, they were often reluctant to jeopardize the stability and predictability of these newly established lives for the uncertainty of a return to the unknown. While the first-hand accounts documenting the experiences of women and children following the Chios massacre are relatively rare, another, later incident with a different political context but a similar outcome—the Armenian Genocide—offers ample documentary evidence into the reluctance of abducted women and children to return to their natal communities.²¹ As Lerna Ekmekcioglu insightfully and cogently demonstrated, some “captive” Armenian women and children actively resisted forcible return, choosing instead to remain where they were, simply because they did not want to trade their relatively stable—and at times bearable—lives for an uncertain and unpredictable future, compounded by the fear of profound stigmatization associated with their “abduction, loss of chastity, abuse at enemy hands, or having had a child by an enemy man,” which was often regarded as a “deep disgrace.”²²

That captive or enslaved women and children were often reluctant to return to their natal communities should in no way be interpreted as an indication that they fared better in their host

16 Smiley, “Rebellion, Sovereignty, and Islamic Law in the Ottoman Age of Revolutions,” 231; Erdem, “Do not think of the Greeks as agricultural labourers.”

17 Yanni Kotsonis, *The Greek Revolution and the Violent Birth of Nationalism* (Princeton University Press, 2025); Ioannes Makrygiannes, *Memoirs* (Narok, 2001), 198; Drawing on the account of British traveler Robert Walsh, Will Smiley notes—albeit with some reservations—that the total number of slave-tax certificates issued during this period reached 41,000. Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*, 177.

18 Erdem, “Do not think of the Greeks as agricultural labourers,” 70–71.

19 Erdem, “Do not think of the Greeks as agricultural labourers,” 70.

20 Joshua M. White, “Piracy of the Ottoman Mediterranean: Slave Laundering and Subjecthood,” in Judith E. Tucker (Ed.), *The Making of the Modern Mediterranean: Views from the South* (University of California Press, 2019); Şükrü Ilıcak, “*Those Infidel Greeks*”: *The Greek War of Independence through Ottoman Archival Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 368, 666.

21 For one example of such rare first-hand accounts of the Chios massacre, see Stylianos G. Bios, *Η σφαγή της Χίου εις το στόμα του Χιακού λαού* [The Massacre of Chios in the Voice of the Chian People] (Chios: Homerion Cultural Center of the Municipality of Chios, 1989). For examples of Armenian genocide survivors, see Archives of the League of Nations, United Nations Organization, Geneva (ALON-UNOG), Records of the Nansen International Refugee Office, 1920–1947, files C1601/497: Armenian Orphanage, Aleppo – Registry of Inmates – No. 1–100 to No. 1800–1900, which contains detailed personal information and experiences of nearly two thousand individuals—primarily women and children—documented with remarkable specificity.

22 Lerna Ekmekcioglu, “A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 55, No.3 (2013), 536–538.

communities than in their natal ones. Even when they managed to secure stable living circumstances, theirs was far from an easy life. Their enslaved status—even, and at times especially, following manumission—left them perpetually vulnerable to various forms of coercion, both physical and psychological, dangers they were compelled to navigate on a continual basis. Even in the case of Şemsinur, who appears to have secured her owner-turned-mother-in-law Saliha’s full support and protection—whether by mere chance of affinity, her own merits, or a combination of both—her life in captivity, both before and after her marriage (despite its exceptional affluence), was not entirely easy. For one, as Nektaria Anastasiadou’s fictional piece in this volume vividly illustrates, despite the love and protection that allegedly surrounded her, Şemsinur found herself unexpectedly divorced at the age of 30—through no fault or choice of her own—when her husband, Fethi Ahmed Pasha, was commanded to marry one of the sultan’s daughters. It was only a chance event—the untimely death of the latter—that restored love and protection to Şemsinur’s life.

Besides these external factors, Şemsinur must have also learned to navigate intricate internal dynamics, expectations, and dangers, as subtly indicated in her depiction and remembrance as “exceptionally kind and selfless”—traits often ascribed to agreeable and dutiful slaves.²³ In a context defined by extreme power disparities, where any sign of unruliness could lead to her being labeled as “mentally ill” or, simply, undesirable—thereby justifying her removal from the household in which she was embedded by means of resale—would she not have felt compelled, whether consciously or unconsciously, to shape herself into the near-saintly figure she was ultimately perceived to be?²⁴

The enslaved rarely left behind detailed accounts of their lives. This was particularly true in the Ottoman Empire, where exposing the private lives of their masters—frequently portrayed as their so-called benefactors—was seen as a profound violation of deeply entrenched social norms and deemed highly improper. As a result, much of what we know about the lives of the enslaved comes from second-hand accounts that seldom delve into the complex realities of their experiences.²⁵ One such example provides a rare glimpse into the life of a Greek slave—a Cretan woman, in this instance—living as an elderly figure on a remote island on the Nile in 1870s Egypt. The account, recorded by Mary Louisa Whately, a British missionary who spent many years in the region, remains limited in scope, focusing primarily on religious matters. Yet, it is significant in offering even a faint outline of her existence, particularly given that she was of a similar age to Şemsinur and had likely experienced a comparable trajectory of captivity and enslavement.

Like Şemsinur’s and countless others’, the story of this unnamed Cretan woman’s enslavement began with sheer violence: she was dragged from her parents’ home—one that was presumably already “stained with the blood of fathers and brothers,” Whately added—before being compelled to spend the rest of her life among strangers.²⁶ How she came to reside on the remote island—

“unobtrusive ... seldom, if ever, touched at by travellers,” as the author described it—where she was now living remains unknown. What is certain, however, is that she was brought to Egypt by her captor, a Turk or an Arab in the Turkish service, likely a land-owning elite from the Egyptian countryside, who subsequently married her to a peasant on his estate.²⁷ Half a century later and eclipsed by numerous subsequent tragedies, the Greek War of Independence had largely faded from public memory by then. Yet, as Whately reminded her readers, many of its victims were not only still alive and, in some cases—like the Cretan woman in this story—still living in captivity, but they also continued to bear the profound sadness and lingering fear that had shaped their lives ever since. Clad in the coarse dark-blue cotton robe and black muslin veil typical of Egyptian country women, speaking Arabic like those around her, and even after having children and grandchildren that arguably alleviated the kinlessness and extreme vulnerability of her condition, the Cretan woman carried a “settled sadness” on her face.²⁸ The pain of her “terrible parting,” the violent severance from her family, never left her, so much so that when Whately asked her about them, the dull indifference that had marked the woman’s earlier words shifted into a profound and visible sorrow.²⁹ Not unlike Şemsinur, she described herself as being “old enough to feel everything” at the time of her capture, but she appeared far from free—perhaps even fearful—to openly discuss what she still managed to remember. Instead, she repeatedly and curtly stated that “all [was] forgotten.”³⁰

In the account of the Cretan woman, as in the stories of countless others, we are left with fragments—mere traces that offer only a partial view of the experiences, expectations, fears, and motives of the enslaved. These fragments, while invaluable, fall short of providing the fuller understanding that unmediated narratives might have offered. Even in the rare moments when such accounts emerge, however, they too are riddled with challenges, shaped by trauma-induced memory gaps on the one hand, and the incongruity between the fragmented, unsettling experiences of the enslaved and the narrative expectations of their audience on the other.³¹ As Eve Troutt Powell has insightfully noted, the enslaved often lacked the means to return home—whether in a physical or metaphorical sense—and similarly, they lacked the space to fully articulate their lives. Their stories, marked by ruptures and silences, seldom come together into a cohesive whole, offering only fragmented glimpses of lives shaped by loss and coercion. Yet, in these fragments, there is also evidence, against all odds, of extraordinary resilience—of not mere survival but of beauty and intimacy. Whether it is a stalk of a flower delicately placed in one’s hair, the convivial afternoon gatherings on a summer day to pick and enjoy fresh figs, or the quiet, enduring gaze of a woman watching her beloved from across the Bosphorus, as with Şemsinur, these moments remind us that even under the harshest circumstances, lives were reconstructed, lived, and at times, quietly cherished.³²

23 For a more detailed discussion of this topic in relation to a later, twentieth-century example, see Ceyda Karamursel, “Nergister with Wisteria: Fragments of an Enslaved Life in Istanbul Old and New,” in Eve M. Troutt Powell, Israel Gershoni (Eds.), *A Cultural History of the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

24 For several illustrative instances of so-called mental illness documented among manumitted palace slaves, see Betül İpşirli Arçıt, *Life after the Harem: Female Palace Slaves, Patronage and the Imperial Ottoman Court* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 142, 151–152 note 62, 154–155 note 70.

25 For a detailed discussion on this specific limitation, see Y. Hakan Erdem, “Magic, Theft, and Arson: The Life and Death of an Enslaved African Woman in Ottoman İzmit,” in Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (Eds.), *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 125–146.

26 Mary Louisa (M. L.) Whately, *Among the Huts in Egypt: Scenes from Real Life* (Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1871), 238.

27 Whately, *Among the Huts in Egypt*, 244–245.

28 Whately, *Among the Huts in Egypt*, 243.

29 Whately, *Among the Huts in Egypt*, 247.

30 Whately, *Among the Huts in Egypt*, 248–249.

31 Eve M. Troutt Powell, *Tell This in my Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford University Press, 2012), 77–113.

32 Karamursel, “Nergister with Wisteria”; BOA, İ.MVL, 462 / 20803, 1278.Ş.14 (14 February 1862).