

Liberation from Captivity: Michael Heberer, *Aegyptiaca servitus* (1610)

Abstract

On his Mediterranean journey in 1585, the humanist Michael Heberer (1560–after 1623) was captured by Turkish troops and enslaved for three years. The text below, which was taken from Heberer's account of his travels and his time in captivity, describes how he was ultimately purchased into freedom by the French. Heberer introduced the people that he encountered according to both "national" and religious affiliation and thus recognized these factors as significant markers of identity; however, the circumstances of his ransom reveal the fluidity of "Germanness" as a category.

Source

The Fifty-Second Chapter

As my patron wanted to travel to Tripoli on the Barbary Coast, I became very fearful and very deliberately stopped by the French embassy regarding my freedom.

When I was once again aboard the galley, I heard even sadder news, for my patron had ordered the galley [crew] to prepare for the trip to the Barbary Coast: to renew and restore the ropes, sails, tents, and straps, for the most part to make new oars, to clean the galley, and to entirely recoat [the ship] with green and other colored paints, and to paint [it] beautifully.

When I saw how serious this was, I was very subdued and betook myself again to Mr. Cambout, told him what a dismissive answer I had gotten from the German envoy, and [mentioned] that we had to finish up the galley for our trip to the Barbary Coast. Thus, I did not know what to do about my situation; Mr. Cambout was dismayed by my report but comforted me. However, he admonished me not to give up, for Mr. de Thenissey had already made arrangements at the French embassy so that I would not be abandoned, and negotiations were already underway with Aly Reiss, the brother of Marcus of Malta, to purchase my freedom. For that reason, I should not delay any longer, should go at once to the embassy, and again report to him afterwards about what I was to do. I complied with his admonition and went right away to the French embassy. The good ambassador had me brought to him; I told him about how seriously Doctor Betz had broken his promise to me. The good man laughed about it and said that he was not surprised, because he knew very well not to trust him. But he consoled me that I should not be downcast because of it, for I would get help, and he himself would not abandon me.

I told His Grace further that we had already prepared the galley for our departure to the Barbary Coast, and I therefore was not certain how soon our patron wanted to leave.

There was a nobleman among his courtiers by the name of Mr. de la Planche. This man took me alone to his room and told me in confidence that I should take heart: my freedom would be bought by Aly Reiss, brother of Marcus of Malta, to whom he had already relayed this on the order of Mr. Thenissey, and he [the courtier] ordered me not to say anything about the matter to anyone. I thanked the courtier for the happy news and remembered him most fondly afterwards.

After I had taken proper leave of the ambassador and all the nobles, I went again with a happy heart to my galley.

[...]

Source: Michael Heberer, *Aegyptiaca servitus: das ist, warhafte Beschreibung einer dreyjährigen Dienstbarkeit, so zu Alexandrien in Egypten jhren Anfang, vnd zu Constantinopel jhr Endschafft genommen ... ; mit 2 angehenckten Reisen, die er nach seiner Dienstbarkeit, in 4 Königreich, Böhem, Polen, Schweden, Dennemarckt, auch nechstligende Fürstenthumb und Seestädt vollbracht*. Heidelberg, 1610, pp. 324–26. Available online at: <http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11211728-2>

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

Recommended Citation: Liberation from Captivity: Michael Heberer, *Aegyptiaca servitus* (1610), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-288>> [July 13, 2025].