



BARDA AND BARDA-DĀRI III. IN THE ISLAMIC PERIOD UP TO THE MONGOL INVASION

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Early Islamic society was essentially a slave-holding one, and it seems likely that Iranian society of the time exhibited two of the types of slavery known elsewhere in the pre-modern Old World—agricultural/industrial slavery and domestic slavery—certainly together with a third type, whose development from the 3rd/9th century onward seems to have been peculiar to the Islamic world, namely military slavery. For a consideration of this last, see v, below, but it should meanwhile be noted here that the institution of military slavery was to have a special significance for Iranian history in that, from the end of the 4th/10th century onward, dynasties of Turkish military slave origin began to arise within the Iranian lands, starting with the [Ghaznavids](#) in eastern Iran and Afghanistan, who stemmed from Sebūktigin, military slave of the Samanids (q.v.), and continuing through the numerous lines of *atābaks* in later Saljuq Iran to the sultans of Delhi and other provinces of the culturally Iranized realm of Muslim northern India.

In this section, what might be viewed as slavery in a civilian context will alone



be treated. That the first type of slavery, the agricultural/industrial, existed in early Islamic Iran has largely to be inferred. One might tentatively assume that the agricultural servitude characteristic of lower Iraq in the first four centuries or so of Islam, involving such nonindigenous races as the black African Zanj and the Indian Zott, a slavery fairly well documented for us in the historical sources on account of the periodic rebellions of these despised and exploited groups, was also practiced in the almost identical habitat and climate of the adjacent Iranian province of Ahvāz, where such crops as sugarcane and rice were grown, crops which lent themselves to larger-scale agricultural organization and for which it was not always easy to find free cultivators. Evidence is, however, regrettably sparse for this and for agricultural slavery elsewhere in the oasis economies of Iran, Transoxania, and K̄vārazm. The large estates of the hydraulic society of pre-Arab conquest K̄vārazm, whose existence has been revealed by Soviet archeologists, may well have required serf laborers then and up to the disappearance of the Afrighid K̄vārazmšāhs (see āl-e afrīg; S. P. Tolstov, *Auf den Spuren der altchoresmischen Kultur*, Berlin, 1953, pp. 207ff.). We do have an item of information from Ebn Meskawayh, who (*Tajāreb* I, p.289; tr. IV, p. 337) mentions that the *mamālīk at-tonnā*, presumably agricultural slaves of local landowners, helped defend Shiraz against the incoming Daylamite troops of ‘Alī b. Būya (the later ‘Emād-al-Dawla) in 322/934.

Domestic slavery in Iran was of the kind familiar in the rest of the Islamic world at that time. Slaves were used as domestic servants and attendants, including in the women’s quarters or harem. For this last function, eunuchs were of course preferred, or if intact males were used, then it was recommended that they should be dark-skinned, physically unprepossessing, and as a result unattractive to women (thus according to Kaykāvūs b. Eskandar, *Qābūs-nāma*, ed. Ġ. Ḥ. Yūsofī, 3rd ed., Tehran, 1364 Š./1985, p. 114; tr. R. Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, London, 1951, p. 102). The total social and physical inferiority of the eunuch also meant that in pre-Saljuq times he might on occasion be employed in the office of market inspector or *moḥtaseb*, since he had no respect for anyone and no obligations toward them (Nezām-al-Molk, *Sīāsat-nāma*, chap. VI, ed. M. M. Qazvīnī and M. M. Čahārdehī, Tehran, 1334 Š./1956, p. 56; tr. H. Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, London, 1960, p. 47). Slave girls were favored as concubines, and certain of the wives of ‘Abbasid caliphs who gave birth to princes and future caliphs, being of the status of *omm walad*, are mentioned as being Iranian, e.g., Marājel, the concubine of Hārūn-al-Rašīd, said to be from Bādġīs in northwestern



Afghanistan, and the mother of the future caliph al-Ma'mūn, born in 170/787 (Ebn Qotayba Dīnavarī, *Ma'āref*, ed. T. 'Okkāša, Cairo, 1960, pp. 383, 387; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rik* II, p. 538; Ṭabarī, III, p. 758); and also Māreda, born in Kūfa but of Sogdian stock, slave of Hārūn al-Rašīd, who bore him the future caliph al-Mo'taşem, born in 179/795 or 180/796 (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 758, 1329; N. Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad*, Chicago, 1946, pp. 141-42). Slave girls were also trained for use as singers and dancers, and might be found in the *majāles* or court sessions of governors in Iran like those of the Taherids (q.v.) at Nišāpūr in the 3rd/9th century.

The characteristics of various types of slave and the need for the careful purchaser to keep in mind his specific needs when bargaining for a slave are well set forth in the special chapter of Kaykāvūs's *Qābūs-nāma* on the buying of slaves (chap. 23, pp. 111-19; tr. pp. 99-108). The desiderata for harem attendants have been mentioned above; also discussed in detail by Kaykāvūs are the desiderata regarding slaves to be employed in secretarial and financial duties, as musicians, as soldiers, as tenders of farm animals and horses, and as domestics and cooks.

Concerning the provenance of slaves in Iran, we have a reasonable amount of information. In early Islamic times, parts of Iran itself remained unislamized, and these infidel regions could be raided for slaves. This was the case with *Daylam* in northwestern Iran up to the time of the appearance there of the 'Alid *dā'ī* Ḥasan b. Zayd b. Moḥammad (second half of the 3rd/9th century; Eṣṭakrī, p. 205; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 377, tr. Kramers, p. 366); while slaves were captured from the mountainous region of *Ĝūr* in central Afghanistan, a pagan enclave there till the early Ghaznavid period (*Hodūd-al-'ālam*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 109-10; C. E. Bosworth, "The Early Islamic History of Ghūr," *Central Asian Journal* 6, 1961, p. 122; repr. in *The Medieval History of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, London, 1977, chap. 9). But it was above all the Turks who, from their hardy steppe background, were regarded as supremely suitable for military service and were accordingly praised for this aptitude by authors like the 3rd/9th century author *Jāheẓ* in his epistle on the excellences of the Turks (*Resāla fī manāqeb al-Tork wa 'āmmat jond al-keḷāfa*, ed. G. van Vloten in *Tria opuscula auctore . . . al-Djahiz*, Leiden, 1903, pp. 1-56, tr. C. T. Harley-Walker, "Jahiz of Basra to al-Fath ibn Khaqan on the "Exploits of the Turks and the Army of the Khalifate in General",," *JRAS*, 1915, pp. 631-97; analyzed by F. Gabrieli, in *Rivista degli studi orientali* 32, 1957, pp. 477-83). But their loyalty and single-minded devotion to their masters—since they were, like all slaves



brought from distant lands, déracinés, and with no ties or vested interests within their new home country—made them equally favored for palace and domestic service. The Turkish slave cupbearer or *sāqī* isa familiar figure in Persian poetry, and such personalities as Sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna's cupbearer and favorite Ayāz b. Aymaq (q.v.) not only played what seems to have been at the time a certain political role at the Ghaznavid court but in later ages became elaborated into a significant literary figure (see, e.g., G. Spiess, *Maḥmūd von Ġazna bei Farīdu'd-dīn 'Aṭṭār*, Basel, 1959, pp. 46-95). Of course, beardless boys and young men like Ayāz must often have been used by their masters as catamites.

Such Turkish slaves entered Iran through the two land corridors connecting the lands of ancient Middle Eastern civilization with the inner Asian and eastern European steppes, namely a northwestern corridor through southern Russia and the Caucasus into Azarbaijan, and a northeastern one through K̄vārazm and Transoxania into Khorasan. Slaves came into the Iranian world as captives of war from the Arab campaigns in the Caucasus against the K̄zars (q.v.) and from the campaigns in central Asia against the local Iranian peoples and the Turks of the steppes beyond, from the end of the 1st/7th century onward. Thus Naršakī (p. 62, tr. R. N. Frye, pp. 44-45) mentions how in 87/706 the Arab governor Qotayba b. Moslem (q.v.) slew all the males in the town of Baykand in Sogdia and enslaved all the women and children. Eighty hostages of noble birth taken from the *kātūn* or queen of Bukhara in 56/676 by the governor of Khorasan Sa'īd b. 'Oṭmān were transported, against Sa'īd's pledge to the contrary, to Medina and set to work there as agricultural slaves, a process which was so demeaning for them that, one day, they all entered Sa'īd's house, killed him, and then committed mass suicide (Naršakī, pp. 54, 56-57, tr. pp. 40-41; cf. H. A. R. Gibb, *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia*, London, 1923, pp. 19-20). Subsequently, Turkish slaves captured in the course of Muslim raids into infidel territory (*dār al-ḥarb*) were supplemented by a steady flow of Turks brought to slave markets in such places as Darband, Samarqand, Bukhara, Kīš, and Naḳšab (Nasaf), victims of internecine Turkish warfare in the steppes (as was the case of Sebūktigin) or even deliberately sold by their own families.

The Samanid amirate in Khorasan and Transoxania dominated the corridor into northeastern Iran during the 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries, and owed much of its economic prosperity, stressed by contemporary geographers, to the important trade in Turkish slaves. Slaves regularly formed a part of the land



tax of Khorasan sent by governors there like the Taherids to Baghdad and of the tribute forwarded to the caliphs by the Samanids from Transoxania and by the Saffarid brothers Ya'qūb and 'Amr b. Layṭ from their conquests in eastern Afghanistan and the fringes of India. The geographer Maqdesī ([Moqaddasī] ca. 375/985) states that in his time the annual levy (*karāj*) of Khorasan included, among other things, 1,020 slaves. The Samanid amirs regulated the transit trade in slaves across their territories, requiring a license (*jawāz*) for each slave boy and a fee of 70-100 dirhams, the same fee but no license for each slave girl, and a lesser fee, 20-30 dirhams, for each mature woman (pp. 340-41). Commenting on the superlativeness of Turkish slaves, Maqdesī's near-contemporary Ebn Ḥawqal states that he had more than once seen a slave sold in Khorasan for as much as 3,000 dinars (p. 353, tr. p. 346); the average rate for a Turkish slave in Taherid times was, however, around 300 dirhams (Barthold, *Turkestan*², p.240).

For northwestern Iran, a similar stream of slaves was imported from the Caucasus and beyond, comprising Turks, again through the intermediary of the Ḳazars, but also non-Turkish peoples of the Caucasus and eastern Europe such as the Alans, the Rūs, and the Ṣaqāleba (these peoples and their characteristics as slaves are mentioned by Kaykāvūs; the fair-skinned Ṣaqāleba probably included, as well as Slavs, Finno-Ugrian peoples of eastern Russia like the Burṭās or Mordvins; cf. A. Z. V. Togan, "Die Schwerter der Germanen, nach arabischen Berichten des 9-11. Jts.," *ZDMG* 90, 1936, p. 22). The endemic *ḡazw* conducted by the Muslims in the Caucasus region must also have brought in a steady flow of Christians as slaves, comprising Greeks, Armenians, and Georgians, the first two groups again mentioned by Kaykāvūs (*Qābūs-nāma*, pp. 115-16, tr. p. 104). Illustrating the volume of trade passing through the northwestern corridor into Iran, Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 353, tr. p. 346, mentions that the tax farm (*moqāṭa'a*) of the customs post at Ḳūnaj on the road running from Ardabīl in Azarbaijan to Zanjān in Jebāl was generally rented out annually for 100,000 dinars, in some years going up to one million dirhams; the dues (*lawāzem*) levied here included those on the transit of slaves.

Finally, we should note that the Saffarids' campaigns in eastern Afghanistan and then the Ghaznavids' ones into the plains of northern India opened up the Indian world as a source of slave manpower, for the eastern Iranian lands at least. A single campaign of Maḥmūd of Ġazna in 409/1018, that to Qanawj in the Ganges valley, yielded 53,000 captives, causing the price of slaves in the market at Ġazna to fall as low as 2-10 dirhams a head (C. E. Bosworth,



Ghaznavids, p.102); and by the end of the 5th/11th. century, Indian slaves were sufficiently known in Iran at large for Kaykāvūs to discuss the various aptitudes of different Indian social groups and castes for employment as slaves (*Qābūs-nāma*, p.116; tr. pp. 104-05).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text. See also Spuler, *Iran*, pp. 439-40.