



# BARDA AND BARDA-DĀRI V. MILITARY SLAVERY IN ISLAMIC IRAN

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### v. Military Slavery in Islamic Iran

Military slavery may have been known in the Sasanian period, but, as the Sasanian army was based essentially on the free, mailed cavalryman, any slaves within it can only have been in the little-regarded following of infantrymen, in which conscripted peasants and other socially inferior elements played the main part.

It was the extension of Arab arms during the first two or three centuries of Islam into such regions as the Caucasus and Transoxania, giving access to a vast reservoir of potential slave manpower in the south Russian and inner Asian steppes, and into eastern Afghanistan and the fringes of India that provided the Muslim rulers and governors of Iran with their slaves, although, as noted above (see iii), outlying and as yet unconverted regions of Iran itself, such as Daylam and Ġūr, also provided slaves until as late as the opening of the 5th/11th century. But it was the Turks of the Eurasian steppes who were prized most of all as slave soldiers. The harsh environment of their homeland inured them to hardship; they were prized for their loyalty to their Muslim



masters, having totally abandoned their pagan past; above all, the ancestral equestrian abilities of their race, as mounted spearmen and archers who could shoot accurately from the saddle, soon made them an essential element in many Islamic armies, these military techniques supplementing those of other bodies of troops with special skills, such as the Daylami mountaineer infantrymen, with their javelins and battle-axes, the infantrymen of Sīstān, and the lightly armed Arab cavalry skirmishers.

From the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rašīd (170-93/786-809) onward, Turkish slaves began to be employed as guards in the caliphal armies in Iraq, so that, as the 3rd/9th century progressed, Turkish *mamlūks* or *ḡolāms* became the mainstay of the 'Abbasid army (see D. Ayalon, *The Military Reforms of Caliph al-Mu'tasim, Their Background and Consequences*, unpubl. communication to the International Congress of Orientalists, New Delhi, 1964, printed in offset, Jerusalem, 1963; idem, "Preliminary Remarks on the *Mamlūk* Military Institution in Islam," in *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East*, ed. V. J. Parry and M. E. Yapp, London, 1975, pp. 51-58). It was not therefore surprising that the successor states to the caliphate in the Iranian world, probably beginning with the Taherid governors of Khorasan, should follow this lead. Indeed, the Taherids played a vital, linking role in the purveying of Turks from the central Asian slave markets to Iraq (see above), and very probably utilized them in their personal guard at their court in Nīšāpūr, even though direct evidence here is lacking.

Nevertheless, we do have specific information about the use of Turkish slave troops from the ensuing period of the Saffarids of Sīstān. Ya'qūb b. Layṭ employed an élite force of 2,000 *ḡolāms*, whom he fitted out with gold and silver shields, swords, and maces which he had captured in Nīšāpūr when he overthrew the last Taherid governor there, Moḡammad b. Ṭāher b. 'Abd-Allāh, in 259/873 (thus implying that the Taherids had already recruited a similar guard which had used this ceremonial equipment). Furthermore, in the 4th/10th century, certain Saffarid amirs in Sīstān were using Indian and possibly even some black (*zanjī*) slave troops (Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, Paris ed., VIII, pp. 49-50; ed. Pellat, sec. 3168; *Tārīk-e Sīstān*, p. 222; tr. Gold, p. 176; C. E. Bosworth, "The Armies of the Ṣaffārīds," *BSOAS* 31, 1968, pp. 545-47). The Samanids of Transoxania and Khorasan controlled the corridor into inner Asia by which many of the Turkish slaves were imported into the Islamic world, and by the early 4th/10th century Turkish *ḡolāms* already formed the nucleus of the Samanid army, with the top commands held by *ḡolām* generals such as



Qaratigin Esfijābī (q.v.; d. 317/929) and with Amir Naṣr b. Aḥmad (301-31/914-43) said to have 10,000 *golāms*. An account of the reception in Bukhara of a reputed Chinese embassy describes the ceremonial parading of élite Turkish slave troops with gold or gilded and silver weapons and equipment (Qāzī Ebn al-Zobayr, *Ketāb al-dakā'er wa'l-toḥaf*, tr. in Bosworth, "An Alleged Embassy from the Emperor of China to the Amir Naṣr b. Aḥmad: A Contribution to Sāmānid Military History," *Yād-nāma-ye Īrānī-e Minorski*, ed. M. Mīnovī and Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 5-6, 9-11). It was the hope of the amirs that loyal Turkish troops would counterbalance the influence of the indigenous Iranian landowning classes' opposition to the Samanids' centralizing policies; but in fact Naṣr's father Aḥmad b. Esmā'īl had been murdered by his *golāms* in 301/914, and in the last decades of Samanid power it was overmighty Turkish slave generals like Begtuzun and Fā'eḳ Kāṣṣa, (who deliberately brought about the disintegration of the state (see Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, pp.246-68). At this time, too, the Daylami Buyids, when they took over northern and western Iran and Iraq, speedily felt a need for the recruitment of Turkish slave cavalymen, who thenceforth became as important, or at times, more important than the tribal Daylami infantrymen. This caused tensions within the army over pay and privileges, for the Buyid amirs, distancing themselves from their fellow tribesmen, seem often to have favored the Turks as the more loyal element (Meskawayh and Ebn al-Atīr, *passim*, cited in Bosworth, "Military Organisation under the Būyids of Persia and Iraq," *Oriens* 18-19, 1965-66, pp. 153-59; H. Busse, *Chalif und Grosskönig: Die Buyiden im Iraq (945-1055)*, Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1969, pp. 329ff.).

It was from the Samanids' slave guards that there arose in Afghanistan and eastern Iran, out of the ruins of the Samanid state, the most powerful and territorially extensive empire thitherto known in the eastern Islamic world, that of the Turkish Ghaznavids. The founder, Sebūktigin (q.v.), was originally a slave soldier in the guard of the Samanids' Turkish commander-in-chief Alptigin (q.v.; concerning this slave guard, its training, and its ranks, we have a detailed—but probably idealized—account in Neẓām-al-Molk's *Sīar al-molūk* (*Sīāsāt-nāma*), chap. xxvii, ed. Darke<sup>1</sup>, Tehran, 2535 = 1353 Š./1974, pp. 135-50, tr. idem, *The Book of Government*, London, 1960, pp. 107-21; cf. Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, p. 227, and Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 102-03, 107). The multiracial Ghaznavid army was built around a slave core, mainly of Turks brought in from central Asia, through the intermediary of the Qarakhanids, who by then controlled Transoxania and eastern Turkestan, but also—following Saffarid precedent—of Indians, for Sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna



and his successors were now able to tap the vast resources of slave manpower in India. At the heart of the forces was the sultan's palace guard, the *gōlāmān-e sarāy*; it is presumably these troops who are depicted on what remains of the mural paintings of the complex of Ghaznavid palaces at Laškārī Bāzār (q.v.) in southern Afghanistan, according with the literary descriptions of such Ghaznavid historians as Bayhaqī and Gardīzī that these élite guards had uniforms of rich brocade and bejeweled belts and weapons when employed on ceremonial occasions (cited in Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp.98ff., and see the references in idem, "Lashkar-i Bāzār" in *EI*<sup>2</sup>).

In the Saljuq period, the various atabeg (*atābak*) lines which developed during the 6th/12th century in such regions of Iran as Azarbaijan, Jebāl, Fārs, and Kūzestān sprang from the Turkish slave commanders who acted as tutors and guardians (*atābaks*, q.v.) for young Saljuq princes and who had been granted appanages in the outlying provinces of the empire. For, once the empire of the Great Saljuqs had been made firm under Alp Arslān and Malekšāh (qq.v.), the sultans had found it necessary to supplement and to counterbalance the tribal contingents of their own people, the Oghuz Turks, with professional paid troops, these being in large measure Turkish slaves purchased from central Asia but also slaves of Armenian, Greek, Georgian, and Negro origin (see Bosworth, in *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, pp. 78ff., 198-200). The employment of a professional slave army, usually in greater part Turkish, was taken over by the dynasties succeeding to the Saljuq heritage in Iran, such as the K̄vārazmšāhs and the Ghurids. The K̄vārazmšāhs' use of pagan Turkish troops recruited directly from the outer steppes contributed much to the shahs' unpopularity within Iran, for the historian Rāvandī states that their excesses were far worse than those of the Christian Georgians and Franks or of the infidel Qara Ketāy (*Rāḥat al-ṣodūr*, cited in Bosworth, op. cit., p. 183), while it was the Turkish slave troops of the Ghurids who retained their professional solidarity after the demise of the Ghurid sultanate in Afghanistan, and, as the Mo'ezzīya (thus named after the great Mo'ezz-al-Dīn or Šehāb-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Sām, 569-602/1173-1206) and as similar groups, set up in northern India various Muslim principalities, notably the line of so-called "Slave Kings" in Delhi.

The irruption of the Mongols brought a new set of military traditions into the Iranian world, primarily those of a tribal Mongol-Turkish cavalry army backed up by an impressed horde of local population as auxiliaries to be employed in sieges and as cannon fodder in general (see B. Spuler, *Mongolen*<sup>1</sup>, pp.413-19). But, like other steppe invaders, the Mongol Il-khanids were



gradually assimilated to the pervading culture and practices of Iran, and among their Turkmen epigones such as the Qara Qoyunlū and Āq Qoyunlū, the institution of the professional slave soldier reappears. Thus in an *‘arz-nāma* or description of a review of the army and administration (cf. *‘arz-Īw*, *dīvān-e*) of the Āq Qoyunlū sultan Uzun Ḥasan (857-82/1453-78) are mentioned 3,900 *qolloğčīs* or “servants,” who were clearly slave soldiers (V. Minorsky, “A Civil and Military Review in Fārs in 881/1476,” *BSOS* 10, 1939-42, pp. 155, 164),

Although the military basis of the theocratic Safavid state was originally the Qezelbāš (q.v.) tribal division of the eastern Anatolian and Azarbaijan Turkmen adherents of the Şafawīya Sufi order, their exclusive position as the troops upholding the régime was challenged when Shah Ṭahmāsb I (r. 930-84/1524-76) launched his four campaigns into the Caucasus region between 947/1540 and 960/1553, bringing back large numbers of Christian Georgian, Armenian, and Circassian prisoners as slaves (see H. H. Roemer, in *Camb. Hist. Iran* VI, pp. 245-46). These speedily became a rival force in the state to the Qezelbāš. Under Moḥammad Ḳodā-banda in 994/1586, a Georgian nobleman convert became *lala* or tutor to the prince Ṭahmāsb b. ‘Abbās, a position corresponding to that of the Saljuq atabeg and an office previously held by a Qezelbāš amir. With the advent of Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 996-1038/1588-1629), the new elements, converted to Islam at least nominally, were formally constituted as the royal household slaves, *ḡolāmān-e kāşşa-ye šarīfa* or *qūllar* (the parallel here in nomenclature with the Ottoman *qapı qulları* “slaves of the porte,” among whom were the famed Janissaries, is notable). These were either still in slave legal status or were the sons of slaves, were specially trained for military or civil palace duties, and received their pay directly from the royal treasury. It was obvious that their prime allegiance would be to the shah their master and that they could therefore be used, if occasion arose, as a rival force in the state against the Qezelbāš Turkmen, just as the Great Saljuqs had at times been compelled to use their professional troops against the Oghuz tribesmen. Shah ‘Abbās’s military *qūllar* served as mounted cavalymen, bearing muskets, although handguns had been used, on a limited scale, in the Safavid army since Ṭahmāsb’s time, very soon after the defeat of Čālderān (q.v.) at the hands of the Ottomans, with their superior firepower, and Shah ‘Abbās’s special corps of musketeers (*tofanğčīān*) seems to have been composed mainly of native Iranians. By 1006/1598, the Georgian Allāhverdī Khan could be appointed by the shah commander-in-chief of the Safavid forces (*sardār-e laşkar*, later *sepahsālār*), and he was followed by an Armenian *ḡolām*, Qaṛçaqay Khan (R. M. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*,



Cambridge, 1980, pp. 64-66, 78-82, 92, 184; Roemer, in *Camb. Hist. Iran* VI, pp.265-66; Savory, *ibid.*, pp. 363-65). Even during the decline of the Safavids in the later 17th century, Chardin numbered the military *ḡolāms* 10,000, and Tavernier assessed them at 18,000 (*Travels*, tr., London, 1684, I, pp, 224-25). According to the early 18th-century manual of Safavid administration, the *Taḏkerat al-molūk* of Mīrzā Samī'ā, for the whole body of *ḡolāmān*, headed by the influential *qūllar āḡāsī*, there was a special vizier and a special financial officer (*mostawfi*) of the department of the *ḡolāms* (*Tadhkirat al-Mulūk, a Manual of Ṣafavid Administration*, tr. Minorsky, GMS 16, London, 1943, introd. p. 33; tr. pp. 56-57, 73, comm. pp. 127-28, 141).

During the 19th century, slavery gradually disappeared in Iran, though *ḡolāms*, a considerable proportion of them Georgians, still formed the royal bodyguard under the Qajar Faḥ-'Alī Shah (r. 1797-1834); but, by the later part of his reign, the need was being felt for the formation of a modern professional army to withstand the encroachments on Persian territory of such powers as imperial Russia.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also, for the early period, Bosworth, "The Turks in the Islamic Lands up to the Mid-11th Century," separatim from the (so far unpublished) *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta* III, Wiesbaden, 1970, p. 20; *idem*, "Barbarian Incursions: The Coming of the Turks into the Islamic World," in *Islamic Civilisation 950-1150*, ed. D. S. Richards, Oxford, 1973, pp. 1-16; *idem*, "Ghulām. ii. Persia," in *EI*<sup>2</sup>.