

The Success of the Slave Market in Samanids Era

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Abstract

Before the modern time, slave and slavery was ever a part of reality in the human society in nearly all discovered world and all past time. Since this fact is hard to believe for the modern human, so talking about it and its different aspects such as sociology, economic and some theoretical aspects should be interesting. Since considering this subject with such a wide range of time and place is out of our brief article, so we limit our subject to that part which is a good criterion for the other parts. Whereas our proper time and place for this research is samanid's territory (great Khorasan including current Khorasan and Transoxiana), and third and fourth centuries, so the method of collecting data would mainly be based on library and documents and after explaining the case we try to analyze and classify the events and coming to a conclusion. At the end, the readers would be surprised by knowing that how the slaves' society transforms into Samanid's social and political system and even Baghdad caliphate organization and gradually they turn from the slaves of court into great general, The fact that gradually end to overturning of the samanids dynasty and succession of them by these previous slaves.

Key words: Slave, Samanids, Khorasan, Transoxiana

1. Introduction

There are various views and theories around slave trading and aside from their attraction for studying, pondering about the adventures and the events that have occurred and how the dealers do in this market has another attraction, because this market is the only market that merchant and merchandise are from one kind. About the first aspect of view in this research which is more theoretical than historical and has been the subject of various science like sociology, political science, laws, economy, philosophy, religious jurisprudence, Kalam (religious discourse), Hadis (prophets' words), ... and involves too many professional and long discussion is not the subject of this research and just with a short glance at it, the main course would be begun. Amongst the most serious researches in slave and slavery system are those which have been done in the countries belong to the eastern world. Development of communism ideas in the middle of 19th century and publishing the ideas of persons like Marx and Engels and stabilization of regimes with the base of communism principals lead to encourage and support the researchers in this field. In consequence of these policies a flood of various scientists, researchers and theorists encouraged to enter in this field. The five-part pattern of Marx main theory about the west historical path which passes from five stations (the first commune, slavery system, feudalism, capitalism and communism) made his followers and adherents to generalize his pattern to the all societies in order to universalize the theory.

In the other side and as a reaction to the danger of publication of these thoughts and ideas, the theoreticians of capitalism world did their best to answer and encounter with these ideas. In the middle of this field another group of people who are jurisprudent and spiritual leaders whether in Islam world or in Christianity and Judaism and the other religions, encounter with these two sides in order to defend of their beliefs. Apart from the accuracy or inaccuracy of the claims of each side of this campaign and the winning or failure of each side, history took the most advantages of these debates since it was exactly researched multilateral and minutely. Since talking about the object of study (slave trading) in all of the past time and all of the places is not considered and not possible in this short essay so we limit it to the time and place of Samanids reign.

It means the great Khorasan and third and fourth century(A.H)*. Choosing of this time and place is for some particular characters of this period. Among them:

1. Samanids dynasty is the first proportionally independent Iranian dynasty after Arabs invasion and penetration and stabilization of Islam in Iran.
2. According to the most sources, Samanids are descendants of Sasanids and are members of Bahram Choobin family¹, so they are inheritor of ancient Iranian culture too.
3. Third and fourth centuries (A.H) are the time that new religion, Islam, finally fixed firmly in great Khorasan (means present Khorasan and Transoxiana regions) where was Samanids territories.
4. Samanids rulers, with acceptance of Islam from one side and having ancient Iranian origin on the other side are a good sample for a composed culture and a new phenomenon called Iranian-Islamic factor.
5. Reviewing the events and the adventures of this period can provide us with a good criterion about the conditions of our object of study (slave trading) in the past times and specially the times after this period.
6. Something that makes studying slave trading in Samanids period more important is this fact that, finally arrival of slaves from different regions around of Iran to inside specially from the north lands of Transoxiana lead to developing a new reality called Turk factor in Iran history which affects deeply all the next periods up to now.

2. General Overview

Based on one of the prominent Russian orientalists, Petrushevsky, there were three main groups from those slaves living in Caliphate's land:

- A. Those who work inside homes, i.e., eunuchs, maids who were slept with them, maids who were brought in Harems; singers, composers, and dancers.
- B. Slaves who were appointed for producing, gardening, irrigating, animal husbandry and crafting, etc.
- C. Soldiers and sentry services from amongst young slaves that were bought from trades- people from different countries (more from Turks and less from Africans and Slavs) (Petrushevsky, 1977: pp. 27-28).

Slave trading was one of the beneficial activities in Samanidsera. The trading that involves many skills and it was regarded as a burdensome activity; however, there were so many factors to be focused on, in their transactions, as follows: Target markets, profit, risk-taking, starting point, destination, path, kinds of supplies, tastes of markets, pricing index, functions of various goods, sex, race, age, art, physical power, experience in war, bravery, creativity, ethics, color, health, elegance, beauty, mentality, profession, culture, climate compatibility, fertility, decency, originality, and so many other factors that they all formed the motivation and the desire to walk in this path. The author of Gaboosnameh, Onsor-almaali wrote on this:

If you buy a slave, take care since buying a human is a difficult science; there are so many fine slaves that in fact they are not if you look at them scientifically. Most of people would think, slave trading is like the other business. The fact that the knowledge of buying slave is like a philosophy was hidden for them. Anybody who buy something and has no knowledge about it would be a loser and when the matter is buying a human it would be more difficult because their arts and faults are too many. One bad point can cover many good points, at the same time; one good point can cover many bad points (Onsor-almaali, 1985: pp. 111-119).

Samanids who in fact were to pay tax or tribute (Kharaj) to Baghdad court, used these Turk slaves as a portion of tax and gifts. A part of khorasan's annually tax was 1012 slave (Maghdesi, 1982:pp: 2/498-499). Baghdad's Caliphs usually used these Turk slaves in their court. (Yaghoubi, 1968: p.29; Balazori, 1967:pp: 238-239; Ghodamat-ibne-Jafar, 1991: p. 141). Yaghoubi when was talking about how to construct Samerra city by Motasem (218-227) says:

Jafar Khoshaki informed me that Moetasem had sent him to Nooh-ibn-Asad in Samarghand for buying Turks in Mamoon period; and I had collected dozens of them for him every year till their number reached to 3000.

After Hejrat(departure) of prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Medina which is the beginning of Islamic calender

When it was his turn and the caliphate was in his hand (Moetasem) he looked for Turks more insistently and began to buy all the people's slave who lived in Baghdad. (Yaghoubi, *ibid*)

3. Traffic path

The promotion of Islam and the Iranian people's conversion to Islam, made central Asia and Caucasian areas the best slave resource. Non-Moslem Turk slaves had a good market in Abbasids period in Baghdad. Moreover war was not the only way for slave obtaining, it was also possible to buy slaves in non-war situations, because the Turk tribes in central Asia used to fight with each other and like black tribes in western Africa in 18th century used to sell the prisoners of war to Muslims. In this manner, central Asia provided slaves continually for the Caliphate system (Frye, 1969: pp. 166-167).

In Kharazm, there are not any gold and silver mine and the other jewels as well. Most of their possessions were from trading with the Turks and training beasts; most of slaves from Khazar, Saghlab² and the near area and Turk slaves as well are sold by them. (Estakhri, 1968: pp. 238-239; Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: p. 210). Nearly one third of what is now called Eastern Europe and most of Asian steppes were under the direct control of Khazars or one of their dependent states. The large territories of Khazars separated Byzantine Empire with that of caliphate. Nevertheless, they didn't lean on none of them. They were as a main fender between Byzantine's goals towards east and Abbasid Caliphate's advances towards west. (Wolf & Zolitor, 2002: p.1). the Khazars had become a major power in Caucasian steppes for about 300 years from the middle of 7th to 10th century (A.d) / 1st to 4th (A.H). They had a main role in business between this area and Islamic world especially Iran (Gabriel, 1999: p. 39).

Khazar's slaves are from their idolaters who sell their children and each other as a slave and this is permissible in their customs and religion, but for their Jews and Christians it is forbidden in their religion. (Estakhri, 1968: p.180; Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: p. 135)³

Slav slaves (Saghalabe) who were taken from central and eastern Europe were passed through Khazar's lands via the lower Volga. In the city called Etel were to pay tax for them. Then they were taken to Darband and Arminie by land and to Tabarestan, Ray and Baghdad by sea. One other part of Saghalabe was taken to Kharazm via Bulgaria land and after passing through Bulgar city (in confluence of Volga and Kama rivers) and desert. Kharazm was under the rule of Samanids and the city called Gorganj in there was of the greatest slave markets in Transoxiana. A part of mass amount of Samanids' coins (Derham) which have been found along the Russian rivers used to pay for slaves' price and indicates to flourishing in this market in that era. These slaves were taken from Kharazm to Iran, Iraq and other parts of Islam world. (Iumbard, 261).

According to professor Thomas. S.ronan, the famous specialist in Vikings' history and numismatology, Islamic Derhams was the Scandinavian people's main motive towards east. Silver had a good market in their exchanges. In fact since they had no native precious metals resources in north forest, so began to seek for Iranian-Islamic Derhams in very large scales. Because of large amount of silver resources in Hindu kush region, Samanids government could mint adequate coins, the coins that Scandinavian residents were very interested in them. In 4th century the number of coins reached to Scandinavian areas increased amazingly. (Gabriel, 1999: 39) About 100,000 Derhams which most of them are related to the years 288 to 422 (A.H) have been found just in Sweden. Hundreds other cases have been found in all over Scandinavia, Baltic countries and Russia (id.42) 4000 Iranian-Islamic coins have been found in Denmark, most of them are Samanids' Derhams although there are some Abbasids' coins among them (Boisen, 1964: 38)

Saghlab's slaves (Slav slaves) were brought mostly from Bulgar city where was capital of Bulgarian settled around Volga and the other parts up to Oxusarea. The greatest market for these slaves was Samarghand where the best slaves were trained there. Samarghand's people were very luxurious and more than all of the Khorasan's people used to think to their appearance. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 221-222) "Samarghandian Turks" is a famous expression especially in Hafez poetry that indicates to these female slaves trained in Samarghand and the word "Turk" in Persian literature has a vast meaning, by the Way in a fragment of a song from Ein-Al-Ghozat Hamedani indicates to Bulgarian as charming pretty girls. "Chegels' moon, Khata and khotan's Turks" are also another current expression in Persian literature, and all are understandable if we know and pay attention to the origin of these female slaves or beardless slaves that was mainly Eastern Europe and Transoxiana.

Some part of these war prisoners were as a result of wars and plunders that made purposely by Kharazmian in Bulgaria and Slav lands and made them slave after capturing. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 133) These slaves contrary to those Slav slaves who were entered to Andalusia (Spain in Islamic period) and at the moment of entrance were castrated by Jewish merchants, were remained safe in their virility. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 110) As the writer of Hodood-Al-Alam says, some places like Espijab and Farghane were the gate of Turkestan and counted as the borderline between Moslem settled regions and Turkestan and at that time had been changed to great markets for slave selling who were obtained as result of Moslems' constant holy war in blasphemy lands. (Maghdesi, 1982: 2/477; 382-383; Hodood-Al-Alam, 1961: 112) Slaves had been brought to Transoxiana first and then rest of them to other places and no slave is like Turk. (Estakhri, 1968: 227) In some places like Khottalan and Choghanian whose residents were called Komijian used to buy and sell slave. (Hodood-Al-aAlam, 1961: 120) There were some places near to Khotal and Vakhsh like Vakhsh and Safineh where both were settled by pagans and these slaves were probably brought from there. (Estakhri, 1968: 233; Ibne-Khordadbeh, 1992: 32-33) Transoxiana's slaves are from Turks who settled around Transoxiana and in this region slaves are more than necessary so taken to the other parts.

Slaves from those parts are better, more beautiful and more expensive than the other parts. Samarghand is central of Transoxiana and the best slaves of this area are trained in there. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 195, 221) Ghoor is a mountainous region and all around it are Moslem settled areas, but they are pagan, most of Ghoor's slaves were taken to Harat and Sistan and the slaves from Ghoor's mountains, taken to Khorasan (Estahri, 1968: 220; Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 178-179; Hodood-Al-Alam, 1961: 101) Apart from pagan settled areas around Transoxiana, they used to take slaves from mountainous areas of Deilam. (Today: Gilan) The people of Deilam in Islam era were most in blasphemy and were taken as slave by Moslem and finally in the time of Hasan-Ibn-Zeid and with his effort they converted to Islam and became Alavi. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 119)

4. Slaves' main group

As it was said slaves were used for work either in palaces and homes (house-slaves) or in agriculture, animal husbandry and crafting (labor slaves) or for military duties (soldier slaves).

4.1. House-slaves

Samanids' princes usually used of those slaves and slave girls in their court who were skilled in play musical instruments or in song⁴, likewise it was a custom in caliphs' court and even in their relatives and their commanders of a division, more ever some of these precious slave girls got married with them and some of future princes were of their descendants. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 185, 198) White skinned or aristocrat's slaves were more expensive than every other color skinned, so that a white slave girl who was just pretty and had no skill would cost 1000 Dinars or more. (Estakhri, 1968: 48) especially while west borders were closed in 4th century and slave transportation from Andalusia discontinued. this caused increasing in price of white skinned slave girls, because the only rest source were Byzantium and Armenia and also supply from there were with parsimony. (Adam Metez, 1983: 187) Aside from these conditions, Turkish slaves who were entered into Transoxiana and khorasan from around regions were more expensive and precious. (Estakhri, 1968: 221, 227)

Ibne-Hoghal says:

The most expensive slave is from Turkish lands who is unique in all around the world and no slave is as well as him in price and beauty. I have seen several numbers of slaves who were sold 3000 Dinars in Khorasan. The price of a Turkish slave girl reaches to 3000 Dinars and I have never seen in all around the world a Roman slave girl or a bringing forth girl with such a high price and so has been never heard unless she has a musical instrument and be an expert in play music and there are a lots of such a people in the house of Samanids and the great and the heads of Khorasanians. (Ibne-Hoghal, 1966: 185)

Slave transmission from Samanids' territory followed some regulations. In Transoxiana slave passage from Oxus river was forbidden except with state permission and for each slave should be paid 70 to 100 Derhams as transit fee, and for Turkish slave girls as well but for non-Turkish slave girls it was about 20-30 Derhams. (Maghdesi, 1982: 2/498-499)

4.2. Labor slaves

Most of slaves who escaped were from those who were exploited in farms, as the only slaves' rebellion in third century and in the reign of Mo'atamed (Abbasid's caliph 256-279 A.H) and with the leadership of a person who were called Saheb-Al-Zanj, was the rebellion of Zanzibar slaves (black slaves) who worked in salt marshes and stony places and prepared soil for cultivation. Wretchedly work of slaves in Basreh is reputed and thousands of them were suffering from unbearable work in the brooks of Basreh. (Metez, 1983: 196; Eghbal, 2006:95)All over of Islamic regions were full of escaped slaves during 4th century and the first thing which was written on the appointment order of the governors was arresting the escaped slaves as much as possible and give back them to their owners.(Metez, 1983:195)It is said that Nazook, the head of Baghdad police, drove his slave off. The slave had no place to go and finally referred to a pious man who used to write letters of recommendation and asked him for writing a recommendation letter to his lord. On the other hand Nazook repented and send his men to look for him. They found him. Slave told his story but Nazook could not believe until decided to ask that pious man and what he said was what the slave said: " Salve came to me and said that he was a poor thrall and had no place to go for such a days that his lord drive him off. He paid me one Derham [for writing the letter] and I couldn't stop my tears for his situation." Nazook eyes became tearful but controlled himself and forgave his slave.(AlfarajBa'adasheddah, 1/53-54 quoted from Metez, 1983: 195-196)Petrushevsky believes that in the cities of the caliphate land, like free craftsmen who worked in some institutions like workshops [guilds] There were slave craftsmen who had to pay tribute (Zaribah) to his lord which mustn't be less than one Derham for each day. (Petrushevsky, 1977: 32, quoted from Masoodi: 4/225-227)

4.3. Soldiers and sentry services

In all of the times Turkish troops were preferred to the others. Caliphs always select Turkish soldiers because good servicing, obedience, warfare and loyalty were in their nature. [Estakhri, 1968: 229-230; Ibne-Hoghal 1966: 198]Nezam-Al-Molk in his book, Siasatnameh, has explained with the details the best method of slave training in Samanids period. He writes:

If somebody bought a slave, he would command him to be in his service dismountly (without use any hours) for one year and with poor dress. This slave was not permitted to ride a horse either obviously or hidden during this year and if he did he would be punished. After one year if he became sure he would tell his chamberlain to give him a Turkish horse with a rawhide saddle and cheap bridle and strap. While he served him for another one year with horse and lash, for third year he would be given a wraparound to wind round his waist and for next year And each year his dignity, luxuriance and status would increase until he became the head of horsemen and then chamberlain if his sufficiency and art were verified in all the fields and if he could manage jobs and was sociable and obedient then until he hadn't been 35 years old he would not be given the command of a troops, and nomination for a province(Nezam-Al-Molk, 1965: 122-123)

Every year slave would learn a new duty and lesson like cupbearer and dress keeper duties and if he was expert and capable it was possible to give him the command of division of an army and after that promote him to chamberlain of the court. The highest level was the rule of a province which would give to it's owner a vast independence. There is no evidence to prove the existence of a special school for slaves with an organized method but this same disorganized method would lead to make Turkish slaves capable leaders for official organization and also for army.(frye,1969: 169)It looks in Taherids periods in Neyshabour Turks had not yet been successful neither in court nor in army. Ismaeil (the first of Samanids) had a large number of young slaves in his army but probably they were not exclusively from Turks. (Id: 168)In the period of Ahmad, the son and successor of Ismaeil, a large number of Turks enter in loyal guard system. (Ibid)Samanids' princes had organized assemblage of Turkish slaves and used to choose their body guard from them (Estakhri, 1968: 229-230)There is no doubt that except Turks there were a large number of slaves from Iranians, Armenians, Greeks and Africans and slavery of all non-Moslem nations was legal but all of them except Turks transmuted in Islamic culture but Turks preserved their genuine.In fact the direction of history was with them and they did their best in occasional situation but Indians, Africans and other slaves remained in their slavery position and never organized a certain group.Therefore Turkish military slaves organized a certain guild which was called Turk guild (slave-militaries) and this same formal organization is observable.

In fact this organization was that concept which provided government and empire for Turks. (Frye, 1969: 170-171) In the subsequent steps it is seen that persons like Baktoozoon, Faeghkhasse, Tash, Aleptakin and Saboktakin and ... gradually increased their influence in court and army and even reached to high governmental ranks like great chamberlain and commander-in-chief. Aleptakin who was a Turkish slave were bought by Ahmad (the second in Samanids' dynasty) and after Ahmad served his son, Nasr. In the reign of first AbdolMalek promoted to great chamberlain position and that who killed Bakr-ibn-malek, the Samanids' commander-in-chief, in 345(A.H) in Bukhara is he. In 349(A.H) promoted to Samanids' commander-in-chief and Khorasan's government and finally founded his own government in Ghazne and became independent from Samanids. His substitutes even went more a head and with the coworking of local powers like Afrasiabids overthrew Samanids' government and Saboktakin and his son, Mahmood, themselves founded a new dynasty (ghaznavids). (Eghbal, 2006: 221-222)

5. Conclusion

Samanids social base (city dwelling) limited them providing their military needs and for resolving this problem they began to buy Asian and European slaves in market, on the other side Abbasids were in the same situation because of tribal competition to obtain political and military power. As a result of increasing in slave demand, slave trading had become a flourishing business. In Iran's dynasties after Islam, especially Samanids, slave-military guilds have always had particular roll both in militarism and political affairs. Causing Competition and variety in troopers, mistrust in natives and racial-tribal relatives, using their warfare abilities, and this view that they are more obedient because of lack of social relationship, were the most basic reasons which made political systems to choose slave-militaries. In some cases amongst these military slaves, some potential and bold ones would rise that contrary to their hard conditions promoted their ranks in military and policy very fast and in some other cases they would even success to found a new dynasty themselves and overthrow the dynasty which they had risen in it from a simple slave.

Endnotes

1. Narshakhi, Bokhara history, 1984: 82; Ibne-Hoghal, Sourat-Al-Ardh, 1966:198 & 201; Maghdesi, Ahsan-Al-Taghasim, 1982: 2/ 494; Hodood-Al-Alam, 1961: 89; Estakhri, 1968:125 & 230; Feray, Bokhara as a result of middle centuries, 1969: 71; Frye, Golden age of Iran's culture, 1984: 217; Eghbal, Iran's history, 2006: 195;

2. The word "slave" in Europe is an adaptation of this people. It means "esclave" in French and "slave" in English. In Aalam, Almonjad writes: Saghalabe were divided in two kinds: northern (Russian, white Russian and Bolognese) and southern (Serbian, Croatian, Slovakian and Bulgarian) (15th edition, p 306)

3. Adam Metez says about this:

"Using of slaves by Jews, Moslem and Christian was current, although church conscience expressed occasionally dissatisfaction of this act and church dignitaries would say Christ did not make any distinction between slave and free and at least church via deprivation slave sellers from allegiance ceremony opposed with this trade. It was interesting for Moslems that having sex with slave girls is forbidden for Jews and Christians. Metez then quotes from ZaraeYaghoob, an Ethiopian (Abyssinian) thinker, (1600 A.D.) in evaluation of Islam and Christianity: in Christianity all of the people are God's sons but formalizing slave trading in Islam has dispersed brotherhood and equality. (Quoted from Al laal, a handwritten manuscript in Berlin with number 8327, p 206B)"

4. Considering that Islamic society among different kinds of arts paid more attention to the good poem and nice music, the price of slaves and slave girls who were talented and trained in song and musical instruments rose very much so that in the reign of Haroon al Rashid, a famous musical performer had 80 students of slave girls that each of them cost 1000 -2000 Dinars after the end of this course. (Al Aghani, 5/6) the house of slave girl sellers was the place where poets were present. (Al Aghani; 20/ 43)

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