

(Bookreview)

SLAVE SOLDIERS AND ISLAM: THE GENESIS OF A MILITARY SYSTEM

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By Daniel Pipes, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
1981. XX+246 pp.

This book, based on a doctoral dissertation submitted in May 1978 to Harvard University, consists of an introduction (XIII-XVII), two parts, of three chapters each (1-194) five appendixes (195-214), glossary (215-217) selected bibliography (219-231) and an index (233-246).

First of all, Part I, titled The Islamicate Context, places military slavery in its general Islamicate context. Here, the author indicates that Islamicate life was continuously changing, both over time and space. In the case of military slavery, this means that it had different functions in ninth-century Iran, eleventh-century Egypt, thirteenth century India and so on. At various times and in various places, slave soldiers served their masters as bodyguards and elite troops, infantry and cavalry, political agents and provincial governors. Later rulers had different needs from those who first developed the institution and adapted it to achieve their purposes. (p.3)

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The first part of this book, consists of three chapters. The first chapter, titled What is a Military Slave?, defines the military slave and shows how distinct he is from other types of slaves. He defines a military slave as a person of slave origins who is acquired in a systematic way, trained for military service, and spends most of his life as a professional soldier. (p.5)

Here, there aroused the two most common questions concerning him. These are: what distinguishes him from other slaves, and is he a "true" slave?

As far as the differences from other slaves are concerned, in contrast to all other slaves, the military slave devotes his life to military service. His characteristic features derive from the fact that he works as a soldier. From the time he is acquired until his retirement, he lives differently from other slaves, for he participates in a lifelong system with its own rules and rationale. Specifically, he differs from two other kinds of slaves: *ordinary slaves* who happen to fight and *government slaves*. (p.6)

Ordinary slaves who are the ones in domestic service or labor at some economically productive tasks. Such slaves do happen to fight occasionally. (p.6)

When one compare both of them, these differences may be observed:

1. While acquisition of an ordinary slave depends on primarily economic reasons, acquisition of military slave depends on military considerations.

2. Matter of selection: they should have military potential, be youths of noble origins.

3. For the military slave, training program is the most important factor. The program lasts about five to eight years and has a twofold purpose: to develop skills and to imbue loyalty. (pp.7-9)

As far as the comparison with the government slaves, it may be pointed out that whereas the government slaves are chosen from among the ruler's servants military slaves are soldiers. Secondly,

government slaves cannot, build up a power base of their own and almost never threaten their master; military slaves, however, can develop such a base from within their own corps and use it to stand up to the ruler. (p.12)

On the question of whether he is a true slave, the author presents the ideas of some scholars. For instance, H.A.R. Gibb and H.Bowen imply that military slaves were slaves. B.Papoulia also finds them real slaves. On the other hand, some scholars refer to them as mercenaries. Only one scholar, M.A.Shaban, argues that military slaves are not slaves in any sense, especially in the early period of Islam. (p.14)

At the end of this chapter, he finalizes that the military slave alone is carefully selected, purposely acquired as a youth, trained and indoctrinated, then employed as a professional soldier. He joins the ruling elite and belongs to a corps of soldiers which can seize power under the right circumstances. Yet, despite these many differences between him and other kinds of slaves, he remains a true slave as long as his master controls him. One must not dismiss his slavery as a formality or as legal fiction. (p. 23)

At the second chapter, titled Slaves in War: The Historical Record, he moves on to the question when and where the military slave did exist. Since the military slavery did not exist in early Islam, he draws on examples of ordinary slaves in warfare not just from outside Islamdom but from the first two centuries of Muslim history. In this context, he tries to outline the ways in which ordinary and military slaves were used.

According to him in peacetime ordinary slaves worked at nonmilitary occupations as personal retainers, domestic servants, plantation workers and engaged in warfare only by chance when every able body was needed. (p.25)

However, the master's fear of a slave was the most important deterrent to using his slaves in battle. The slaveowner rarely treated his slaves so well that he could expect their loyalty in combat. Yet the record shows that when slaves fought, they did

so with vigor and neither mutinied nor deserted to the enemy. Rather than make trouble, slaves generally helped their masters in war to the best of their abilities. (pp.26-27) But since most masters thought that slaves had no military skills and feared their mutiny or desertion, few ordinary slaves were enlisted into the army itself. Most slaves filled noncombatant positions; sometimes they served as auxillary soldiers, but it usually required an emergency to induce rulers to enroll slaves within the army itself. (p.31) However, helpful ordinary slaves could be in battle, they had limited functions; they never constituted the mainstay of an army. For that they had to be trained professional soldiers, in other words, *military slaves*, (p.35)

According to him, slaves occasionally fought in an organized way for non-Muslim masters. This occurred in Muscovy, China, West Africa, the West Indies, the United States South and Cameroon. (p.36)

However, inside Islamdom, for a full millennium, from the early 3rd/9th century until the early 13th/19th, Muslims regularly and deliberately employed slaves as soldiers. This occurred through nearly the whole Islamdom, from Central Africa to Central Asia, from Spain to Bengal, and perhaps beyond. They served both as soldiers and as officers, then often acquired preeminent roles in administration, politics, and all aspects of public affairs. (pp.45-46)

He mentions the dynasties which used military slaves. These are Abbasids, Spanish Umayyads, Buyids, Fatimids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks, Almoravids and Almohads, Ayyubids, Delhi Sultanate, Hafsids, Mamluks, Ottomans, Safavids, Sharifs of Morocco and Mughals (pp.46-50)

As a conclusion, he points out that **in contrast to the erratic employment of slaves as soldiers by non-Muslims, military slavery in Islamdom served as a nearly universal tool of statecraft. Elsewhere, slaves fought as emergency forces, personal retainers, auxiliaries, or cannon fodder; only Muslims used them in large numbers on a regular basis as professional**

soldiers, Muslims alone chose to recruit soldiers through enslavement. (p.53)

In the chapter three, titled An Explanation of Military Slavery, he seeks to account for the two basic facts of military slavery: that it existed at all and that it occurred only in Islamdom. Why would anyone choose to recruit soldiers as slaves? Why did Muslims alone in fact do so?

In order to answer these questions, he makes a connection to Islam. He points out that Islam lay behind the existence of this institution. On the other hand, before inquiring the role of Islam, he considers other possible factors for the existence of military slavery. And of the alternatives, three stand out: climate, Turks and the stirrup. (p.54)

Were military slavery related to climate, we would expect it to have in only the regions of dry heat such as Spain and Northeast India; but it did not. Furthermore, military slavery occurred also in wetter areas such as southern and eastern India.

Secondly, Turks are often associated with military slavery. But military slavery did not exist among Turks outside of Islamdom and no Turks were present in early 3rd/9th century Spain. Later, too, sub-Saharan dynasties made extensive use of slave soldiers, and almost none of them were Turks. Thus, Turks correlate much less clearly with military slavery than does Islam.

The stirrup which makes the horseman comfortable and use horse properly offers a much better reason for military slavery. The introduction of the stirrup enhanced the power of the peoples living where horses could be raised - primarily in steppe lands and in deserts- and reduced the strength of peoples living in densely inhabited areas, especially cities. By making horses more important to warfare, the stirrup redistributed power from civilized to barbarian peoples. (pp.55-57)

If we accept this reasoning then military slavery appears to be an answer by the civilized centers to the predations of the horse

barbarians, and military slavery can be understood as a response to the shift in military balance caused by the stirrup. (p.57)

However, this answers why military slavery did not exist before Islam and also explains why so many of the slave soldiers came from steppe and desert regions. If it was the decisive factor, why, then, did the other nonhorse-breeding areas not also develop military slavery? Furthermore, many military slaves were foot soldiers (p.58)

Then, military slavery may have been connected to the religion or the civilization of Islam. According to him, it is not Islamic, it has no religious sanction and it is not even unambiguously legal. Then, if not Islamic, is it Islamicate? Islamicate elements are not an outgrowth of Islamic religion and law, yet are integral to Muslim life. (p.59)

According to Pipes, military slavery must have been connected to the civilization of Islam. The reason why only Muslims established military slavery lies deeper, in the nature of Islamic political ideals and their effect on the actual conducting of politics. (p.62)

In that case, why did Muslim subjects relinquish power? Concerning this matter, the first question which should be answered is that what Islamicate reasons caused Muslims alone regularly to recruit their soldiers as slaves? What uniquely Islamicate pattern caused military slavery to come into existence? (p.62)

He argues that Islam has the political and military ideals. Three Arabic words may be used to sum up these ideals. Umma, Caliphate and Jihad. (p.64)

In reality, with the exception of jihad, other factors did not work well for bringing the Muslims together. There were always some troubles and Muslim subjects, not all of them, responded to troublesome realities by withdrawing from politics and warfare. (p.69) Muslim subjects avoided armies even more than governments and administrators. (p.71) They were principally

interested in leading the good life and much less in who administrated it? (p.73)

Who then, staffed Islamicate armies? Withdrawal by Muslim subjects created a power vacuum which opened Islamicate public life to domination by others, that is, the people coming from marginal areas such as the steppes, deserts, mountains and forests. (p.75)

On the other hand, while steppe, desert and mountain soldiers provided a source of great power, they had their own particular drawbacks. However mightily they began, they rapidly became unreliable after conquering a government area. They became undependable and had to be replaced with fresh soldiers. (p.81)

When a ruler decided to recruit soldiers from marginal areas to replenish his armed forces, he had three means through which to acquire them: alliance, pay or enslavement. The author himself argues that rulers preferred slaves to either mercenaries or allies. (p.86)

As far as the reasons for this preference or the benefits of military slavery are concerned, he points out some facts as follows:

1. Military slaves were usually procured as children and this facilitated their acquisition.

2. Enslavement gave access to a wide variety of nationalities and this provided army with a beneficial diversity of troops, as they often brought with them the special skills of their own peoples. (p.87)

3. By enslaving his recruits, the Muslim ruler could choose his soldiers man for man. They came singly. The government could select its slaves carefully. (p.88)

4. The master was able to isolate his slaves. He took them from their homelands to a strange country and cut them off from the rest of the society. They had no choice but to accept the ties provided them and to become loyal to him. (p.90)

5. They could also be kept unmarried. In return for receiving their entire income in salary from the ruler, the slaves served him all year round as a standing army.

6. Military slaves fell far more completely under the cultural influence of the polity than their free rivals.

7. The years of training distinguished the military slave and determined his future career. He entered training a young and isolated boy and emerged a highly skilled, disciplined, and well-connected soldier. (p.91)

As a conclusion, he suggests that military slavery existed only in Islamdom because of the fact that it provided a most effective way for governments to acquire and control marginal area soldiers; and Muslim rulers developed it because their own subjects withdrew from public life and would not fight for them. (p.99)

The second part of this book, titled Origins and consisted of the chapter 4.5 and 6, searches out the first instance of military slavery and explains its occurrence.

The chapter four, titled The Unfree in Muslim Warfare, 2-205/624-820, documents the Muslim use of unfree persons in war from the Prophet Muhammad's time until 205/820, establishing that they fought frequently.

al-Mu'tasim's name is universally associated with military slavery. (p.107) However, according to Pipes, unfree soldiers (slaves and mawlas) fought for Islam from the first battle, and 8% of the total Muslim combatants at Badr was Mawlas. (p.110) At the close of the Ridda Wars, during the time between 13/634 and 64/684 the unfree soldiers remained minor for two generations. (p.113) At the time of Marwanids, 64-132/684-750, when Muwiya II died and the civil war advented the first large-scale of unfree soldiers entered into Muslim armies. They continued to fight often and in large numbers through the Marwanid period both against Muslims and non-Muslims until the Abbasids tookover in 132/750. (p.117)

They also fought for the Abbasids. Abu Muslim was the outstanding mawla figure in the Abbasid movement; as the military and political tactician of their rise to power. (pp.131-132)

The chapter five, titled The First Military System, argues that their first appearance came not before 198-205/814-820 and analyzes the available information on them in this period.

According to Pipes, the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur made unprecedented efforts to purchase slaves and mawlas. The caliphs who ruled between al-Mansur and al-Ma'mun must also have collected slaves, but the sources say almost nothing about this. (pp.144-145) Al-Ma'mun and al-Mu'tasim, 198-227/813-842, undertook to acquire slaves in systematic and large-scale manner unrelated to anything that preceded them. The majority of slaves came from Central Asia, though some also came from Egypt. (p.146) These two caliphs dropped Arabians from the Military Register (*Diwan al-Jund*) and simultaneously entered Turks onto it for the first time (p.150)

As far as the matter of which caliph developed military slavery, many accounts note that al-Ma'mun acquired Turkish slaves. More important, some make an explicit connection between practices that al-Ma'mun initiated and al-Mu'tasim's imitation of him. (p.152) Then al-Mansur was the first to acquire the Turks intentionally, al-Ma'mun the first to use them in large numbers, and al-Mu'tasim the first to depend on them heavily. (p.153)

The chapter six, titled How Military Slavery First Occurred explains how this initial development of military slavery occurred.

Pipes argues that the Arabian conquerors of the 1st/7-8th centuries were the tribally organized army. However, the tribal organizations of the armies that carried out the great conquests and its preservation through the Military Register meant that the central government did not control its army. This led to unusual developments when the time came to recruit new soldiers (pp.167-168).

As marginal area soldiers par excellence, Arabians rapidly became unreliable about 64/684. (p.168) So, non-Arabians enrolled as mawlas, most of them were Muslims. (p.170) Slaves and mawlas acquired military significance in the Marwanid era by providing needed extra manpower to the armies of the time.(p.172)

To sum up, the first time Muslim rulers needed to replace unreliable marginal area soldiers, they turned to their outsider subjects and recruited them as mawlas. The second time this need arose, the authorities established the pattern which was to be followed for a millennium: they went beyond their domains and recruited marginal area soldiers as slaves (pp.173-174)

Until the time of al-Ma'mun, in the Abbasid army there have been some weakness and finally at the close of the civil war, al-Ma'mun found himself in the following circumstances: despite his conquest of western Iran, the strong animosity of the populace of Baghdad and its region toward al-Ma'mun indeed him to stay in the east. (p.180)

After his victory in the civil war, al-Ma'mun had even less control over his army than previously. He saw the descendants of earlier marginal area soldiers collapse when fighting for al-Amin. Whatever other reasons he might have had for seeking out new troops, the experience of the civil war confirmed this undertaking. For the second time in Islamic history, a Muslim ruler needed fresh marginal area soldiers. Having just beaten the old soldiers in a civil war, al-Ma'mun was well placed to recruit whomever he chose; and living in Khurasan, he had easy access to large numbers of the finest marginal area soldiers (pp.180-181)

As a conclusion, **Daniel Pipes says that this explanation for the origins of military slavery confirms the arguments for its Islamicate rationale proposed in chapter 3. Briefly, that rationale maintains: (1) that the impossibility of attaining Islamic public ideals caused Muslim subjects to relinquish their military role;(2) that marginal area soldiers filled this**

power vacuum; (3) that they became rapidly unreliable, creating the need for fresh marginal area soldiers and a way to bind them; (4) that military slavery supplied a way both to acquire and to control new marginal area soldiers (p.193)

In the first development of military slavery, the following sequence occurred. (1) Muslim subjects in the Fertile Crescent and Iran had withdrawn from public affairs by the end of the 2nd/8th century, a consequence of their disappointment with Abbasid rule (and possibly because Muslims had become a large portion of the population). (2) Some or many of the Abbasid military supporters from Khurasan were marginal area soldiers (3) The descendants of these soldiers had grown unreilable by the 190/810s, as is shown by the poor show they made in fighting for al-Amin against al-Ma'mun. al-Ma'mun needed new sources of marginal area soldiers and a way to control them. (4) Military slavery fulfilled both these needs.

Once the institution of military slavery had been established, it acquired a momentum of its own and became available to rulers and dynasties with diverse needs. Mainly it spread because Muslim rulers, under the restriction of unattainable Islamic ideals, needed some way to acquire and control outsider soldiers from marginal areas. Military slavery developed early and remained a basic institution of premodern Islamicate public life. It did not arise as a result of accidental features of Abbasid history; much less was it the result of al-Ma'mun's personal decision. Rather, it came into existence and took hold in response to fundamental facts of Islamicate life. Military slavery was an institution implicit in the Islamicate order; the Abbasids (and probably the Spanish Umayyads as well), with the Marwanid model before them, resorted to it naturally. (pp.193-194)