

Slavery and Slave Prices in the Crimean Khanate (According to Islamic Court Registers)

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Abstract

Before the appearance of the Crimean Khanate, the Latin Kingdoms, the Byzantine Empire and the Russians as well had slave markets on the Black Sea shores and in the north of the Black Sea for a long time. In other words, when the Crimean Khanate became a major actor in the aforementioned part of the world, it came into possession of the slave markets which preceding civilizations had already created. Therefore, the Crimean Tatars made use of economic benefits of slave markets and the high profit of slave trade attracted the khanate. Especially, the difficulty of the Ottomans in obtaining slaves due to the end of the Ottoman frontier raids encouraged the Crimean Tatars. Thereafter, they became a major actor of slave trade.

The inheritance (*tereke*) records and some tittle deeds (*hüccets*) of the Islamic court registers (*şer'iye sicilleri*) of the Crimean Khanate speak of slaves and concubines. The records about the need for and use of slave labor, commercial relations and disputes due to buying and selling of slaves, and emancipation of slaves show the significance of slavery in social and economic life of the Crimean Khanate. This study aims to shed light on slave prices and the place of slavery in the economic structure of the Crimean Khanate.

Keywords: Crimean Khanate, Ottoman Empire, Crimean Peninsula, Slave

Introduction

It is possible to state that just as other pre-modern states, the khanate was largely depended on farming, animal husbandry and some manufacturing and services. However, in addition to these economic activities, the Crimean Tatars had important financial

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resources from plundering and slave-capturing raids.¹ Therefore, it should be accepted that never-ending raids of the Crimean Khanate had also economic motives given that slaves captured in the raids were economically much valuable than other spoils. For example, a young and beautiful maiden was as valuable as a real estate, or a physically strong male slave could be sold at a very high price.

Therefore, the increasing need of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and then the Ottoman Empire for slave labor led the Crimean Tatars to organize plunder raids into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Muscovy, Ukraine and the Caucasus. The Crimean Tatars took their captives to slave markets. In 1649, the Muscovite ruler Aleksei collected tax from his subjects in order to ransom captives from the Crimean Khanate.² As raids had a very devastating effect on Poland-Lithuania and Muscovy, they complained to the Ottoman sultans about the Crimean Khanate and even paid regular taxes to the khans in order to convince them to stop the raids.

There are also records in the Crimean court registers that the Tatars borrowed or rented horses in order to bring much spoils from raids. It was important for the khanate and the troops to return from raids with a large amount of spoils. If the booty was plenty, the demand for another raid was also high. In relation to this, when the Ottoman Empire requested the Crimean Khanate to participate in the Iranian campaign, some Crimean Tatar tribes refused to join the campaign allegedly because of distance and a possible failure to extract adequate booty.

¹ Halil İnalçık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarihi*, Translate: Halil Bertkay, I, İstanbul 2001, p. 341.

² Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, Hoover Institution Press, California 1978, p. 28.

Slavery and the Status of Slaves

The terms for slaves recorded in the Crimean court registers were “cariye”, “kalmuk cariye”, “cariye çocuğu”, “erkek köle”, “Çerkes kızı”, “Çengi kızı”, “Kazak” (for a male slave), “cura” (for an old Cossack slave), “düke³” ve “gulam” (for a little female slave).

As many pre-modern states, both the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire were largely dependent on slave labor in order to meet the need for workforce and increase the profits of enterprises.⁴ Therefore, for Crimea and all urban centers belonged to Crimea, slavery is a means of great monetary gain and an element of important economic activity.⁵ The slave is a kind of asset, which is bought and sold like goods. At the same time, slaves are primarily obtained by maintaining children born to slaves continue their life as slaves, seizing captives during a war, and purchasing captives from their owners.⁶ In his accounts, the seventeenth century Ottoman traveler Evliya Chelebi speaks of slaves and their families in Crimea. In his words, there were sixteen hundred villages and six thousand farms in the Crimean peninsula, whose circumference is seven hundred seventy miles. Of all these villages, a total of one hundred thousand troops and of the farms twenty-six thousand troops could be collected, whereas forty thousand troops were mobilized at the time of campaign. However, if the khan ordered, sixty thousand Tatars

³ Bahçesaray Şeriye Sicilleri (Thereafter B.Ş.S.), 34/97a-1.

⁴ V. E. Sroëçkovskiy, Muhammed Geray Han ve Vasalları “Kırım Tarihi”, Translated by Kemal Ortaylı, Su Yayınları, İstanbul 1979, p. 27, 45.

⁵ Sroëçkovskiy, op. cit., pp. 45-47 emphasizes that the economic wealth of the Crimean nobles was primarily based on the slave labor and everyone had more than one slave. In addition, it was pointed out that not only the slave merchants but also the khanate extracted significant income in the slave market of Kefe.

⁶ Karasu Şeriye Sicilleri (Thereafter K.Ş.S) 25-39a-396 recounts a dispute that a slave was bought at 55 golden coin (*altun*), but after the sale, his or her abdomen was bled. There are many court records speaking of disputes about problems emerged during or after the sale of slaves.

went to war and the rest stayed in Crimea because there were certainly four hundred thousand Cossack captives in the peninsula. The Cossack captives also had their four hundred thousand wives and their three thousand boys called “*kopna*” and daughters. Besides, there were twenty thousand Greek, Armenian and Jewish infidels, however the khanate did not have European or Hungarian subjects. Evliya Chelebi continues that since there were so many Cossack captives in Crimea, the khanate did not mobilize all military units, only the khans took eighty thousand troops to the campaign and revenged upon all infidel lands and drew their people to Crimea from where they were taken away to other countries.⁷

Slaves did not have any property rights. All of their gaining or earning belonged to their owners. They did not have the right to inheritance but could only receive loans at a certain percent. All responsibility because of the debt or any damage belonged to the owner of the slave.⁸ The slave could be liable for the debt or the damage only when he or she was emancipated. According to Islamic law, a person could sell and rent his or her slave or even give him or her as a gift to any person. A man had the right to have sexual relationship with his concubine without marriage and even have children from the concubine. However, if the man had a child from his concubine, then the child and the concubine would become free.⁹

In addition, the court registers of the khanate had several rulings about slaves and concubines. The campaign booty was one of the most profitable sources of income for both the khanate and

⁷ Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Mehmed Zilli, Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi, Ed. Yücel Dalı, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Robert Dankoff, VII, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2003, p. 229.

⁸ Mehmet Akif Aydın-Muhammed Hamidullah, Köle, Volume 26, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, Ankara 2002, pp. 232-233.

⁹ Aydın, op. cit., pp. 237-246.

the Crimean people.¹⁰ Accordingly, one of the most valuable items of the booty were captives. The Tatars spared some of the captives for their own needs and sold others in slave markets in order to earn cash. The Crimean armies carried out raids on Circassia, Ukraine, Muscovy, the Polish-Lithuanian lands, Iran, Wallachia and Moldavia and thus encountered people of different ethnic origins. Therefore, the court registers of the khanate had many records about slaves from the aforesaid countries.

Moreover, during or after the purchase and sale of a slave, if the slave was diseased or injured or a part of his or her body was damaged,¹¹ or even the slave appeared to be not virgin,¹² the trade failed. These problems could lead bargaining to fail, disagreements occasionally happened and were brought to the court.¹³ The purchased slave was usually returned because of his or her defects, as long as the witnesses could state that the defects had already existed, could not be seen or the seller did not speak of the defects.¹⁴ In his travel accounts, Evliya Chelebi

¹⁰ Sroječkovskiy, op. cit , p. 43; As Saadet Geray wrote to Vasiliy III “our land, our crop and our plow is battle. My brother, you know our works. Our country lives by war,” he pointed to the importance of the booty.

¹¹ According to K.Ş.S., 25-69b-746, Murteza Molla came to the court to argue that the slave who he bought at 50 golden coin (*altun*) did not have two teeth and his or her leg was wailing for one year. Therefore, Murteza Molla wanted to return the slave. Upon the testimony of witnesses, the court agreed with Murteza Molla’s request.

say that the slave he bought to 50 golden have two less teeth, and his leg was wailing since last year, and demanded from the court that he return the slave. In court, he decide to return the slave to the old owner.

¹² K.Ş.S., 33-75a-670 recounts that a man named Osman came to the court to ask that he paid 65 esedi to buy a supposedly virgin concubine from Abdulfettah, but then it appeared that the cuncubine was not virgin. The court agreed with Osman’s claim.

¹³ B.Ş.S., 38-24a-1 states that a person who claimed the concubine had a dislocated shoulder appealed to the court to return the slave since she was a defective commodity. The court agreed with the person and ruled that the concubine should be returned to her former owner.

¹⁴ K.Ş.S., 25-62b-667 relates that a person paid 63 gold coins (*altun*) to buy a boy of Hungarian origin. However, the owner then wanted to return his or her slave because the slave had a nodule below his or her throat. The owner claimed that the slave previously had that defect. The court agreed the owner’s request to return the slave.

recounts how the slaves were sold by glossing over their defects: Firstly, the forty-fifty years old captive Cossacks, whose heads were shaven, were taken to the bath (*hammam*) and rubbed with bath-gloves. After the Cossacks went out of the bath, their beard and moustache was fully shaved, so their face became as bright as the sun. As they were turned into lovely slaves, experienced merchants fooled by the appearance of the slaves sold them to the customers. One or two months later, however, as his white beard and moustache grew, the Cossack slave would not be worthier than one asper (*akçe*). And women, who gave birth to child seven or eight times having droopy breasts, were taken to the bath. Besides, after the bath, their hair was cut, their face and eyes, and the lower parts of their bodies were treated with quince seed, alum and gallnut. Hence, they [merchants] turned them [women slaves] into girls with ruddy cheeks and orange breasts and dressed with luxurious kaftans and put them [women slaves] on the captive boards for sale. Then, when that aged and feeble slave was presented with her fake beauty, a customer surely bought her and thus fell into trap. When the concubine menstruated, the customer complained “Oh my dear, my property was gone.” However, it was too late that he already bought the slave with all flaws. There were cunning slave merchants in the city of Karasu. However, they were not Tatar but were the people of Kayseri from Anatolia. There were also midwives called *ehl-i kible*. When they said “that girl is virgin,” they should not be believed, because all these procuress midwives were damned liars and did business with the negligent.¹⁵

Emancipation of Slaves

Emancipation of slaves had many economic and sociological consequences. The role and place of the freed slaves and

¹⁵ Evliya Çelebi, op. cit., p. 241.

concubines in the society is one of the most appealing subjects.¹⁶ It is particularly necessary to show specific examples from daily life of the slaves. In this respect, the court records of the khanate as the primary source of our research help shed light on that subject by recounting unique events.

In addition, there were several conditions that would lead to the emancipation of a slave. The most important condition was the conversion of a slave to Islam.¹⁷ There were also records that when the purchased slave appeared to be a tax-paying subject, he was released. It would be enough for the person to get rid of such an unfair situation by proving that he was a tax-paying subject through the testament of the witnesses.¹⁸ Such a case happened in Bahchesaray.¹⁹

Moreover, the slave was promised to have his or her freedom in return for paying a certain sum of money or performing a service. It was a kind of conditional emancipation. In fact, there is a record that the owner promised to free his or her slave if the slave would pay three hundred twenty *esedi* (the seventeenth century Dutch silver coin).²⁰ According to another case, the slave of a non-Muslim person who resided in the Karağaç neighborhood claimed that the owner promised to free him or her

¹⁶ Kemal Çiçek, Abdullah Saydam, Kibristan Kafkasyaya Osmanlı Dünyasında Siyaset, Adalet ve Raiyyet, Trabzon, Derya Kitapevi, 1998, p. 116.

¹⁷ K.Ş.S., 25-91a-933; Hasan who was of Russian origin converted to Islam, he was emancipated by his owner Ali Beşe ibn-i Ahmed who was the resident of Şor neighborhood. In addition, Karasu court register 25-64b-694 and 25-65a-700 recounts that as a non-Muslim of Moldovia converted to Islam and changed his name to Hüseyin, he was freed. 33-88b-792.

¹⁸ K.Ş.S., 25-52b-527 ve 25-75b-804; Slaves were released on the ground that they might be tax-paying subjects because it was seen that they had difficulty in adapting to the slavery and thus did not work well.

Besides, a person who legally was not a captive or slave could not be turned forcibly into a slave. In the aftermath of a judicial process, as a slave can recover his or her former rights, it means that the slave was taken away.

¹⁹ B.Ş.S., 38-18a-5.

²⁰ K.Ş.S., 25-22b-234.

in return for serving eight years. Since the slave had been serving ten years, he or she asked the court to give his or her freedom. As the witnesses confirmed the aforesaid words, the court agreed to free the slave.²¹ It should be underlined that a slave had the right to seek justice at the court because everyone could appeal to the courts and nobody would be wronged. Again, in the Hoca Salası village of Bahcesaray, a person came to the court to record his agreement with his slave concerning the emancipation of the slave.²²

In addition, if the slave was diseased or disabled, he or she could be emancipated. It was related that a slave girl of Hungarian origin was freed because her left foot was disabled, and the owner went to the court to register that incidence of emancipation.²³ The slaves were also freed purely for the sake of Allah.²⁴ The slave could be freed even without an apparent reason²⁵ or under special circumstances. For example, according to one of the court records, a person promised that if his son Abdullah recovered from illness, he would free his slave of Russian origin.²⁶

As an example for other cases of emancipation, there are two interesting records. The first one recounts that a person bought his wife's concubine at one hundred fifty coins (*guruş*) and made the concubine his wife.²⁷ According to the second record, a slave complained to the court that while his owner supported his education to become a kind of priest and accordingly granted his freedom, however after the death of the owner, the son of the

²¹ K.Ş.S., 25-86a-888 ve 25-70b-760, the concubine was emancipated in return for her service.

²² K.Ş.S., 20-78b-2.

²³ K.Ş.S., 25-74a-792, 25-67a-723, 25-67a-724.

²⁴ K.Ş.S., 25-67a-722.

²⁵ K.Ş.S., 25-75b-807.

²⁶ K.Ş.S., 25-29b-301.

²⁷ K.Ş.S., 47-12b-91.

owner disagreed with the release of the slave. Upon the testimony of the witnesses in favor of the slave, the court confirmed the freedom of the slave.²⁸

There is no record that the Crimean Tatars had a custom of demanding bride price called başlık or kalın for their girls who were reached to the age of marriage. However, it is interesting to note that a woman was brought to the court because of selling her daughter to a man. The judge (*kadı*) ordered the woman to take her daughter back and return the money to the man.²⁹

Evliya Chelebi also recounts that lovely slaves and girls were given to Canbek Giray as gifts.³⁰

Slave prices recorded in various registers

Slaves and captives in the 25th volume (1095 / 1683-84)

gulam (slave)	30 esedi
düke	57 altun
Cossack named Ivan	16 altun
cariye (concubine)	125 esedi guruş

Slaves and captives in the 33rd volume (1110/1698)

gulam (slave)	60 esedi guruş
cariye (concubine)	1000 Guruş
cariye (concubine) 2 pieces	1000 guruş
Cossack	400 guruş

²⁸ K.Ş.S., 25-19b-203.

²⁹ B.Ş.S., 37-54b-2.

³⁰ Evliya Çelebi, op. cit., p. 273.

cariye (concubine)	120 guruş
Cossack	72 esedi guruş
cariye (concubine)	134 esedi
cariye (concubine)	150 esedi
cariye (concubine)	9600
cariye (concubine)	180 esedi
gulam (slave)	55 esedi
düke	93 esedi
düke	65 esedi
Kalmyk cariye (concubine)	120 esedi guruş
Circassian girl:	13600 akçe
cariye (concubine)	120 guruş
Çengi (Gipsy) girl	5 guruş

Slaves and captives in the 47th volume (1129/1717)

cariye (concubine)	150 guruş
Kalmyk cariye (concubine)	120 guruş
erkek köle (male slave)	260 guruş
cariye (concubine)	140 guruş
cariye (concubine)	180 guruş
cariye (concubine)	150 guruş = 22 kazan + 31 guruş

Slaves and captives in the 51st volume (1135-1136/1723-1724)

gulam (slave)	11500 akçe
cariye (concubine)	11000 akçe

Slaves and captives in the 53rd volume (1130-1140/1726-1728)

Cossack	16000 akçe
kart cariye (old concubine)	5000 akçe
Old Cossack	6000 akçe
sagire cariye (young concubine)	8000 akçe
Cossack	17000 akçe

Slaves and captives in the 72nd volume (1163-1164/1750-1751)

Cossack	120000 akçe
sagire cariye (young concubine)	30000 akçe
cariye (concubine)	160000 akçe

Some real estate prices recorded in the volume 25th-33rd-47th**When we analyze the cheapest and most expensive house prices in the 25th volume;**

Ali Efendi neighborhood:	80-90 esedi,
El-hac Şaban neighborhood:	3009 akçe - 65,3 esedi,
Çorum neighborhood:	800 akçe - 60 esedi,
Sadık Efendi neighborhood:	20 altun - 110 esedi,
Receb Efendi neighborhood:	8 altun - 70 guruş,
Çingene neighborhood:	5 altun 100 akçe - 25 altun,
Şor neighborhood:	2000 akça - 50 altun,
Acem neighborhood:	10 guruş - 60 altun,
Cami'î Kebir neighborhood:	4000 akçe - 40 esedi,
Tarhanlar neighborhood:	5,5 altun-7 altun,

When we analyze the cheapest and most expensive house prices in the 33rd volume;

El-hac Şaban neighborhood:	1800 akçe - 5000 akçe,
Şor neighborhood:	1800 akçe - 7000 akçe,
Ali Efendi neighborhood:	8450 akçe - 1000 vakıyyeduhan ³¹
Kıbtıyan neighborhood:	8000 akçe - 105 guruş,
Çorum neighborhood:	2000 akçe - 50 guruş.

Sold shops recorded in the 47th Volume (1129/1717)³²

a shop	80 guruş
a mill	1875 guruş
two shops and a cellar in Sheep bazaar	195 guruş
a shop in the Kalpakçılar çarşusu	45 guruş

When the abovementioned prices of slaves and real estates are compared, it can be stated that a slave could be much expensive than many houses and shops, and also the price of the slave could be equal to the price of more than one house. Therefore, the captives held at raids provided considerable economic wealth to those who captured them and to the treasury of the khanate.

Conclusion

The Crimean Khanate had a vivid and strategic location where a large-scale of slave trade was carried out. Throughout the

³¹ If we calculate that 1 vakıyyeduhan is nearly equal to 16 akçe, its total value is 16000 akçe.

³² The sales records of the shop in the 47th volume are ordered as follows: 1) 47-3b-25, 2) 47-41a-276, 3) 47-45b-307, 4) 47-22b-146.

history, Crimea became a region where slave markets yielded great profit. For this reason, the khanate could not keep itself away from such profitable business. In addition, the end of the Ottoman frontier raids made the slave trade much profitable. In fact, as far as all profitable economic activities were concerned, the spoils from campaigns was of great importance for both the troops and the khanate.

Since a slave was both a cheap labor force and valuable, he or she was a good commodity. At the same time, in addition to their material value, legal arrangements and sociological issues about slaves have drawn the attention of domestic and foreign researchers because the status of slaves in the society, their relations with other people and their rights and responsibilities are very interesting topics. Besides, as slaves became a party of the Crimean society in the aftermath of their emancipation, the nature of their new status presents a new sociological issue.

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