

Readings for History 730

Sources on slavery in the medieval Islamic world

Short selections in packet:

1. *The Arab essayist al-Jahiz (d. 868), “On the Merits of the Turks” and “On Singing-Slave Girls”*
2. *Provincial Persian ruler Kaykaus b. Iskandar (d. after 1082) on medieval period slavery*
3. *Arab geographer Buzurg b. Shahriyar (d. 955) on slave trading in sub-Saharan Africa; al-Tabari (d. 923), History of Messengers and Kings on slave rebellions, such as the Zanj Revolt under the later ‘Abbasid Caliphate*

Reading Text #1: The introduction of Turkish-speaking peoples into the Islamic world dates back to the early ninth century, as the 'Abbasid caliphate's power began to wane in the face of civil conflict and internal divisions among its members. As Turkish-speaking soldiers of slave origin became more prominent in positions of power and influence in the Islamic world under the later 'Abbasid caliphs, their contemporaries began to take note of them, and works even began to appear in the Turkish language, albeit converted into the Arabic-language script. In our first selection, we examine an essay by the noted Arab author, essayist and satirist al-Jahiz (d. 868) on the nature of the Turkish population. While the essay is partially tongue-in-cheek, it nevertheless helps to shed light on why the Turkish soldiers might be viewed as valuable by some people in the later 'Abbasid context. However, Turkish peoples were not the only ones who came to be valuable in medieval Muslim societies. Al-Jahiz's second essay represents another tongue-in-cheek piece dealing with "passionate love" and the practice of keeping singing slave-girls (called "qiyān" in Arabic) as a source of entertainment in the 'Abbasid period. His writing suggests that these types of slaves could rise to prominent positions in society.

ARAB ESSAYIST AL-JAHIZ (D. 868), "THE MERITS OF THE TURKS"

The Turk as Horseman

A Kharijite [i.e., a member of a radical religious sect who were engaged in guerilla warfare against the 'Abbasids], at close quarters, relies entirely on his lance. But the Turks are as good as the Kharijites with the lance, and in addition, if a thousand of their horsemen are hard-pressed they will loose all their arrows in a single volley and bring down a thousand enemy horsemen. No body of men can stand up against such a test.

Neither the Kharijites nor the Bedouins [i.e., Arabian camel nomads] are famous for their prowess as mounted bowmen. But the Turk will hit from his saddle an animal, a bird, a target, a man, a couching animal, a marker post or a bird of prey stooping on its quarry. His horse may be exhausted from being galloped and reined in, wheeled to right and left, and mounted and dismounted: but he himself goes on shooting, loosing ten arrows before the Kharijite has let fly one. He gallops his horse up a hillside or down a gully faster than the Kharijite can make his go on the flat.

The Turk has two pairs of eyes, one at the front and the other at the back of his head....

They train their horsemen to carry two, or even three bows, and spare bowstrings in proportion. Thus in the hour of battle the Turk has on him everything needful for himself, his weapon and the care of his steed. As for their ability to stand trotting, sustained galloping, long night rides and cross-country journeys, it is truly extraordinary. In the first place the Kharijite's horse has not the staying-power of the Turk's pony; and the Kharijite has no more than a horseman's knowledge of how to look after his mount. The Turk, however, is more experienced than a professional farrier [i.e., a blacksmith], and better than a trainer at getting what he wants from his pony. For it was he who brought it into the world and reared it from a foal; it comes when he calls it, and follows behind him when he runs....

If the Turk's daily life were to be reckoned up in detail, he would be found to spend more time in the saddle than on the ground. The Turk sometimes rides a stallion, sometimes a brood mare. Whether he is going to war, on a journey, out hunting or on any other errand, the brood mare follows behind with her foals. If he gets tired of hunting the enemy he hunts waterfowl. If he gets hungry,

jogging up and down in the saddle, he has only to lay hands on one of his animals. If he gets thirsty, he milks one of his brood mares. If he needs to rest his mount, he vaults on to another without so much as putting his feet to the ground.

Of all living creatures he is the only one whose body can adapt itself to eating nothing but meat. As for his steed, leaves and shoots are all it needs; he gives it no shelter from the sun and no covering against the cold.

As regards ability to stand trotting, if the stamina of the border fighters, the post-horse outriders [i.e., messengers], the Kharijites and the eunuchs were all combined in one man, they would not equal a Turk.

The Turk demands so much of his mount that only the roughest of his horses is equal to the task; even one that he had ridden to exhaustion, so as to be useless for his expeditions, would outdo a Kharijite's horse in staying power, and no Tukhari pony could compare with it.

The Turk is at one and the same time herdsman, groom, trainer, horse-dealer, farrier and rider: in short, a one-man team. When the Turk travels with horsemen of other races, he covers twenty miles to their ten, leaving them and circling around to right and left, up on to the high ground and down to the bottom of the gullies, and shooting all the while at anything that runs, crawls, flies or stands still.

The Turk never travels like the rest of the band, and never rides straight ahead. On a long, hard ride, when it is noon and the halting-place is still afar off, all are silent, oppressed with fatigue and overwhelmed into weariness. Their misery leaves no room for conversation. Everything round them crackles in the intense heat, or perhaps is frozen hard. As the journey drags on, even the toughest and most resolute begin to wish that the ground would open under their feet. At the sight of a mirage or a marker post on a ridge they are transported with joy, supposing it to be the halting-place. When at last they reach it, the horsemen all drop from the saddle and stagger about bandy-legged like children who have been given an enema, groaning like sick men, yawning to refresh themselves and stretching luxuriously to overcome their stiffness.

But your Turk, though he has covered twice the distance and dislocated his shoulders with shooting, has only to catch sight of a gazelle or an onager [a type of wild donkey] near the halting-place, or put up a fox or a hare, and he is off again at a gallop as though he had only just mounted. It might have been someone else who had done that long ride and endured all that weariness.

At the gully the band bunches together at the bridge or the best crossing-place; but the Turk, digging his heels into his pony, is already going up the other side like a shooting star. If there is a steep rise, he leaves the track and scrambles straight up the hillside, going where even the ibex [an Asian type of mountain goat] cannot go. To see him scaling such slopes anyone would think he was recklessly risking his life: but if that were so he would not last long, for he is always doing it...

National Characteristics [of the Turks Relative to Other Peoples]

Know that every nation, people, generation or tribe that shows itself outstanding in craftsmanship or pre-eminent in eloquence, the various branches of learning, the establishment of empires or the art of war, only attains the peak of perfection because God has steered it in that direction and given it the means and the special aptitudes appropriate to those activities. Peoples of varying habits of thought, different opinions and dissimilar characters cannot attain perfection unless they fulfill the conditions needed to carry on an activity, and have a natural aptitude for it. Good

examples are the Chinese in craftsmanship, the Greeks in philosophy and literature, the Arabs in fields that we mean to deal with in their proper place...and the Turks in the art of war....

The Chinese for their part are specialists in smelting, casting and metalworking, in fine colors, in sculpture, weaving and drawing; they are very skillful with their hands, whatever the medium, the technique or the cost of the materials. The Greeks are theoreticians rather than practitioners, while the Chinese are practitioners rather than theoreticians; the former are thinkers, the latter doers.

The Arabs, again, were not merchants, artisans, physicians, farmers—for that would have degraded them—mathematicians or fruit-farmers—for they wished to escape the humiliation of the tax; nor were they out to earn or amass money, hoard possessions or lay hands on other people's; they were not of those who make their living with a pair of scales;...they were not poor enough to be indifferent to learning, pursued neither wealth, that breeds foolishness, nor good fortune, that begets apathy, and never tolerated humiliation, which was dishonor and death to their souls. They dwelt in the plains, and grew up in contemplation of the desert. They knew neither damp nor rising mist, neither fog nor foul air, nor a horizon bounded by walls. When these keen minds and clear brains turned to poetry, fine language, eloquence and oratory, to physiognomy and astrology, genealogy, navigation by the stars and by marks on the ground,...to horse-breeding, weaponry and engines of war, to memorizing all that they heard, pondering on everything that caught their attention and discriminating between the glories and the shames of their tribes, they achieved perfection beyond the wildest dreams. Certain of these activities broadened their minds and exalted their aspirations, so that of all nations they are now the most glorious and the most given to recalling their past splendors.

It is the same with the Turks who dwell in tents in the desert and keep herds: they are the Bedouins of the non-Arabs....Uninterested in craftsmanship or commerce, medicine, geometry, fruit-farming, building, digging canals or collecting taxes, they care only about raiding, hunting, horsemanship, skirmishing with rival chieftains, taking booty and invading other countries. Their efforts are all directed towards these activities, and they devote all their energies to these occupations. In this way they have acquired a mastery of these skills, which for them take the place of craftsmanship and commerce and constitute their only pleasure, their glory and the subject of all their conversation. Thus have they become in the realm of warfare what the Greeks are in philosophy, the Chinese in craftsmanship, and the Arabs in the fields we have enumerated....

ARABIC ESSAYIST AND SATIRIST AL-JAHIZ, "ON SINGING SLAVE-GIRLS"

Passionate love [called in Arabic 'ishq]

The factor that makes singing slave-girls fetch such extraordinary prices is simply the desire [they arouse], for if they were bought as ordinary slaves none of them would fetch more than the normal price per head. Most of the buyers who pay an exorbitant price for a young slave-girl do so out of passionate love. A buyer may start by having designs on a girl and seeking the simplest means of satisfying his lust; if then this turns out to be impossible, he descries his opportunity and has recourse to legal means, even though this was not his original intention. So he sells his possessions, loosens his purse-strings, and takes on his shoulders a burden of usurious interest in order to purchase the slave. After that the only profitable thing left for him to do is to go abroad with singing slave-girls and act as their procurer. All these [vicissitudes] he endures simply out of infatuation for

the girls: having been frustrated in his aim by the severity of their masters, the conscientiousness of their keepers and the strictness of their seclusion, he is compelled to buy in order to have free use of the woman's body, and thus Satan is kept at bay...

I propose to describe *'ishq* for you, so that you may know how it is defined. It is a sickness that attacks the soul and spreads to the body by direct contagion, the soul being weakened by the violence done to the body and physical exhaustion being followed by [moral] weakness. The [privileged] position occupied by the heart in relation to the other organs is conducive to the spread of the sickness throughout the body; and its intractability arises from the diversity of its causes. The sickness is compounded of diverse elements, as fever is compounded of cold and phlegm; and if you attempt to treat one of the two components, the treatment is ineffectual and at the same time aggravates the other. It is the strength of its elements that makes it so persistent and so slow to be dispelled. *'Ishq* is compounded of sentimental love, desire, attraction and association; it sets in, grows worse, stops at its climax and then gradually abates until it disintegrates altogether in the moment of exhaustion.

The word *hubb* [a word meaning "sentimental love"] has the meaning normally attributed to it, and has no other connotation; for we say that a man "loves" God, that God "loves" the believer, that a father "loves" his son, that a son "loves" his father, and that we "love" our friends, our country or our tribe. It is possible to "love" in many ways without the emotion warranting the name of *'ishq*, and hence it will be seen that the word *hubb* without the addition of other components is insufficient to denote *'ishq*. *Hubb* is, however, the first stage of *'ishq*; it is followed by *hawa* [i.e., a word meaning "passion"], which sometimes bears its usual literal meaning and sometimes quite a different one, as when *hawa* is used of religion, love of one's country and so forth. A man in the grip of this emotion is guided by irresistible influences in the choice of the object of his *hawa*; and hence the sayings: "The eye of *hawa* is not honest," "*Hubb* makes a man blind and deaf," and "They make their religions into gods for their *hawa*." It commonly happens that the object of a lover's passion is far from being distinguished by perfect beauty or remarkable gifts of graces; and if he is asked for the reason he has nothing to say.

Hubb and *hawa* can be combined and still not constitute *'ishq*. This sort of twofold emotion can be felt for a child, a friend, a country or a type of garment, for carpets or saddle-animals: but no one has ever known a man fall sick and lose his reason out of love (*hubb*) for his son or his country, even though he may feel a pang and a searing pain at the moment of parting. [On the other hand] we know, directly or indirectly, of many people who have died, after much suffering and pining, of the sickness of *'ishq*. Of course when attraction is added to *hubb* and *hawa*, I mean the natural attraction or love [*hubb*] of men for women and women for men that is instinctive to the males and females of all animals, then the result is true *'ishq*...

'Ishq does not reach its full force at the first meeting. It needs to be reinforced by repeated association and planted in the heart by dint of repetition; then it sprouts like a seed in the earth, grows tall and strong, and bears fruit. Sometimes the seed gives rise to a huge trunk with thick, strong branches; in other cases the trunk shrivels up and the plant dies. This emotion, containing all these components, is true *'ishq*.

Infrequency of meeting aggravates and inflames it, and separation fans its flames to the point of delirium, exhaustion and neglect of all everyday matters: the image of the loved one is constantly before the lover's eyes, monopolizing his thoughts and obtruding itself relentlessly on his consciousness. If separation is prolonged, the *'ishq* gradually fades and eventually dies away, though the scars left by its wounds remain and never completely disappear.

Triumphant [possession] of the loved one hastens the ending of *'ishq*. This is because some people are quicker to *'ishq* than others, on account of differences of temperament: some are more naturally susceptible, quicker to arrive at intimacy, and of a more passionate nature than others. Once the partner's *'ishq* becomes apparent to the loved one, the sickness spreads by contagion, implanting itself in her heart and setting fire to her entrails, by virtue of the affinity between them, the echo aroused in them both by each other, and the mutual attraction of two souls in unison. Just so the sight of someone asleep makes a man drowsy despite himself, and if someone else yawns, even though he has no desire to yawn himself, he will follow suit.

It is very rare for *'ishq* to arise with the same [force] between two people unless they are physically and mentally well-matched, of the same degree of refinement, and have a similar disposition and tastes. When we find a handsome man falling in love with an ugly woman, or the other way round, or someone preferring ugliness to beauty and holding that no other choice is possible, we suppose it to be an error of judgment: but in fact it is mutual understanding and inner harmony [that have dictated the choice].

The *'ishq* aroused by singing slave-girls, notwithstanding their many good qualities and the happiness they confer, is an absolute scourge. Do they not offer a man a range of pleasures such as can be found together nowhere else? All pleasures [involve] the senses: food and drink are the concern of taste, and no other sense can enjoy them to the same extent. To eat musk, which pertains to the sense of smell, would be revolting and sickening, seeing that it is clotted blood. To sniff at certain eatables which do not have a pleasant smell, such as dried fruit and the like, when one's appetite was blunted, or even to stare at them, would have ill effects. To bring one's ear close to the choicest perfumes in the world would give no pleasure. But when it comes to singing slave-girls three senses are involved, [not to mention] the heart, which makes the fourth: sight, in the contemplation of a beautiful and appetizing slave-girl-for [professional] skill and beauty are only rarely found together for the delectation of patrons taking their ease; hearing, as the share of the man who simply enjoys the pleasure of listening to a musical instrument; and touch, in lust and the urge for sexual gratification. Now all the senses act as scouts and witnesses for the heart.

When a singing slave-girl lifts up her voice and starts to sing, all eyes are fixed on her and all ears turned towards her. The heart is the king, and hearing and sight vie with one another to be the first to relay to it what they have received from the singer: the two of them meet at the bottom of the heart, and there pour out everything they have picked up. In addition to the resultant gratification, the sense of touch is also involved, so that three pleasures are combined simultaneously—something that never happens otherwise, and that the sense organs could not achieve singly. Thus time spent in the company of singing slave-girls entails the most perilous enticement, for as tradition has it: "Beware of a look! It plants the seeds of desire in the heart, and is a sufficient enticement for the looker!" Imagine when looking and desiring are joined by the pleasure of listening [to music] and decked out in amorous language!

Portrait of a singing slave-girl

The singing slave-girl is unlikely to be true and loyal in love, for both by temperament and training she is disposed to set traps and spread nets to catch lovers in their toils.

When an admirer looks at her she ogles him, smiles archly at him, flirts with him in the verses she sings, responds readily to his wishes, drinks with gusto, and shows herself anxious for him to stay, eager for his quick return and grieved at his departure. Once she feels that her charms have won him over and that the luckless man is caught in the trap, she presses her advantage home,

and leads him to believe that her feelings for him are even stronger than his for her. Then she writes him notes complaining of the pain of her love, and swearing that she has filled the inkwell with her tears and wetted the paper with her saliva, that night and day he is the sole preoccupation and torment of her mind and heart, that she wants no other lover, that she prefers no other love to his, that she will never give him up, and that she wants him not for his money but for himself. Then she puts the missive into a sheet of parchment folded into six, seals it with saffron and ties it with a piece of lute-string.

She brings out her secret in front of her masters, to make the doting fellow feel still more closely bound to her. She insists on his writing back to her, and if he favors her with a reply she declares that it will be her consolation and make up for her lover's absence; then she...sings these lines: "My beloved's letter keeps me company: at times it converses with me, at times it is my aromatic plant." The beginning of it made me laugh, but the rest of it brought tears to my eyes.

Next she begins to find fault with him, grows jealous of his wife, forbids him to look at the other girls, pours half her glass into his, tries to tempt him with the apple she has bitten into, offers him a sprig of her basil, and when he leaves presses on him a lock of her hair, a piece of her veil and a chip from her plectrum. On the feast of Navruz [the Persian New Year celebration] she gives him a belt and some sweets, and at Mihrajan [an autumn solstice celebration] a ring and some apples. It is his name that she engraves on her own ring, and his name again that falls from her lips if she chances to stumble. When she sees him she sings him this line: To look upon the object of his passion is a joy for the lover, but what terrible peril for him is the absence of the beloved!

Then she tells him that she cannot sleep for her longing for him, that her love takes away her appetite, that when he is away she never stops weeping, that she cannot think of him without getting upset or utter his name without trembling, and that she has already filled a phial with tears shed for him...

It may happen, however, that she is hoist with her own petard and genuinely begins to share her lover's sufferings: in that event she betakes herself to his house, lets him have a kiss and more, and even gives herself to him if he thinks it lawful.

Sometimes she will also conceal her talents as a musician and singer in order to keep the price down for him; or she may pretend to her masters to have some sickness and buy herself out, and then fraudulently make herself out a free woman so that he may marry her without having to pay a prohibitive price. She does this when she happens on a lover who is kind, with elegant gestures, well-spoken, intelligent, sensitive and high-minded; and if he writes poetry, or recites or sings it, she thinks even more highly of him.

But for most of the time she is not straightforward, but employs treachery and wiles to suck her victim dry and then abandons him.

It sometimes happens that the visits of three or four of her lovers coincide, though they take pains to avoid such meetings and are jealous of one another when they come face to face. In that event she weeps with one eye for one of them and laughs with the other for another, or makes sheep's eyes at one behind another one's back. She whispers secrets to one of them and talks out loud to another, making each one think she is his alone and that appearances are no guide to their true intimacy. After they have gone she writes them all identical notes, telling each one how tiresome she finds the others and how eager she is to be alone with him with no one else present.

Had the devil no other fatal wiles, no other badge, and no other seductive charms, singing slave-girls would assuredly meet his purpose.

What I am saying is not censure of them: on the contrary, it is high praise. According to tradition: "The best of your women are those endowed with charm and seductiveness," and neither

Harut and Marut [i.e., the angels who in Muslim tradition inquire of the soul's deeds in the grave], nor Moses's rod, nor Pharaoh's wizardry could achieve what singing slave-girls achieve.

The training of singing slave-girls

How can the singing slave-girl escape temptation, and how could she possibly be virtuous, seeing that passions are acquired by upbringing just as languages and habits are learnt by direct contact, and that she lives her whole life from cradle to grave in an atmosphere calculated to lead her astray from godly thoughts? [For it consists] of ribald talk and all manner of tomfoolery and mischief among profligates and libertines—men with never a serious word to say, unfit to be trusted an inch, and devoid equally of fear of God and respect for humanity.

The cleverest of them know by heart four thousand songs and more, each of two to four lines. Multiplying it up, this comes to around ten thousand lines—in which God is never once mentioned except inadvertently, and the poet never once draws attention to the danger of divine punishment or the need to seek one's reward in the world to come. They are all on such subjects as adultery, procuring, *'ishq*, youthful dalliance, yearning desire and amorous passion.

She continues to apply herself to learning her trade, picking up instruction from contact with men whose conversation is nothing but wantonness and their recitation nothing but invitation to sin. This she is obliged to do for the sake of her calling: for if she is negligent trade falls off, if she is careless business suffers, and if she learns nothing new she makes no progress—and standing still is tantamount to slipping backward. In any trade the difference between mediocrity and excellence lies in the diligent pursuit of increased proficiency. If a singing slave-girl wanted to follow the right path, she could not find it: if she wished to be virtuous, she could not.

In praise of the keepers of singing slave-girls

One of the signs of our superiority [i.e., al-Jahiz mockingly takes the voice of the owner of a singing slave-girl here] is that people go a journey to come and see us, in the same way that they dance attendance on caliphs and high dignitaries. They pay us visits that we need not bother to return, give us presents when we are not obliged to give them any, and send us gifts without expecting any from us. All night long men lie sleepless and weeping, their hearts pounding and their entrails writhing, their hopes fixed on our stock-in-trade—which in the list of things bought and sold, possessed and used, comes second only in price to necklaces of precious stones. People send slave-owners presents of all manner of sweetmeats and sherbets: the porters whose task it is to carry them turn ruefully away after being allowed a glimpse of them. Their master reaps where these people sow, and has the benefit all to himself. He does not have to bear the burden of the upkeep of his slaves, and the cares of bread-winning for a family, the vexation of feeding many mouths, the vast expense of it, and the problem of providing for a crowd are all troubles that a slave-owner is free of. He does not need to worry his head about a rise in the price of flour, a shortage of *sawiq* [i.e., a barley drink], or a dearth of oil, nor yet about adulterated wine: for in the event of its becoming scarce, or unluckily turning sour, or [the toilet] disastrously breaking, all these misfortunes are quickly made good again.

Then again, if we are in straitened circumstances we can always, without the risk of being refused, ask for a loan to tide us over. People treat us with deference, call us by our first names, send us pressing invitations, favor us with the most interesting pieces of news and entrust us with the

most closely guarded secrets. Our clients squabble over us, vie with one another for our goodwill, compete for our friendship and boast vaingloriously of any favor we show them.

So far as we are aware, only caliphs are accorded such treatment: but then they give away more than they receive, requiting petitioners who come to them cap in hand, and enriching [their favorites], whereas your slave-girl owner takes the substance and gives away the shadow, selling empty air for solid gold-ingots of silver and gold....!

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Reading Text #2: One of the realities of life in the medieval Islamic world was that of slavery. It is difficult to judge the extent of the practice based on the existing sources, and it is difficult to quantify what percentage of the population were slaves in any given time or place during the medieval period. Aside from the circumstances surrounding the Zanj Revolt of the later ninth century, however, the type of agricultural, chattel slavery common in the pre-modern Americas does not appear to have been the norm in many parts of the Islamic world. However, we have a rare text from a local Persian-speaking ruler, Kayka'us b. Iskandar (d. sometime after 1082), whose polity controlled areas in the vicinity of the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, an important commercial center for the trade in slaves. He wrote this text as part of an advice manual for his son and heir in building his own royal household, entitled Qabusnama. How do these sources on slavery offer us additional windows into the political and religious history of the early centuries of Islamic civilization?

SELECTION FROM KAYKA'US B. ISKANDAR (D. AFTER 1082), "QABUSNAMA"

When you set out to buy slaves, be cautious. The buying of men is a difficult art; because many a slave may appear to be good, who, regarded with knowledge, turns out to be the opposite. Most people imagine that buying slaves is like any other form of trading, not understanding that the buying of slaves, or the art of doing so, is a branch of philosophy. Anyone who buys goods of which he has no competent understanding can be defrauded over them, and the most difficult form of knowledge is that which deals with human beings. There are so many blemishes and good points in the human kind, and a single blemish may conceal a myriad good points, while a single good point may conceal a myriad faults.

Human beings cannot be known except by the science of physiognomy and by experience, and the science of physiognomy in its entirety is a branch of prophecy that is not acquired to perfection except by the divinely directed apostle. The reason is that by physiognomy the inward goodness or wickedness of men can be ascertained.

Now let me describe to the best of my ability what is essential in the purchasing of slaves, both white and black, and what their good and bad points are, so that they may be known to you. Understand then that there are three essentials in the buying of slaves; first is the recognition of their good and bad qualities, whether external or internal, by means of physiognomy; second is the awareness of diseases, whether latent or apparent, by their symptoms; third is the knowledge of the various classes and the defects and merits of each.

With regard to the first requirement, that of physiognomy, it consists of close observation when buying slaves. (The buyers of slaves are of all categories: there are those who inspect the face, disregarding body and extremities; others look to the corpulence or otherwise of the slave.) Whoever it may be that inspects the slave must first look at the face, which is always open to view, whereas the body can only be seen as occasion offers. Then look at eyes and eyebrows, followed by nose, lips and teeth, and lastly at the hair. The reason for this is that God placed the beauty of human beings in eyes and eyebrows, delicacy in the nose, sweetness in the lips and teeth and freshness in the skin. To all these the hair of the head has been made to lend adornment, since [God] created the hair for adornment.

You must, consequently, inspect everything. When you see beauty in the eyes and eyebrows, delicacy in the nose, sweetness in the lips and teeth and freshness in the skin, then buy the slave possessing them without concerning yourself over the extremities of the body. If all of these

qualities are not present, then the slave must possess delicacy; because, in my opinion, one that is delicate without having beauty is preferable to one that is beautiful but not possessed of delicacy.

The learned say that one must know the indications and signs by which to buy the slaves suited for particular duties. The slave that you buy for your private service and conviviality should be of middle proportions, neither tall nor short, fat nor lean, pale nor florid, thickset nor slender, curly-haired nor with hair over-straight. When you see a slave soft-fleshed, fine-skinned, with regular bones and wine-colored hair, black eyelashes, dark eyes, black eyebrows, open-eyed, long-nosed, slender-waisted, round-chinned, red-lipped, with white regular teeth, and all his members such as I have described, such a slave will be decorative and companionable, loyal, of delicate character, and dignified.

The mark of the slave who is clever and may be expected to improve is this: he must be of erect stature, medium in hair and in flesh, broad of hand and with the middle of the fingers lengthy, in complexion dark though ruddy, dark-eyed, open-faced and unsmiling. A slave of this kind would be competent to acquire learning, to act as treasurer or for any other [such] employment.

The slave suited to play musical instruments is marked out by being soft-fleshed (though his flesh must not be over-abundant, especially on the back), with his fingers slender, neither lean nor fat. (A slave whose face is over-fleshy, incidentally, is one incapable of learning.) His hands must be soft, with the middles of the fingers lengthy. He must be bright-visaged, having the skin tight; his hair must not be too long, too short or too black. It is better, also, for the soles of the feet to be regular. A slave of this kind will swiftly acquire a delicate art of whatever kind, particularly that of the instrumentalist.

The mark of the slave suited for arms-bearing is that his hair is thick, his body tall and erect, his build powerful, his flesh hard, his bones thick, his skin coarse and his limbs straight, the joints being firm. The tendons should be tight and the sinews and blood-vessels prominent and visible on the body. Shoulders must be broad, the chest deep, the neck thick and the head round; also for preference he should be bald. The belly should be concave, the buttocks drawn in and the legs in walking well extended. And the eyes should be black. Any slave who possesses these qualities will be a champion in single combat, brave and successful.

The mark of the slave suited for employment in the women's apartments is that he should be dark-skinned and sour-visaged and have withered limbs, scanty hair, a shrill voice, little [slender] feet, thick lips, a flat nose, stubby fingers, a bowed figure, and a thin neck. A slave with these qualities will be suitable for service in the women's quarters. He must not have a white skin nor a fair complexion; and beware of a ruddy-complexioned man, particularly if his hair is limp. His eyes, further, should not be languorous or moist; a man having such qualities is either over-fond of women or prone to act as a go-between.

The mark of the slave who is callous [insensitive] and suited to be a herdsman or groom is that he should be open-browed and wide-eyed, and his eyelids should be flecked with red. He should, further, be long in lips and teeth and his mouth should be wide. A slave with these qualities is extremely callous, fearless and uncivilized.

The mark of the slave suited for domestic service and cookery is that he should be clean in face and body, round-faced, with hands and feet slender, his eyes dark inclining to blue, sound in body, silent, the hair of his head wine-colored and falling forward limply. A slave with these qualities is suitable for the occupations mentioned.

Each then, should have the essential characteristics which I have recounted. But I will also mention the defects and virtues which should be known in respect of each separate race. You must understand that Turks are not all of one race, and each has its own nature and essential character.

Amongst them the most ill-tempered are the Ghuzz and the Qipchaqs; the best-tempered and most willing are the Khutanese, the Khallukhis, and the Tibetans; the boldest and most courageous are the Turghay (?), the most inured to toil and hardship and the most active are the Tatars and the Yaghma, whereas the laziest of all are the Chigil.

It is a fact well-known to all that beauty or ugliness in the Turks is the opposite of that in the Indians. If you observe the Turk feature by feature [he has] a large head, a broad face, narrow eyes, a flat nose, and unpleasing lips and teeth. Regarded individually the features are not handsome, yet the whole is handsome. The Indian's face is the opposite of this; each individual feature regarded by itself appears handsome, yet looked at as a whole the face does not create the same impression as that of the Turk. To begin with, the Turk has a personal freshness and clearness of complexion not possessed by the Indian; indeed the Turks win for freshness against all other races.

Without any doubt, what is fine in the Turks is present in a superlative degree, but so also is what is ugly in them. Their faults in general are that they are blunt-witted, ignorant, boastful, turbulent, discontented, and without a sense of justice. Without any excuse they will create trouble and utter foul language, and at night they are poor-hearted. Their merit is that they are brave, free from pretense, open in enmity, and zealous in any task allotted to them. For the [domestic] establishment there is no better race.

Slavs, Russians, and Alans are near in their temperament to the Turks, but are more patient. The Alans are more courageous than the Turks at night and more friendly disposed towards their masters. Although in their craftsmanship they are nearer to the Byzantines, being artistic, yet there are faults in them of various kinds; for example they are prone to theft, disobedience, betrayal of secrets, impatience, stupidity, indolence, hostility to their masters, and escaping. Their virtues are that they are soft-natured, agreeable, and quick of understanding. Further they are deliberate in action, direct in speech, brave, good road-guides, and possessed of good memory.

The defect of the Byzantines is that they are foul-tongued, evil-hearted, cowardly, indolent, quick-tempered, covetous, and greedy for worldly things. Their merits are that they are cautious, affectionate, happy, economically-minded, successful in their undertakings, and careful to prevent loss.

The defect of the Armenians is that they are mischievous, foul-mouthed, thieving, impudent, prone to flight, disobedient, babblers, liars, friendly to misbelief, and hostile to their masters. From head to foot, indeed, they incline rather towards defects than to merits. Yet they are quick of understanding and learn their tasks well.

The defect of the Hindu is that he is evil-tongued and in the house no slave-girl is safe from him. But the various classes of the Hindus are unlike those that prevail amongst other peoples, because in other peoples the classes mingle with each other, whereas the Hindus, ever since the time of Adam (upon whom be peace!), have practiced the following custom: namely, no trade will form an alliance with any outside it. Thus, grocers will give their daughters only to grocers, butchers to butchers, bakers to bakers, and soldiers to soldiers.

Each of these groups therefore has its own special character, which I cannot describe one by one because that would entail a book in itself.

However, the best of them, people benevolent, brave or skilled in commerce, are [respectively] the Brahman, the Rawat and the Kirar. The Brahman is clever, the Rawat brave, and the Kirar skilled in commerce, each class being superior to the one after. The Nubian and the Abyssinian are free of faults, and the Abyssinian is better than the Nubian because many things were said by the Prophet in praise of the former.

These then are the facts concerning each race and the merits and defects of each.

Now the third essential is being completely alive to defects both external and internal through knowledge of symptoms, and this means that at the time of buying you may not be careless. Do not be content with a single look; many a good slave may appear vile at first sight and many an extremely vile one appear to be good. Further there is the fact that a human being's visage does not continually bear the same complexion. Sometimes it is more inclined to be handsome, at other times to be ugly. You must carefully inspect all the limbs and organs to ensure that nothing remains hidden from you. There are many latent diseases which are on the point of coming but have not yet appeared and will do so within a few days; such diseases have their symptoms.

Thus, if there is a yellowness in the complexion, the lips being changed [from the normal] in color, and dry, that is the symptom of hemorrhoids. If the eyelids are continuously swollen, it is a symptom of dropsy. Redness in the eyes and a fullness of the veins in the forehead are the mark of epilepsy. Tearing out the hair, flickering of the eyelashes and chewing of the lips are the signs of melancholia. Crookedness in the bone of the nose or irregularity in it are the symptoms of fistula; hair that is extremely black, but more so in one place than another, shows that the hair has been dyed. If here and there upon the body you perceive the marks of branding where no branding should be, examine closely to ensure that there is no leprosy under it. Yellowness in the eyes and a change [from the ordinary] in the color of the face are the symptoms of jaundice.

When you buy a slave, you must take and lay him down, press him on both sides and watch closely that he has no pain or swelling. If he has, it will be in the liver or spleen. Having looked for such hidden defects, seek further for the open ones, such as smells from the mouth and nose, hardness of hearing, hesitation in utterance, irregularity of speech, walking off the [straight] road, coarseness of the joints, and hardness at the base of the teeth, to prevent any trickery being practiced on you.

When you have seen all that I have mentioned and have made certain, then if you should buy, do so from honest people, and so secure a person who will be of advantage to your household. As long as you can find a non-Arab do not buy an Arabic-speaking slave. You can mold a non-Arab to your ways, but never the one whose tongue is Arabic. Further, do not have a slave-girl brought before you when your appetites are strong upon you; when desire is strong, it makes what is ugly appear good in your eyes. First abate your desires and then engage in the business of purchasing.

Never buy a slave who has been treated with affection in another place. If you do not hold him dear, he will show ingratitude to you, or will flee, or will demand to be sold, or will nourish hatred in his heart for you. Even if you regard him with affection, he will show you no gratitude, in view of what he has experienced elsewhere. Buy your slave from a house in which he has been badly treated, so that he will be grateful for the least kindness on your part and will hold you in affection. From time to time make your slaves a gift of something; do not allow them to be constantly in need of money in such a way that they are compelled to go out seeking it.

Buy slaves of a good price, for each one's value is in accordance with his price. Do not buy a slave who has had numerous masters; a woman who has had many husbands and a slave who has had many masters are held in no esteem. Let those you buy be well-favored. And when a slave truly desires to be sold, do not dispute with him, but sell; when a slave demands to be sold or a wife to be divorced, then sell or divorce, because you will have no pleasure from either.

If a slave is deliberately (and not through inadvertence or mistake) lazy or neglectful in his work, do not teach him under compulsion to improve; have no expectation of that, for he will in no wise become industrious or capable of improvement. Sell him quickly; you may rouse a sleeping man with a shout, but a dead body cannot be roused by the sound of a hundred trumpets and drums. Further, do not assemble a useless family about you; a small family is a second form of wealth.

Provide for your slaves in such fashion that they will not escape, and treat them that you have well, as befits your dignity; if you have one person in good condition it is better than having two in ill condition. Do not permit your male slave to take to himself in your household someone whom he calls “brother,” nor permit slave-girls to claim sisterhood with each other; it leads to great trouble. On bond and free impose the burdens which they are able to bear, that they may not be disobedient through sheer weakness. Keep yourself ever adorned with justice, that you may be included amongst them that are honored as such.

The slave must recognize your brother, sister, mother or father as his master. Never buy a dealer’s exhausted slave; he is as fearful of the dealer as the ass is of the farrier. Set no store by the slave who always, when called to any work, demands to be sold and never has any fears with regard to being bought and sold; you will gain nothing good from him. Change him quickly for another, seeking out one such as I have described. Thus you will achieve your purpose and suffer no troubles....

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Reading Text #3: Various Arab geographers and travelers, from the ninth century onward, gained a limited awareness of the countries and peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, in part through a trade in African slaves. A careful reading of these writings may offer some clues about the spread of Islamic civilization to those regions during the medieval period. Here, we examine the account of a noted Persian ship's captain, Buzurg b. Shahriyar (d. 955), whose commercial ventures carried him to many places around the littoral of the Indian Ocean during the tenth century. Some of his colleagues (and most likely, he himself) were involved in the slave trade in East Africa, and recorded their experiences there. However, the trade could have its pitfalls, as seen in the account of the Muslim chronicler al-Tabari (d. 923), who describes a slave uprising known as the Zanj ("Blacks") Revolt which began in 869 and threatened the caliphate for much of the 870s until its final suppression in 883.

SAILORS' TALES OF BUZURG B. SHAHRIYAR, CA. MID-TENTH CENTURY

Sailor's Tale 31

Isma'ilawayh told me, and several sailors who were with him, that in the year 310 [i.e., 922 C.E.], he left Oman [on the southeastern coast of the Arabian peninsula] in his ship to go to Kanbalu [i.e., an island, Pemba, near Zanzibar off the coast of present-day Tanzania]. A storm drove him towards Sofala [a town in present-day northern Mozambique] on the Zanj [i.e., "black" or East African] coast. Seeing the coast where we were, the captain said, and realizing that we were falling among cannibal negroes and were certain to perish, we made the ritual ablutions and turned our hearts towards God, saying for each other the prayers for the dead. The canoes of the negroes surrounded us and brought us into the harbor; we cast anchor and disembarked on the land. They led us to their king. He was a young negro, handsome and well made. He asked us who we were, and where we were going. We answered that the object of our voyage was his own land.

"You lie," he said. "It was not in our land that you intended to disembark. It is only that the winds have driven you thither in spite of yourselves."

When we had admitted that he spoke the truth, he said: "Disembark your goods. Sell and buy, you have nothing to fear."

We brought all our packages to the land and began to trade, a trade which was excellent for us, without any obstacles or customs dues. We made the king a number of presents to which he replied with gifts of equal worth or ones even more valuable. When the time to depart came, we asked his permission to go, and he agreed immediately. The goods we had bought were loaded and business was wound up. When everything was in order, and the king knew of our intention to set sail, he accompanied us to the shore with several of his people, got into one of the boats and came out to the ship with us. He even came on board with seven of his companions.

When I saw them there, I said to myself: "In the Oman market, this young king would certainly fetch thirty dinars, and his seven companions sixty dinars. Their clothes alone are not worth less than twenty dinars. One way and another this would give us a profit of at least 3,000 dirhams, and without any trouble." Reflecting thus, I gave the crew their orders. They raised the sails and weighed anchor.

In the meantime the king was most agreeable to us, making us promise to come back again and promising us a good welcome when we did. When he saw the sails fill with the wind and the ship begin to move, his face changed. "You are off," he said, "well, I must say goodbye." And he

wished to embark in the canoes which were tied up to the side. But we cut the ropes, and said to him: "You will remain with us, we shall take you to our own land. There we shall reward you for all the kindnesses you have shown us."

"Strangers," he said, "when you fell upon our beaches, my people wished to eat you and pillage your goods, as they have already done to others like you. But I protected you, and asked nothing from you. As a token of my goodwill I even came down to bid you farewell in your own ship. Treat me then as justice demands, and let me return to my own land."

But no one paid any heed to his words; no notice was taken of them. As the wind got up, the coast was not slow to disappear from sight. Then night enfolded us in its shrouds and we reached the open sea.

When the day came, the king and his companions were put with the other slaves whose number reached about 200 head. He was not treated differently from his companions in captivity. The king said not a word and did not even open his mouth. He behaved as if we were unknown to him and as if we did not know him. When he got to Oman, the slaves were sold and the king with them....

Now, several years after, sailing from Oman towards Kanbalu, the wind again drove us towards the coast of Sofala on the Zanj coast, and we arrived precisely at the same place. The Negroes saw us, and their canoes surrounded us, and we recognized each other. Fully certain we should perish this time, terror struck us dumb. We made the ritual ablutions in silence, repeated the prayer of death, and said farewell to each other. The Negroes seized us, and took us to the king's dwelling and made us go in. Imagine our surprise, it was the same king that we had known, seated on his throne, just as we had left him there. We prostrated ourselves before him, overcome, and had not the strength to raise ourselves up.

"Ah," he said, "here are my old friends." Not one of us was capable of replying. He went on: "Come, raise your heads, I give you the *aman* [i.e., a pledge of safe-conduct] for yourself and for your goods." Some raised their heads, others had not the strength, and were overcome with shame. But he showed himself gentle and gracious until we had all raised our heads, but without daring to look him in the face, so strongly did remorse and fear affect us. But when we had been reassured by his safe-conduct, we finally came to our senses, and he said: "Ah, traitors! How have you treated me, after all I did for you!" And each one of us called out: "Mercy, oh King! be merciful to us!"

"I will be merciful to you," he said. "Go on, as you did last time, with your business of selling and buying. You may trade in full liberty." We could not believe our ears, we feared it was nothing but a trick to make us bring our goods to shore. None the less we disembarked them, and came and brought him a present of enormous value. But he refused it and said: "You are not worthy for me to accept a present from you. I will not soil my property with anything that comes from your hands."

After that, we did our business in peace. When the time to go came, we asked permission to embark. He gave it. At the moment of departure, I went to inform him. "Go," he said, "and may God protect you!" "Oh king," I replied, "you have showered your bounty upon us, and we have been ungrateful and traitorous to you. But how did you escape and return to your country?"

He answered: "After you had sold me in Oman, my purchaser took me to a town called Basra [in southeastern Iraq]," and he described it. "There I learnt to pray and to fast, and certain parts of the Qur'an. My master sold me to another man who took me to the country of the king of the Arabs, called Baghdad"—and he described Baghdad. "In this town I learnt to speak [Arabic] correctly. I completed my knowledge of the Qur'an and prayed with the men in the mosques. I saw the Caliph, who is called al-Muqtadir [reigned 908-932]. I was in Baghdad for a year and more, when there

came a party of men from Khurasan mounted on camels. Seeing a large crowd, I asked where all these people were going. I was told: 'To Mecca.' 'What is Mecca?' I asked. 'There,' I was answered, 'is the House of God to which Muslims make the Pilgrimage.' And I was told the history of the temple. I said to myself that I should do well to follow the caravan. My master, to whom I told all this, did not wish to go with them or to let me go. But I found a way to escape his watchfulness and to mix in the crowd of pilgrims. On the road I became a servant to them. They gave me food to eat and got for me the two cloths needed for the *ihram* [i.e., the ritual white garments used for the pilgrimage]. Finally, they instructing me, I performed all the ceremonies of the pilgrimage."

"Not daring to go back to Baghdad, for fear that my master would take away my life, I joined up with another caravan which was going to Cairo. I offered my services to the travelers, who carried me on their camels and shared their provisions with me. When I got to Cairo I saw the great river which is called the Nile. I asked: 'Where does it come from?' They answered: 'Its source is in the land of the Zanj.' [I asked:] 'On which side?' [They replied:] 'On the side of a large town called Aswan, which is on the frontier of the land of the blacks.'"

"With this information, I followed the banks of the Nile, going from one town to another, asking alms, which was not refused me. I fell, however, among a company of blacks who grabbed me. They seized me, and put me among the servants with a load which was too heavy for me to carry. I fled and fell into the hands of another company which seized me and sold me. I escaped again, and went on in this manner, until, after a series of similar adventures, I found myself in the country which adjoins the land of the Zanj. There I put on a disguise. Of all the terrors I had experienced since I left Cairo, there was none equal to that which I felt as I approached my own land. 'For,' I said to myself, 'a new king has no doubt taken my place on the throne and commands the army. To regain power is not an easy thing. If I make myself known or if anyone recognizes me, I shall be taken to the new king and killed at once. Or perhaps one of his favorites will cut off my head to get in his favor.'"

"So, in prey of mortal terror, I went on my way at night, and stayed hid during the day. When I reached the sea, I embarked on a ship; and after stopping at various places, I disembarked at night on the shore of my country. I asked an old woman: 'Is the king who rules here a just king?' She answered: 'My son, we have no king but God.' And the good women told me how the king had been carried off. I pretended the greatest astonishment at her story, as if it had not concerned me and events which I knew very well. 'The people of the kingdom,' she said, 'have agreed not to have another king until they have certain news of the former one. For the diviners have told them that he is alive and in health, and safe in the land of the Arabs.'"

"When the day came [when I reached my own land], I went into the town and walked towards my palace. I found my family just as I had left them, but plunged into grief. My people listened to the account of my story, and it surprised them and filled them with joy. Like myself, they embraced the religion of Islam. Thus I returned into possession of my sovereignty, a month before you came. And here I am, happy and satisfied with the grace God has given me and mine, of knowing the precepts of Islam, the true faith, prayers, fasting, the pilgrimage, and what is permitted and what is forbidden: for no man else in the land of the Zanj has obtained a similar favor. And if I have forgiven you, it is because you were the first cause of the purity of my religion."

Sailor's tale 60

Sailors generally agree that the sea of Berira [i.e., Berbera], which stretches for seven hundred parasangs and is on the way to the land of the Zanj, is among the most dangerous of seas.

On one side is a range of big islands, where the current runs very strong. Ships cross it in seven or eight days. When a ship goes ashore in the confines of Berira, the blackamoors geld [i.e., castrate] its company. And, when merchants journey to Berira, each of them, according to his means and the position he occupies, takes with him an escort for his protection, lest the natives seize and geld him. These blacks make a collection of the proceeds of such onslaughts upon travelers. They keep them, and flaunt them about to excite one another's envy. With them, a man's prowess is judged from the number of travelers he has dealt with in this fashion....

Sailor's tale 116

A traveler, who had made his way among the inhabitants of Waqwaq [may refer to either Madagascar or the islands of Southeast Asia like Sumatra?], once described to me the great size of their towns and islands. By the words "great size," I do not mean that their towns are of vast extent, but that they are thickly populated. The Waqwaqians have a certain affinity with the Turks. They are most industrious artisans, while as for their morals, they are treacherous, crafty, and deceitful, the lowest and most ill-intentioned set of people you could find anywhere.

Sailor's tale 117

Ibn Lakis has imparted to me some extraordinary pieces of information concerning them. It is thus that in 334 [i.e., 945 or 946 C.E.] they came upon Kanbalu [near Zanzibar] in a thousand ships and fought them with the utmost vigor; without, however achieving their end, as Kanbalu is surrounded by a strong defensive wall around which stretches the water-filled estuary of the sea, so that Kanbalu is at the center of this estuary, like a fortified citadel. When people of the Waqwaq subsequently came ashore there, they asked them why they had come specifically there and not somewhere else. They replied that this was because among them there were to be found products sought after in their country and in China, such as ivory, tortoise shell, panther hides and ambergris, and because they were seeking out the Zanj, on account of the ease with which they endured slavery and on account of their physical strength. They said that they had come from a distance of one year's sailing, that they had pillaged islands situated six day journey time from Kanbalu and had taken possession of a certain number of villages and towns of Sofala of the Zanj, to say nothing of others which they did not know. If these people spoke the truth and if their account was accurate, this would confirm what Ibn Lakis said of the islands of the Waqwaq: that they are situated opposite China.

Sailor's tale 118

...I am told by the same informant, that he had heard say by a ship's captain how vessels, which have started out of Sofala of the Zanj, often land on a coast, where dwell cannibal blacks. It happens by accident, winds and currents diverting the vessel from its course and drawing it this way, in spite of all that the captain can do. The cannibal tribe are some fifteen hundred parasangs distant from Qabila. God's wisdom is over all. As for the place, at which the ships touch, it is a thousand, or, by the very lowest estimate, eight hundred parasangs beyond Qabila, and a voyage of about forty-two zama....

The Events of the Year 255 (869)—The Revolt of the Zanj

...It was reported from Rayhan b. Salih, one of the slaves of the Shurajiyin [a group of African slaves], who was the first of their number to join 'Ali [the leader of the Qaramita Muslim movement], that he said: I was in charge of my master's slaves, transporting flour from al-Basra to the Shurajiyin and distributing it among them. I had conveyed a cargo to them as usual and on the way passed by the place where 'Ali was staying, that is, at Barankhal in the castle al-Qurashi, when his supporters seized me and took me to him. I was ordered to greet him as [if he were an] amir, which I did. He asked me where I had come from, and I told him that I had come from al-Basra. He asked whether I had heard any news about them in al-Basra, and I replied that I had not. He then asked me if there was any news of al-Zaynabi [an official in Basra leading the 'Abbasid forces there], and I told him I knew nothing about him. Then he said: "Tell me of the activities of the Bilaliyyah and Sa'diyyah factions." I replied that I had no information on them either. Finally, he inquired whether I knew anything of the slaves of the Shurajiyin and what each was doing in the business of transporting flour, *sawiq* [i.e., a parched barley meal, sort of like oatmeal], and dates and also about those among both the freedmen and slaves who worked in the salt steppe. I told him what I knew of these matters.

He appealed to me to join him, to which I agreed. He then said to me, "induce as many slaves as you can to join, and bring them to me." He promised to extend various benefits to me and make me their commander. He also made me solemnly vow that I would not disclose his whereabouts to anyone and that I would return to him. He then allowed me to proceed on my way. I delivered the flour that I was carrying to its intended destination. I was away for the whole of that day and returned to 'Ali's camp the next morning.

When I arrived, Rafiq, the servant of Yahya b. 'Abd al-Rahman, had also arrived at the camp. He had been sent to al-Basra with some of his business goods. He arrived with Shibl b. Salim, one of the slaves of the al-Dabbasin [i.e., a group who produced pressed date juice], who had with him a piece of silk material, which 'Ali had commissioned him to purchase to have it made into a banner. Written upon it in red and green characters were the following words: "God has purchased the souls of believers and their property, for they have attained to paradise fighting in the way of God" [al-Qur'an, 9:111], to the end of the verse. 'Ali's name and that of his father were also inscribed upon it, and the banner was fastened to the top of a barge pole.

In the early morning of Saturday, the 28th of Ramadan [i.e., September 9, 869], 'Ali set out from [the castle al-Qurashi]. When he had reached the farthest end of the castle precinct, some slaves of one of the Shurajiyin known as al-'Attar met him as they were setting about their business. 'Ali ordered them to be seized, along with their agent, who was placed in fetters. They numbered in all some fifty slaves. 'Ali next proceeded to a place where [the agent] al-Sana'i worked, and there around five hundred slaves were seized, among them one who was known as Abu Hudayd. Their agent was likewise bound with fetters and taken along as well. The place where this occurred was called Nahr al-Mukathir. 'Ali proceeded next to a place belonging to al-Sirafi and captured there another one hundred fifty slaves, among them an individual called Zurayq and another known as Abu al-Khanjar. Then, at a place belonging to Ibn 'Ata', Tariq, Subayh al-A'sar, Rashid al-Maghribi, and Rashid al-Qarmati were captured along with eighty more slaves. The next place was that of Isma'il, who was known as a slave of Sahl al-Tahhan. 'Ali continued to operate in this fashion all day until he had amassed a large number of the Shurajiyin slaves.

Assembling them together, ‘Ali rose and addressed them, raising their spirits by promising to lead and command them and to give them possession of property. He swore a solemn oath to them that he would neither deceive nor betray them and that they would experience only kind treatment from him. ‘Ali then summoned their masters and said to them: “I wanted to behead you all for the way you have treated these slaves, with arrogance and coercion and, indeed, in ways that God has forbidden, driving them beyond endurance. But my companions have spoken to me about you, and now I have decided to set you free.”

They replied that the slaves were merely habitual runaways, who would flee from ‘Ali [at the first opportunity], and then both he and they would be the losers. They said, “turn them over to us, and let us pay you compensation for them.” But ‘Ali ordered their slaves to bring whips of palm branches and, while their masters and agents were prostrated on the ground, each one was given five hundred lashes. ‘Ali extracted a vow from them, on penalty of having to repudiate their wives, that they would neither divulge his whereabouts to anyone nor reveal the size of his following. They were then released and sent on their way to al-Basra.

One of their number, a man named ‘Abdallah and known as Karikha, crossed over the Dujayl [a branch of the Tigris River] and warned the Shurajiyin to guard their slaves carefully. There were some fifteen thousand there at the time.

After performing the afternoon prayer ‘Ali ventured forth again, and upon reaching the bank of the Dujayl he found there boats laden with compost of dung and ashes entering port on the rising tide. Together with his partisans he traversed the river in them and then went on to the Nahr Maymun [a canal]. He established his quarters in the mosque situated in the middle of the market that stretched along the Nahr Maymun. He continued efforts to gather blacks to his camp right up to the time of the prayer breaking the fast of Ramadan. On the day of the celebration of the feast he summoned his followers to assemble for prayer. When they had done so, the pole flying his banner was set into the ground. ‘Ali prayed with them, and in a sermon he recalled the wretched state from which, through him, God had rescued them. ‘Ali said that he wanted to improve their condition, giving them slaves, money, and homes to possess for themselves, and that by them they could achieve the greatest things. He then swore a solemn oath, and when his prayer and sermon were complete he ordered those who had followed his words to instruct those non-Arabic speakers among them who had not understood, in order [also] to raise their spirits. That was done, and ‘Ali entered the castle.

A day later he set out for Nahr Bur, where a detachment of his troops encountered a detachment of the [‘Abbasid commander] al-Himyari and drove them off into the desert. The Zanj leader, accompanied by some more troops, joined forces with the others and defeated al-Himyari and his troops, driving them back as far as the Tigris flats. One of the superintendents of the blacks, called Abu Salih and known as “the Short,” sought protection for himself and three hundred Zanj. ‘Ali graciously granted this and promised them good fortune. When the numbers of Zanj who had been thus gathered together increased significantly, he appointed leaders for them and said that, for each of them who brought another Zanj, he would be attached to him. It is also said that ‘Ali did not appoint his commanders until after the battle of slaves in Bayan and his move to Sabkhat al-Qandal [near the city of Basra].

Ibn Abi ‘Awn was transferred from the governorship of Wasit to that of al-Ubullah and the districts of the Tigris. On the day that [‘Ali b. Muhammad] appointed his commanders, news reportedly reached him that al-Himyari and ‘Aqil, along with Ibn Abi ‘Awn’s deputy, who had been stationed in al-Ubullah, had advanced toward him and were encamped at Nahr Tin. ‘Ali ordered his troops to move to al-Raziqiyah, which was located at the far side of al-Badhaward [a town between

Basra and Wasit to its northwest]. He reached there at the time of the midday prayer, which they performed, and then prepared for battle. At the time there were only three swords in ‘Ali’s so-called “army”—namely, his own, that of ‘Ali b. Aban, and that of Muhammad b. Salm. Between the time of the midday and afternoon prayers, ‘Ali departed [from al-Raziqiyyah] with his troops and hastened back toward al-Muhammadiyya [a marsh lake near Basra], placing ‘Ali b. Aban in their rear with orders to report on anyone following them. He himself proceeded at the head of the company [of blacks] until they reached al-Muhammadiyya. He sat by the water’s edge and ordered the company to quench their thirst.

When the troops arrived, ‘Ali b. Aban said to him that they had seen swords glistening and heard the sounds of people moving behind them but that they could not tell whether they were moving away or heading toward them. He was still speaking when the enemy arrived. The Zanj called one another to arms and Abu Salih Mufarraj al-Nubi hastened forth with Rayhan b. Salih and Fath al-Hajjam. Fath had been eating [at the time], and so he went into the fray holding his plate. As his companions advanced, one of the Shurajiyin called Bulbul encountered Fath, who attacked him with his plate and beat him with it, causing Bulbul to drop his weapon, turn, and flee. He and four thousand other men were put to flight, some being killed and others dying of thirst on the way. A number, too, were taken captive and brought to the leader of the Zanj who ordered them beheaded. Their heads were stacked on the backs of mules seized from the Shurajiyin, who had used them for transporting the nitrous topsoil [to replenish the southern Mesopotamian farmlands]. The procession set out and reached al-Qadisiyya by the time of the evening prayer.

A *mawla* [attached client] of the Hashimites attacked ‘Ali’s company outside the village and killed one of the blacks. The news was brought to ‘Ali, and his companions asked him for permission to sack the village and search for the culprit who had killed their comrade. He replied, saying “that would be impossible without our knowing what the villagers intended and whether the killer acted with their consent. We will ask them to deliver him to us. If they do so, fine, but, if not, then it would be lawful for us to slay them.”

‘Ali urged them to prepare quickly for departure, and they returned to Nahr Maymun, where he established himself in the same mosque that he had initially used. He ordered the heads [of the Shurajiyin] to be brought as well and publicly displayed. He instructed Abu Salih al-Nubi to make the call to prayer. This he did, saluting ‘Ali as the amir. Then ‘Ali prayed the late evening prayer with his companions and spent the night there. The following morning ‘Ali set out again, first passing by the [village] of al-Karkh, before arriving at a village called Jubba [a village known for sugarcane production]. It was the time of the midday prayer. He crossed over the Dujayl [in the province of al-Ahwaz] by way of a ford he had been shown, but rather than entering the village, he camped outside it. He sent a message to the inhabitants. Their elders, along with those of al-Karkh, came to meet him. He ordered them to provide hospitality for himself and his companions, which was done as he wished, and he spent that night among them.

The next day one of the inhabitants of Jubba offered ‘Ali a bay horse, but he could find neither bridle nor saddle for it; thus he had to make do with a rope and a cinch of palm fibers. He set out and finally reached a place called al-‘Abbasi al-‘Atiq, where he secured the services of a guide as far as al-Sib, a canal upon which was situated the village of al-Ja‘fariyya. The villagers were alerted to his arrival and fled. ‘Ali entered and settled in the house of [the ‘Abbasid] Ja‘far b. Sulayman, which was located in the market, while his companions scattered throughout the village. They brought to him a villager they had discovered, and ‘Ali asked him the whereabouts of the Hashimites’ agents. The man said they were in the thickets [outside the village]. ‘Ali sent the one nicknamed Jurban to fetch their headman, Yahya b. Yahya al-Zubayri, a *mawla* of the Ziyadiyyin

[group]. He was asked whether he had any money, and the man replied that he did not. So ‘Ali ordered him beheaded. Fearing now for his life, the man confessed to having hidden some money away; he sent for it and brought to ‘Ali the amount of two hundred fifty dinars and one thousand dirhams, the first such booty he had gained. ‘Ali next asked the headman about the animals owned by the agents of the Hashimites, and he pointed out three pack animals, one a bay; one chestnut, and one gray. One was given to Ibn Salm, another to Yahya b. Muhammad, while the third was given to Mushriq the servant of Yahya b. ‘Abd al-Rahman. Rafiq rode upon a donkey; loaded with baggage.

Some of the blacks discovered a cache of arms in a house belonging to one of the Banu Hashim; they were seized. Al-Nubi the Younger brought a sword, which the Zanj leader then gave to Yahya b. Muhammad. In this way there fell into the hands of the Zanj swords, spears, daggers, and shields....

The Origins of the Qarmatians

In 278 [i.e., the year 891], reports arrived [at Baghdad] of a revolutionary group in the Kufa area known as the Qarmatians. Their movement began with the arrival there of a man from the province of Khuzistan. Settling in a place known as al-Nahrayn, he led an ascetic life and displayed his piety to all. He earned his living by weaving baskets from palm leaves, and spent much of his time praying. He continued this way for some time. If anyone joined him, he would discourse with him upon religious affairs, inculcate him with contempt for this world, and teach him that it was incumbent upon everyone to pray fifty times each day and night. He did this until news spread about his activity in this place. Then he disclosed that he was urging allegiance to an Imam from the house of the Messenger [i.e., from the family of ‘Ali b. Abu Talib]. He went on in this manner attracting people to his side and spreading his message which won over their hearts.

He stayed at a greengrocer’s in the village. Nearby there was a palm-grove, which was acquired by a group of merchants. The latter built an enclosure in which they stored the fruits they gathered from the grove. They came to the greengrocer and asked him to find them a man who could guard what they had gathered. The greengrocer pointed this man out to them, and said, “If this man consents to guard your dates, he is just the man you want.” So the merchants discussed the matter with him, and he agreed to act as guard for a certain remuneration. He acted as guard for them, spending most of his day at prayers and fasting. For breakfast, he would take a ratl [i.e., a weight measurement] of dates, and after eating he would collect the stones. When the merchants had loaded all their dates, they went to the greengrocer to settle their account with this hired-hand of theirs, and they paid him what he had earned. Then, the latter reckoned what he owed the greengrocer for his dates, and deducted from that sum the worth of the stones which he returned to the latter.

When the merchants heard what was going on between the man and the greengrocer concerning the date stones, they attacked him, and striking him, they said, “was it not enough for you to eat our dates, but that now you even sell their stones?” The greengrocer then said to them, “leave him alone; this man would not even touch your dates.” And he told them his story. The merchants now regretted having struck him, and asked him to forgive them. This he did, and, as a result, when they came across his asceticism, the people of the village esteemed him even more.

Afterwards, he fell sick and lay abandoned on the road. Now there was a man in that village who drove oxen. He had extremely red eyes; his eyes were so red that the people of the village came to call him Karmita, on account of the redness of his eyes—Karmita in Aramaic means “red-eyed” [i.e., this term perhaps refers to the Nabaetean dialect of north Arabia] The greengrocer asked this

Karmita to take the sick man to his home and ask his family to watch over him and take care of him. Karmita did this, and the man stayed with him until he recovered.

Thereupon he would receive townspeople in his home, invite them to join him in his cause, and describe his creed to them. The people of this region responded and he took a dinar from everyone who joined his religious group—they thought that he took it for the Imam. In this fashion, he continued to summon the people of those villages, and they responded favorably to him. Then he selected twelve agents from among them [like the ‘Abbasid head propagandists before him], and he instructed them to summon people to their faith. He said to the agents, “you are like the apostles of Jesus, the son of Mary....”

Later on, he appeared in another place, and met some of his friends and others. They asked him about his experience and he replied, “no one can work evil upon me and thus control me.” This lifted him still higher in their eyes. Fearing for his safety, he left for the vicinity of Damascus, and nothing was heard of him. People called him by the name of the owner of the oxen in whose house he had been, Karmita. Later they found it easier to pronounce it as Qarmat....

The arrival of Qarmat in the neighborhood of al-Kufa took place before the leader of the Zanj was killed. That is, one of our colleagues (heard this from) [his] brother-in-law: I went to the leader of the Zanj. Arriving before him I said, “I subscribe to a certain religious practice, and have one hundred thousand swords at my command. Let us discuss this matter. If we agree about the practice, I will join you with all my men; if not, I will withdraw.” I then said to him, “grant me safe conduct.” He did this. I held a discussion with him until noon, but then it finally became clear to me that he was opposed to my ideas. When he rose to go to perform the prayer I slipped out, and, leaving his city, I went to the area of al-Kufa....

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