ENSLAVEMENT, SLAVE LABOUR AND THE TREATMENT OF CAPTIVES IN THE CRIMEAN KHANATE

MÁRIA IVANICS

The Crimean Tatars founded a state in a region that had been an area for the acquisition and marketing of slaves since Antiquity. Imposing taxation on the slave trade and on the commerce of Italian colonial towns along the Black Sea littoral was the means of generating the reliable income the Tatars needed for the foundation of an independent state in the first half of the fifteenth century and for its subsequent maintenance for approximately three hundred years. The density of the population in the area controlled by Tatars was very low, and the agriculture there was rudimentary. Only the coastal districts of the peninsula were suitable for intense cultivation. Their yields, however, were insufficient to support the multitudinous warring layers, in contrast to the Balkans which proved to be the granary of Ottoman troops for centuries. Because of the frequent droughts and epidemics, most of the nomadic Nogai Tatars living on the steppe and in Bucak under the suzerainty of the Crimean khan were compelled to pursue slave acquisition as their only sure means of subsistence. The Tatar clans of the military élite settled in the Crimea constantly needed slaves to work their estates. Thus, slave labour and revenues from the slave trade were indispensable to the Crimean Khanate for centuries.

Research into the Crimean Tatar slave trade has concentrated mainly on raids against Polish and Russian areas, on the fate of slaves seized in these territories and on the revenues from it that accrued to the Ottoman treasury.\(^1\) A major stride has taken place recently with the publication of

Ottoman customs registers. Rough estimates can thus be replaced by exact figures concerning the magnitude of the Black Sea slave trade, and of the profits from it pocketed by the Ottomans after 1475, when the Italian coastal colonies were occupied and the Khanate forced into a loose dependency. In 1529, 10,000 gold coins, approximately one quarter of the customs revenue of the busiest port, Caffa, derived from slaves exported from the Crimea.\(^2\) Of total Ottoman income from the Crimea in 1577–78, 29 per cent came from the slave trade. An indication of the special value of slaves is the fact that a customs duty of 256 \(\text{akçe}\) or nearly 4 gold coins per capita was levied on them (as compared to the 4.2 per cent duty levied on ordinary goods).\(^3\) This was the equivalent to 6–12 per cent of a price ranging from 25 to 50 gold coins per capita that could be achieved in slave markets. Thus, duties on slaves were very high. Using the customs revenues of 1578 as a basis, İnalçık put the number of slaves exported over a period of 14 months at 17,502.\(^4\) The customs income of the Black Sea ports went in part to the leaders of the Khanate. Prior to 1475, the Genoese colonies paid tribute to the khan, while after that date the Ottomans gave various amounts, mostly from the customs duties levied in Caffa, to the khan, the \(\text{kalga}\) and the \(\text{nureddin}\) as annual allowances (\(\text{salyane}\)).\(^5\)

**Opportunities for taking prisoners during military campaigns**

A large number of slaves could be captured by the Tatars during their campaigns, which were directed mainly against the Russians, Poles and

---


\(^4\)İnalçık, *The Customs Register*, 143 and *An Economic and Social History*, 283–285.

\(^5\)In 1578, 10 per cent of the total revenues was paid as \(\text{salyane}\). İnalçık, *The Customs Register*, 143. Detailed \(\text{salyane}\) lists are published in A. W. Fisher, “Les rapport entre l’Empire Ottoman et la Crimée. L’aspect financier,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique* 13 (1972) 368–382.