

AHMED NAZMI

The Functions of the White Slaves in the Social Life of the Abbasid Caliphate

At the end of 6th beginning of the 70th century A.D., the time of the advent of Islam, slavery was a regular element of society.¹ Like other religions, Islam did not prohibit this system. Needless to say Islamic law and its jurisprudence in its approach to slavery in general has presented more substantial moral rules than are to be found in other religions. This was achieved by considerably ameliorating the lot of slaves under Islam.

According to the *Qur'an*,² granting slaves freedom and emancipating them are considered acceptable charitable deeds by God.³

Perhaps it should be also emphasized that slavery in Islam does not convey the same idea as in other civilisations.⁴ In Islam the slave has equal rights with his master in food, clothing and dwelling, moreover the slave can manage his own business and buy his own freedom.⁵ But in practice depended on what kind of function or job the slave had and this we shall explain in due course.

By the coming of the Umayyad dynasty thousands of slaves, captives both black and white, had been brought in to the Caliphate as war booty, this occurred as result of war like expeditions round the four points of the compass. White slaves became a distinctive phenomenon inside the Muslim society as early as the beginning of the Umayyad period.

Spain and the Byzantine lands were the main sources of slaves of European origin. The war between the Arabs and the rising Khazarian State, beyond

¹ R. Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam*, Cambridge 1962, p. 81.

² M. Gaudetroy-Demonbynes, *Narodziny islamu*, translated into Polish by H. Olędzka. PIW, Warszawa 1988, pp. 454–455.

³ *Qur'ām*, s. IV–92 and s. II–177.

⁴ A. Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Heidelberg 1922.

⁵ Al-Kāsānī, *Kitāb badā'i' aṣ-ṣanā'i fī tartīb aṣ-ṣarā'i*, Al-Qāhira 1910, vol. V, pp. 46, 47, 48, 49 and 107, 108, 109, 110. See also Al-Gazālī, *Kitāb adāb aṣ-ṣuḥba wa-al-Mu'āṣara*, Baḡdād 1984, pp. 420–427.

the Caucasian mountains became a parallel source of the Eurasian slaves who were of Turkish as well as Ugrian origin.⁶ The Umayyad penetration in Transcaucasus region brought a trickle of Slav domestic slaves as mentioned by Al-Balāḍurī.⁷ Most probably the majority of these slaves are not only of Slavonic race but a mixture of Bulgarian, Slav, Finno-Ugrian and Turkish races as has been pointed out by recent scholars.⁸

According to C. E. Bosworth the acquisition of slaves was a compelling motive behind almost all Arab raids into the steppes between the Caspian and Black Seas.⁹ By the coming of the Abbasids, the demand for domestic slaves grew up. The slavery system was closely integrated into Muslim society in general, its elements recruited from non-Muslim peoples who had been mostly captured in war or purchased on the European slave markets.

The demand for white slaves by the Muslim was an increasing one and there are many reasons for this. Some white slaves served in the Muslim army: for example in the Western Caliphate—Umayyad in Spain and Fatimid in North Africa—they were known by the name Saqāliba, the term which in general was applied to the white slaves—servants and soldiers—who were from a great variety of European races but not only the Slavs.¹⁰ The life of Slaves in the Eastern Caliphate is not truly documented but their functions and behaviour were similar to those of the Muslim Slaves in the West with few exception of significance. From the point of view of social structure, the role of the white slaves was more remarkable in the Abbasid society. It is obvious that the slaves of European origin did not have any important influence on the economic life of the Islamic state. They did not contribute to either agricultural or industrial activity.

It was suggested in general terms that the establishment of the white slavery system in the Eastern Caliphate was not intended for the purpose of using the slaves for manual labour or in the military sphere.

The available Islamic sources do not include substantial evidence of such activity. Quite the contrary—black slaves were used intensively for manual labour particularly for example in soil reclamation in Southern Iraq.¹¹ The inhuman treatment on mass of black slaves in Southern Iraq was one of the main reasons which

⁶ C. E. Bosworth, *Islamic Frontiers in Africa, Asia and Central Asia*. in: *The Legacy of Islam*, 2nd edition, Oxford 1974, p. 120. See also Mez, op. cit., p. 154.

⁷ Al-Balāḍurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, edited by R. M. Raḍwān, Al-Qāhira 1959, p. 205.

⁸ Z. W. Togan, *Ibn Faḍlān's Reisebericht*, Leipzig 1939, pp. 307, 8. T. Lewicki, *Źródła arabskie do dziejów słowiańszczyzny*, Wrocław-Kraków 1956, vol. I, pp. 238, 239; Bosworth, *ibid.*

⁹ Bosworth, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁰ E. Lévi Provençal, *Histoire de L'Espagne Musulmane*, Brill Leiden 1950, vol. II, p. 124.

¹¹ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ ar-rusūl wa-al-mulūk*, edited by M. A. Ibrāhīm, Al-Qahira 1979, vol. IX, p. 414. See also Anonymous *Kitāb al-ʿuyūn wa-al-ḥadāʾiq*, edited by ʿUmar as-Saʿīdī, Institut Français de Damas 1972. V. IV, part I, pp. 14, 15.

led to the so called „Negro revolution” which lasted about fourteen years from the year 868 to 872 A.D. According to the Arabic sources, this rebellion was joined by about 15 thousand Negroes.¹²

As far as the white slaves are concerned, it seems that neither economic nor military employment was important and their role was restricted mostly to a social one. They were used mainly for domestic services in Caliphs, Princes' and high officials' palaces as well as in the houses of merchants and wealthy people who were able to buy such slaves. It was rare for these slaves to be used extensively in military service as were the slaves of Turkish and Asian origin, who had been integrated into the Abbasid army by the Caliph Al-Mu'taṣim who had purchased approximately four thousand Turkish boys to form the nucleus of his army. Later this became a permanent system in the Caliphate and was to last for more than a century and a half.¹³

There is however no evidence to support the view that white slaves were not employed in the Muslim army. They may have served as special guards or for special auxiliary tasks.

The oldest source mentioning the use of white slaves in such jobs seems to be Al-Mas'ūdī who mentions that during the reign of the Caliph 'Utmān, „Mu'āwīya the governor of Syria arrested Abū Darr Al-Ġaffārī who was causing him a lot of trouble and sent him to Al-Madīna—the Muslim capital at this time guarded by an escort of Slavs.¹⁴

We cannot ascertain whether those guards were of Slavonic origin or of other Indo-European races. Nevertheless this passage of Al-Mas'ūdī confirmed that white slaves had a military role from the time of the early Caliphate.

Other information also deriving from Al-Mas'ūdī tells us that some of the white slaves had similar jobs, for example the chamberlain of the last Umayyad Caliph was one of his slave boys who had the name Ṣaqlāb.¹⁵ Perhaps this name indicated a man of Slavonic origin.

There were also cases when many white slaves particularly those who were eunuchs served in military posts as guardian leaders and chief commanders of the main fortification points on the borders between Muslim and Byzantine territory.¹⁶

As far as male slaves are concerned, there were among them the *ġilmān*¹⁷ (boys) who were servants working in the palaces and the *hiṣyān* who were serving and

¹² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūġ ad-dahab wa-ma'ādin al-ġawhar*, edited by M. M. 'Abdal-Ḥamīd, Miṣr, Dār ar-Raġā', without date, vol. IV, p. 135.

¹³ Op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁴ Op. cit., vol. II, p. 228.

¹⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī, *At-Tanbīh wa-al-iṣrāf*, edited by Baron Rosen, reprinted in Beirut 1965, p. 328.

¹⁶ Al-Ġāhiz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, edited by A. M. Hārūn, Al-Qāhira, without date, vol. I, pp. 173, 174.

¹⁷ The term *ġulām*, in plural *ġilmān* has very wide meaning in Arabic, essentially it means a young man or a boy (beardless). Often indicate a slave servant or bodyguard but not eunuch.

guarding the *ḥarīm* in general. The rich and luxurious style of these palaces saw the presence of expensive furniture and fittings and both „*ḡilmān* and *hiṣṭyān*” in order to add more splendour to the Caliph’s court as well as in the residences of the princes and state officials. For instance, some of these officials owned a great many slaves. According to A t - Ṭ a b a r ī one of the state officials, had thirty *ḡulāms* (slave boys).¹⁸ The army chiefs and wealthy people also employed *ḡilmān* and *hiṣṭyān*.

The presence of white slaves whether they were boys or eunuchs was not restricted to urban Muslim societies alone these white slaves were also found in the desert among the Bedouin tribes, specifically as the property of Arab tribal leaders. As some of the Arabic sources mention, Abū Sa‘īd Al-Ġanābī the chief of the Qarāmiṭa (the Carmatians) who was living in the Haḡar desert south of Iraq owned many white slave boys. Moreover, one of his slave boys assassinated him.¹⁹ This shows how the slavery system was integrated in Muslim society as a whole.

As far as the slave boys duties are concerned, we know that they were close to their masters to the extent that they were serving them personally. For instance, some of them hold the position of a butler who was responsible among other things for testing the beverage offered to his master as well as that of waiter whose job was to present the food and supervise the service accorded to his lord during meals; many of these boys later occupied high official posts commanding influential state affairs; nevertheless they kept their former titles and epithets which referred to their previous jobs, such as Badir aš-Šarābī/Badir the waiter or the butler,²⁰ Nadīr al-Ḥaramī /Nadīr the supervisor of the ḥarīm.²¹ Mū’nis al-Ḥāzin /Mu’nis the treasurer or the store house man.²²

Other temporary assignments or unusual tasks were also performed by the white slaves. For instance, the assassination of undesirable men or even the Caliphs themselves had often been performed by them. We have many quotations on such matters in Arabic sources. For example, when the Caliph Al-Ma’mūn decided to liquidate his Vizier Al-Faḍl Ibn Sahl, he sent four of his slaves to kill him; one of them was a certain Slav boy named Muwaffaq aš-Šaqlabī (Muwaffaq the Slav), the second one was a Greek named Constantin Ar-Rūmī.²³ Other sources

A t - Ṭ a b a r ī, op. cit., vol. VIII, p. 311. See also D. Sourdel, Article *Ghulām*, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, Brill 1965.

¹⁸ A t - Ṭ a b a r ī, op. cit., vol. IX, p. 162.

¹⁹ Anonymous, *Kitāb al-‘uyūn*, op. cit., p. 175. Miskawayhī. *Taḡārib al-umam*, edited by H. F. Amedroz, London 1920, vol. I, p. 33.

²⁰ Anonymous *Kitāb al-‘uyūn*, op. cit., p. vol. II. 162.

²¹ Ibn Faḍlān, *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān*, edited by Sāmī ad-Dahān, Matbū‘āt al-Maḡma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī bi-Dimašq 1960, p. 197a.

²² Miskawayhī, op. cit., pp. 7 and 16.

²³ A t - Ṭ a b a r ī, op. cit., vol. V, p. 565.

say that these slaves were also involved in dissension and disturbances inside the court and Caliph's palaces as well as in civil strife in general. Many of them were employed for such dirty tasks as killing and torturing the Caliphs and officials. The Caliph Al-Mustakfī for instance was gouged and agonised at the hands of his own servant who was of Slav origin.²⁴

On the other hand, the custom of using white slaves in the courts and palaces created a sense of beauty which reflected on the social life in big cities in general and in Baghdad in particular. It also left traces in literature and artistic life. Court poetry about the boys, was a new phenomena that appeared in Arabic literature as a result of the social exchange and the establishment of the new rich classes. Many poets dealt with dallying and erotic poetry about boys. Abu Nuwās and Baššār Ibn Burd were the most famous poets in this field.²⁵ Among the officials, Yaḥya Ibn Aktam, the main judge of Al-Baṣra, was known as a homosexual and was also involved in writing love poetry to boys.²⁶ Some Caliphs employed their poets in making verses about dalliance with their own boys.²⁷ Consequently it might be thought that homosexuality was widely spread among the people at that time. It seems that such phenomenon was more common among the high classes of official and rich people. Other information derived from many Arabic sources confirms that the Caliph Al-Amīn himself was involved in this prohibited love with one of his slave boys.²⁸

According to these materials, Zubayda, the mother of the Caliph Al-Amīn, when she noticed that her son was fond of boys, arranged that many of her graceful slave girls should be dressed like boys and even their heads were covered to make them look more like boys. The girls who looked like boys were known in literature by the name *al-ḡulamīyyāt*.²⁹ Moreover, the girls and women in Baghdad society at this time began to imitate the *ḡulmān* (boys) by cutting and combing their hair as well as in the way they dressed. They were also trying to look as graceful as boys.³⁰

Besides these functions, the white slaves either from the markets or from the palaces were used occasionally in the exchange of captives as replacement for Muslim soldiers or civilians who were captured by The Byzantine. In the year 231 H. 845–846 A.D. during the reign of the Caliph Al-Wāṭiq, an exchange of this kind between the two powers took place near the frontier. Both, the Caliphate and Byzantine Empire agreed to carry out this exchange and since the number

²⁴ Anonymous *Kitāb al-‘uyūn*, op. cit., p. 441.

²⁵ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūḡ*, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 343, 346.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Op. cit., vol. IV, p. 72.

²⁸ Al-Ġahšayārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā’ wa-al-kuttāb*, edited by M. As-Saqqā and others. Al-Qāhira 1938, p. 293.

²⁹ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūḡ* op. cit., vol. III, p. 245.

³⁰ Ibid.

of Muslim captives exceeded the number of the Byzantine ones, the Caliph gave the order for purchasing and gathering white slaves from the markets and places in an effort to make the number of Muslim captives equal to the Byzantine one. This was repeated during the reign of the Caliph Al-Muqtadir.³¹

As far as *al-ḥiṣṭyān* (the eunuchs) are concerned, they existed in Muslim society for special functions, mostly as supervising, guarding and serving in the *ḥarām* in the palaces of Caliphs and in the houses that belonged to the officials and wealthy people. Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, who relies on Al-Ġāḥiẓ, says that using eunuchs was not known among the Arabs before Islam. The author adds that Mu‘āwīya was the first Caliph to have been served in his palaces by eunuchs.³² The term *ḥadam* (servants) was also used in Arabic as an equivalent conventional word for eunuchs.³³ This term was usually mentioned to describe the persons instead of the word eunuchs. For instance, Mū’nis al-Ḥādīm, Muflīḥ al-Ḥādīm etc. It cannot however be taken strictly as a synonym. According to Philip Hitti, the term *ḡilmān* might also refer to eunuchs,³⁴ but it is difficult to agree with his view because the linguistic concept of the word means a boy who has reached the stage of carnal appetite and sensuous desire. On the other hand, there is no indication in our sources which can confirm this supposition.

Other Arabic sources deal with the emasculation process in detail but there is no need to mention it here.³⁵ On the other hand, most of these materials point out that the emasculation process is rejected and because of its inhumanity, the Muslim does not carry out that kind of practice. Most of those who performed it were not Muslims; in addition the operation was often carried out outside the Muslim countries.³⁶ We are also informed by Al-Ġāḥiẓ of this view in his work *Fi ḍamm an naṣārā* where there are several noteworthy remarks about the emasculation process which had been carried out by the Byzantine and eastern Christians for the boys who had to serve in church.³⁷ According to Al-Muqaddasī the Muslim armies were accustomed, during their raids against Byzantine provinces, to attack the churches in order to kidnap the eunuch children who were serving in those churches.³⁸ Castration and using eunuchs was common in the Byzantine Empire.

³¹ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, op. cit., V. IX, p. 142. Miskawhī, op. cit., p. 55.

³² Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Kitāb al-awā’il*, edited by M. Al-Miṣrī and W. Al-Qaṣṣāb, Dimašq 1975, vol. I, p. 385.

³³ Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsān at-taqāsīm fī ma‘rifat al-aqālīm*, edited by M. J. DeGoeje, Brill, Leiden 1906, p. 242.

³⁴ Ph. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, Macmillan, London 1943, p. 341. According to Aṭ-Ṭabarī, the word *ḡulām* does not mean eunuch at all, *ibid.*

³⁵ Al-Muqaddasī, op. cit., p. 242.

³⁶ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 124.

³⁷ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Fi ḍamm an-naṣārā. Talāt rasā’il li-al-Ġāḥiẓ*, edited by J. Finkel, Cairo 1926, pp. 41, 42.

³⁸ Al-Muqaddasī, *ibid.*

The spread of emasculation in Byzantium was for a different purpose, either religious or military whereas the reason for using eunuchs in Muslim countries was mainly a social one. Eunuchs in the social structure of Muslim countries were of both colours either white or black. Al-Muqaddasī in this case divided the *ḥadam* (eunuch servants) into three kinds as follows: the first kind which was brought to Egypt—it seems that he is talking about the Nubians—the second kind which was brought to Aden—it seems they were from East Africa and Abyssinia—the author considered the second kind as the worst, and the third and best kind which consisted of white eunuchs servants who were of Slav or Rum (Greek) origin.³⁹ It should be noticed in this connection that there were two kinds of castrated boys. The first who were castrated in a way which only forbade them to have progeny but allowed them to retain carnal appetite, such an eunuch was called *al-maslūb*. The second kind were those fully castrated by cutting off their sexual organs. This kind of eunuch was known by the name *mağbūb*.⁴⁰ Most of the eunuchs who were appointed to serve the *ḥarīm* were of the second kind. Ibn Idārī al-Murrakušī recounted that in the palace of the Caliph Al-Ḥākam in Qurṭuba there were thousand of these slave eunuchs who were of the *Ṣaqāliba*.⁴¹ It should be realised that common tradition in Muslim society recommended the use of black eunuchs as servants, and in supervising and serving the *Ḥarīm* in order to avoid the platonic love adventures which occasionally happened among the women residing in *ḥarīm* and their white eunuchs servants.⁴² The conservative and pious Caliph Al-Muhtadī appointed his black eunuch Kafūr in his *ḥarīm*.⁴³ Mufliḥ another black eunuch of the Caliph Al-Muttaqī was responsible for supervising the Caliph's sons.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, other sources argued that white eunuch servants were also appointed to serve in the *ḥarīm* among other classes in Muslim society. According to At-Tannūhī, Ḥāmid Ibn al-‘Abbās the Vizier of the Caliph Al-Muqtadir and the rich merchant Ibn al-Ġaṣṣāṣ employed white eunuchs in their *ḥarīm*.⁴⁵ The eunuchs functions were not restricted to serving inside the palaces only. Some high official jobs were delegated to them. Mostly they served as senior commanders in the military fortifications on frontiers with the Byzantine Empire. Al-Ġāḥiẓ suggested that such jobs were carried out by the eunuchs because most of them had been cas-

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, op. cit., V. I, pp. 166, 167. See also: Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūğ*, op. cit. vol. III, p. 247. and vol. IV, p. 181. Al-Azharī, *Tahdīb al-luġa*, edited by M. A. al-Ḥafaġī and M. F. al-Qi‘da, Al-Qahira 1964. V. X, p. 510.

⁴¹ Ibn ‘Idārī al-Murrakušī, *Al-Bayān al-muġarib fi aḥbār ahl al-Andalus wa-al-Maġrib*, edited by G. S. Colin and Lévi Provençal, Beirut 1983, 2nd edition, vol. II, p. 25, 89.

⁴² Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-imtā’ wa-al-mu‘ānasa*, op. cit., vol. III, p. 42.

⁴³ Anonymous, op. cit., p. vol. II, p. 412.

⁴⁴ At-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. IX, p. 440.

⁴⁵ At-Tannūhī, *Niṣwār al-muḥāḍara wa-aḥbār al-mudākra*, edited by ‘Abbūd aš-Šalġī. Bairut 1971, vol. III, p. 43.

trated by the Rūm (Byzantine) when they were young, and accordingly they would be more aggressive towards these who made them eunuchs.⁴⁶ Other temporary tasks were done by them, too. In the year 305H/917–918, the Caliph Al-Muqtadir sent two of his eunuch servants on a diplomatic mission to the Byzantine Emperor to conduct negotiation about the capture exchange process between the two states.⁴⁷ The spread of eunuchs in the structure of Abbasid Muslim society particularly among the sovereigns and rich classes was phenomenal. According to Arabic sources the palaces of the Caliph Al-Muqtadir contained eleven thousand black and white eunuchs.⁴⁸ In certain circumstances some of them had opportunities to acquire wealth and power to an even greater extent than those who were normal and free. For instance Mū'nis who had the epithet al-hādīm was one of those who reached the post of army high commander.⁴⁹

As far as the ḥarīm and the life inside the palaces are concerned, the Arabic sources of that epoch contain much information which goes some way to giving us an adequate picture of the situation with regard to maidens and slave women. There is no doubt that the number of slave women was great. According to Al-Mas'ūdī, the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil received on one occasion a present of 200 slaves including maids and boys.⁵⁰ Aṭ-Ṭabarī states that one state official, 'Umar Ibn Farağ in the time of the Caliphs Al-Wāṭiq and Al-Mutawakkil, owned one hundred slave women.⁵¹ Other scattered information gives us a general conception that the female slaves existed extensively in the Abbasid society and on a wide scale. Some women slaves were *ummuhāt awlād* (mothers of children) then they became wives of the Caliphs. Arabic sources have concentrated too much on the mothers of the Caliphs and their slave women, even to the extent that one of the Arab authors allocated an entire book to the private life of Caliphs including their mothers, wives, mistresses and songsters.⁵² In addition to these of the Caliphs' wives or mothers who were of Turkish origin or other Asiatic races or indeed were sometimes black, many others were of European origin mostly of Greek Byzantine origin (*Rūmīyyāt*) or Slavs (*Ṣaqalabīyyāt*), and a few of Circassian (*ğūrğīyyāt*) or Spanish (*Andalusiyyāt*) origin. There are not many pieces of conflicting evidence among our sources concerning the Caliphs' mothers' or

⁴⁶ Al-Gāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 173.

⁴⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī, *At-Tanbīh*, op. cit., p. 193.

⁴⁸ As-Suyūṭī, *Tarīḥ al-ḥulafā'*, edited by M. A. Ibrāhīm. Cairo 1976, p. 613. Ibn Aṭ-Ṭuqtuqī, *Al-Fahrī fī al-adāb as-sulṭāniyya*, Maktabat Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣubayḥ, Miṣr 1962, p. 209.

⁴⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūğ*, op. cit. vol. III, p. 234.

⁵⁰ Op. cit. V. III, p. 234.

⁵¹ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, op. cit., V. IX, p. 161.

⁵² Ibn as-Sā'ī, *Nisā' al-ḥulafā'*, edited by Muṣṭafa Ğawād, Al-Qāhira, without date, p. 16.

wives' origin. Sometimes the contradiction was restrained if the Caliph's mother was Greek or Slav. The essential reason for a Caliph's marrying slave woman was if she gave him a children.⁵³ We are confirmed in this view by Al-Ġāḥiẓ in his noteworthy conclusion which states that „The Rūm girls—he means here the European girls in general—had given birth to the Muslim Kings—he means here the Caliphs”.⁵⁴ On the other hand, nothing could prevent the Caliph who might pass on his wife who was a slave before to another Caliph. Therefore it is not surprising to hear that the Caliph Al-Musta‘īn passed on his three slaves wives to his successor the Caliph Al-Mu‘tazz—of course under the insistence of the second.⁵⁵ Al-Ġāḥiẓ also commented on the fact, that it was easy for a slave woman to marry many men, one by one if she was desired by them. On the other hand, it was not acceptable by tradition for a free Muslim woman to divorced free woman considering that as a shameful act.⁵⁶ According to many accounts, lots of Caliphs had partially European blood. The Caliph Al-Musta‘īn had a Slav mother as well as the Caliph Al-Mustakfī and the Caliph Al-Muṭī.⁵⁷ Other Caliphs as Ar-Rādī, Al-Mu‘tamid, Al-Mu‘tazz and Al-Muttaqī had Greek mothers.⁵⁸ The Caliph Al-Muwaffaq's mother was of Spanish-Andalusian origin.⁵⁹ So there is no reason for being surprised that many Caliphs and Caliphs' sons as described by Muslim authors had European features—white skin, blond hair and blue eyes. According to these sources, the Caliph Al-Wāṭiq whose mother was a Greek woman⁶⁰ had a European outward appearance.⁶¹ Al-Mas‘ūdī who was an eyewitness commented that the Caliph Al-Muttaqī had bluish eyes and blond hair.⁶² It was known that his mother was a Greek woman, similarly by Caliph Al-Muhtadī.⁶³

It should be also noticed in this connection that the Caliph's ḥarīm, either wives or mothers, were able to exercise persuasion and had notable influence on their Caliphs; some of them indeed became very rich. For instance Al-Musta‘īn's mother was of Slav origin, had a fortune of a million dinars, and his son gave her

⁵³ According to Al-Kāsānī, this was known by the Arabic term *al-istilād* (procreation), op. cit., vol. IV, p. 129.

⁵⁴ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Fī ḍamm an-naṣārā*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁵⁵ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. X, p. 349.

⁵⁶ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, op. cit., p. 61.

⁵⁷ Al-Hamadānī, *Duyūl tārīḥ aṭ-Ṭabarī*, edited by M. A. Ibrāhīm, Cairo 1977, p. 324. See also Anonymous, op. cit. vol. IV., pp. 415, 445.

⁵⁸ Al-Hamadānī, op. cit., p. 324. Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūǧ*, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 124. As-Suyūṭī, op. cit., pp. 573, 580, 623.

⁵⁹ Ibn as-Sā‘ī, op. cit., p. 82.

⁶⁰ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *At-Tanbīḥ*, op. cit., p. 361.

⁶¹ Op. cit., p. 397.

⁶² Al-Mas‘ūdī, *ibid*.

⁶³ Ibn al-Aṭīr, *Al-Kāmil fī at-tārīḥ*, Būlāq-al-Qāhira 1290 H., vol. VII, p. 83.

a free hand in the state financial affairs.⁶⁴ The mother of the Caliph Al-Mu'tazz, who was even more wealthy, had a fortune of about 1.3 million dinars.⁶⁵

In general Muslim society at that time had always shown a considerable elasticity with regard to Muslim marriages with slave women; moreover, according to Al-Gāḥiẓ the Muslim tolerated transferring slave wives to another husband or more, this was not so easy with a free woman.⁶⁶

Another duty that was given sometimes to the white women slaves was the duty of *qahramāna*⁶⁷ which was related to the supervision of the ḥarīm financial allocations.⁶⁸ That function resembles the job held by the household manager to day. It also seems that there was always a main *qahramāna* for the whole ḥarīm and there was one *qahramāna* for each of the Caliph's wives.⁶⁹ Many of these *qahramānas* played an important role in administering the state affairs. Some of them had great influence on the Caliphs, they could dismiss Viziers from their posts and appoint new ones. Umm Mūsa, the *qahramāna* had a strong hand over the Caliph Al-Muqtadir and his court. She usually gave orders to the officials and signed orders herself.⁷⁰

In fact it is difficult to decide whether there were many white slave women who held this job or not, but from our sources we come to the conclusion that the majority of *qahramānas* were mostly free women. This job was also attended by men, for organising the financial affairs of the Caliphs, princes and high officials.⁷¹

Next to be considered as one of the main duties assigned to the white female slaves was the job of the maids of honour or the *waṣīfāt* who mostly served the Caliph's wives and princes. Many of them sometimes were also mistresses of the Caliphs or their owner. One of our sources mentions that the Caliph Al-Wāṭiq was fond of the maid of honour of his wife Farīda.⁷²

The sanction of concubinate in Islam allowed Caliphs, their high officials and rich people to possess many maiden girls for this purpose. The Caliphs themselves used to give bondswomen as presents to faithful adherents and officials. If the slave woman gave birth to her master's child, she could not be resold and had a right to become a wife of the child's father and the offspring was also considered

⁶⁴ Al-Hamadānī, op. cit., p. 324.

⁶⁵ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, op. cit., V. IX, p. 284. Ibn al-Aṭīr, op. cit., p. 42.

⁶⁶ Al-Gāḥiẓ, *Risālat al-qiyyān*, op. cit., p. 61.

⁶⁷ It seems too that the job of *qahramāna* was attended to the men. In this case that man is called *qahramān*. Aṭ-Ṭabarī, op. cit., p. 160. See also Al-Azadī, *Tārīḥ al-Mawsūl*, edited by A. Ḥabība, Al-Qāhira 1967, p. 383.

⁶⁸ An-Nūwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, edited by M. A. Ibrāhīm, Al-Qāhira 1955. vol. II., pp. 166, 169.

⁶⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūğ*, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 86.

⁷⁰ As-Suyūṭī, op. cit., pp. 608, 613. Anonymous, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 432. Miskawayhī, op. cit., vol. I, p. 50. Ibn al-Tuqtuqī, *Al-Fahrī*, op. cit. p. 24.

⁷¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 169. Al-Azadī, op. cit., p. 383.

⁷² Ibn as-Sā'ī, op. cit., pp. 60, 1.

legitimate and could inherit its father's property in equal shares with the children of the free wife. Moreover, Islam commended the marriage of Muslim with a slave woman.⁷³ According to Muslim sources, the Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb was the first who prohibited selling or giving away the mother of children.⁷⁴

Also many maiden girls worked as servants and stewardesses at their master's palaces and houses.⁷⁵ As far as the *qiyān* are concerned, they were distinguished for their musical talents and nice voices. Mostly they were of *mūwalidāt* (half blood) stock. This was a result of intermarriage between two races, usually the black race and the white one.⁷⁶ According to Al-Ġāḥiẓ's classification, the *hilāsī* or *hilāsyā* was a kind resulted of intermarriage between the white and Abyssinian races. The *baysarī* was from the white and Indian races.⁷⁷ The third kind of intermarriage between races was the *baġlī* (mule) and it resulted from marriage between the Slavic race and another, often black.⁷⁸

It is generally admitted in the Arabic sources that the *qiyān* were distinguished by their skills in literature particularly in poetry and singing. On the other hand, they were good chess players and attractive companions.⁷⁹

The *qiyān* as distinct from other slaves were, generally, learned, knew by heart a thousand verses of Arabic poems.

Moreover they were trained and skilled in playing music and singing.⁸⁰ It is not surprising therefore that many of them fetched extravagantly high price. Sarīra ar-Rā'iyya was sold to Ibn Rā'iq for 13 thousand dinars; she was half caste slave.⁸¹ Inān, the slave women of An-Nāṭifī reached the price of two hundred thousand dirhams. Maḥbūba the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil's singing girl was much appreciated and held a great value for her master.⁸² In this connection it should be noticed that the work of Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī known by the name *Kitāb al-aġānī* dealt with the matter of the *qiyān* and singers. On the other hand Al-Ġāḥiẓ has left us his work *Risalat al-qiyān*, in which he explains how fond

⁷³ *Qur'an*, s. XXIV, 33, s. IV, 3, 25, s. XXIII, 6, s. XXIV, 32, s. XXXIII, 52, s. XXX, 28. See also Al-Ġazālī, op. cit., 426.

⁷⁴ Al-'Askarī, op. cit., p. 240. See also Abū Ḥayyān, op. cit., vol. III, p. 161.

⁷⁵ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Risalat al-qiyān*, op. cit., p. 60. Ibn as-Sā'ī, op. cit., p. 80.

⁷⁶ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* op. cit., vol. I, p. 157.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-biġāl. Rasā'il al-Ġāḥiẓ*, edited by A. Hārūn, Al-Qāhira 1965, vol. II, p. 281.

⁷⁹ Ibn as-Sā'ī, op. cit., p. 80, 81. At-Tannūhī, *Al-Faraġ ba'd aš-šidda*, Maktabat al-Ḥanġī. Miṣr 1955, p. 387. Al-Ibšīhī, *Al-Mustaẓraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*, Maktabat al-Ġumhuriyya, Miṣr 1385, I, pp. 154, 155. Al-Waššā', *Al-Muwaššā aw aẓ-ẓurf wa-aẓ-ẓurafā'*, Dār Šādir, Bairut 1965, pp. 99, 134-137.

⁸⁰ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūġ*, op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 157-162. Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Risalat al-qiyān*, p. 69. Abū Ḥayyān, op. cit., vol. II, p. 182. Al-Ibšīhī, op. cit., pp. 154, 155, 159.

⁸¹ Al-Hamādānī, op. cit., p. 389. Ibnas-Sā'ī, op. cit., p. 47.

⁸² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūġ*, op. cit., pp. 73, 74. For more information about the *Qiyān* prices see also At-Tannūhī, *Al-Faraġ ba'd aš-šidda*, op. cit., pp. 385, 386 and 387, 392.

of the good and luxury life Abbasid society was; the main element of this was the songsters. Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī informed us that Baghdad and its district Al-Karḥ were full of *qiyān* houses which from his description seem to have been similar to night-clubs or houses of ill fame like those that are known in the recent time. According to our author's explanation, in Al-Karḥ district there were about 460 female *qiyāns*, 120 free women and 90 boys who were very skilled in singing, playing music and giving pleasure to the clients.⁸³ It also mentioned that the Caliph Hārūn ar-Rašīd was personally fond of visiting the *qiyān* houses.⁸⁴ In other cases rich people and high officials used to invite the *qiyān* to their own palaces for consolation, singing and night chats.⁸⁵ There was always a person who was considered as the owner of the slave *qiyān* and who organised their work. This person was known by the name *muqayyīn* and owned one or more *qiyāns*. Since they were beautiful and highly talented in music and singing, the owner could do good business. Al-Ğāḥiẓ mentioned that usually the *muqayyīn* took jewels and gold in compensation for honour.⁸⁶ Obviously such a person played the role of pander. To avoid the accusation of fornication both, the *muqayyīn* and his client made a transaction. The first sold his slave girl (*qīna*) to the second, attained his sexual aim and could sell the *qīna* by return to her master but at a lower price.⁸⁷

Considerable importance during the Abbasid period, particularly till the end of the tenth century was attached in Muslim society to the ownership of slaves. White slaves were brought up to Muslim markets from Europe. In general the Slavs (*Aṣ-Ṣaqālība*) and Greeks (*Rūm*) were at the head of the imported slave list.

According to Ibn Ḥurradādbēh, the majority of white slaves were Slavs, Rūm, Franks, Longobards and Andalusian (Spanish origin)⁸⁸ An almost similar formulation is found in the slightly later geographical work of Ibn Ḥawqal with the exception that he did not mention the Longobards.⁸⁹ Generally there is a consensus among major Arabic sources that the Slavs, Greeks and Spaniards were the main white European slaves who had been brought to the Muslim lands.⁹⁰

It seems that in that age many different parties were collaborating in slave trade. The Muslim world was a great importer and there was great demand for

⁸³ Abū Ḥayyān. op. cit., p. 183. More information could be also found in the work of At-Tanūḥī, op. cit., pp. 385, 387.

⁸⁴ Al-Ğāḥiẓ, op. cit., p. 314.

⁸⁵ Abū Ḥayyān. op. cit., p. 56.

⁸⁶ Al-Ğāḥiẓ, op. cit., pp. 73, 74. See also At-Tanūḥī, op. cit., p. 385.

⁸⁷ Op. cit., p. 75.

⁸⁸ Ibn Ḥurradādbēh, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik*, edited by M. J. DeGoeje, Brill, Leiden 1889., pp. 92, 93.

⁸⁹ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-ard*. (*Opus Geographicum*), edited by J. H. Kramers. Brill 1938, vol. I, p. 110. See also Al-Iṣṭaḥrī, *Al-Masālik wa-al-mamālik*, edited by M. G. al-Ḥīnī, Cairo 1961, p. 37.

⁹⁰ A. Mez, op. cit., pp. 155, 156.

such goods. Jews and their European partners were the suppliers and middlemen of this trad.⁹¹

With such a background it is not surprising that the slave, particularly the white one, came to play a prominent part in the structure of Abbasid society. Many of them presumably attained a high degree of precedence and even rivalled free Muslim people. Inferior status for white slaves or those who were half bred between slaves and Arab, virtually disappeared. They then formed a peculiar class which became remarkable in those times.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² D. i R. Piwińscy, *Niewolnicy w społecznej strukturze islamu*, „Euhemer. Przegląd Religioznawczy” 1978, No. 2 (108), pp. 53–58.