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The Backyard of Slavery: Child and Adolescent Slaves*

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Abstract

Slavery is a phenomenon as old as the history of humanity. In the Ottomans era a non-free person called slave or captive. As in many societies, there is not only in ottoman society slavery adult but also children and this real undeniable. In the related literature, it is not so possible to find out studies on child slaves compared to the studies on adolescent slaves. Child slaves were also the tragic fact of history like adult slaves. The employment of child slaves and the sale of them as a trade product is another problem. The child of a married slave is born as a slave. For this reason, child slaves are as old as the history of slaves. Additionally, slaves captured in the wars or gained as booty were also enslaved. One-fifth of captives gained in the war were used in palaces or army by Ottoman on the rules *kul* system. The rest was distributed to the war participants or the ones who succeeded in the war. Thus, slavery turned into a form of meeting the need of the state, a commodity, a money prize, or a workforce in society.

This study aims to make a general assessment on child slaves in the Ottoman society. In this context, child slaves were analyzed in terms of being leakage, their physical properties, and their original homeland. For this study, court records (*şer'iyye sicili*) of İstanbul, Üsküdar, Galata, Balat, Kadıköy, Eyüp, Manisa, Bursa, Balıkesir, Tekirdağ (Rodoscuk) and Konya were used as main sources.

Keywords: Ottoman era, Slavery, Child slaves, Adolescent slaves, Slave trade.

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Introduction

Nobody knows when slavery first appeared. Through the centuries, slaves have been categorized according to their gender, age, and capabilities and used in socio-economic life. Slavery² held an important position in ancient civilizations. Slaves were useful and indispensable parts of ancient economic systems that lacked machinery and required manpower (Tahiroğlu, 1979-1981: 650). Slavery was common in ancient Greece, which is today considered the foundation of western civilization. In Greek and Roman cities, slaves constituted the majority of the population, playing critical roles in trade and agriculture (see Bakirezer, 2008; Erol, 2007; Fisher, 1993; Garlan, 1988; Günay, 2015; Malay, 2010; Vogt, 1974; for slavery in ancient Greece).

As slavery is a component of settled societies, we cannot indicate the existence of slavery among pre-Islamic Turkish nomadic communities. In ancient Gokturk scripts, the word “kul” might have been used as “subject” rather than slave. On the other hand, the existence of slaves in Tabhgach state was widely mentioned and central Asian Uyghurs were thought to have male and female slaves called “karabaş.” The child trade between Kipchack tribes and some Middle Eastern states could be interpreted as slave trade, but in fact this was mercenary trade (see Kafesoğlu 2010: 230-231 for further analysis). As Turkish tribes adopted settled life, slavery gained ground in Turkish states.

In pre-Islamic Arabic tribes, slavery was widespread and slaves were sharply separated from the freeborn. The masters had ultimate possession over their slaves. Slavery became an institution after the acceptance of Islam. Islamic practices diminished slavery although it was not abolished completely (Aydın and Hamidullah, 2002: 238). Slavery, adapted into Islamic law, remained in the Ottoman Empire. This study focuses on child and adolescent slaves in the Ottoman Empire.

Most studies in child and adolescent slavery in world literature focuses on the era after the Industrial Revolution (Aries, 1962; Beattie, 2010; Cunningham, 2006; Pollock, 1996). There are some studies about child workers and slaves (Kokdaş and Araz, 2018). Few studies focus on the history of childhood in the Ottoman Empire and specific research on child slaves is limited. This study investigates the reasons why children were enslaved, their positions in social life, their physical traits, their attire, and their emancipation. The main sources are legal proceedings (İstanbul, Üsküdar, Eyüp, Galata, Balat, Hasköy, Ankara, Manisa, Konya, Bursa, Rodosçuk) from the 16th and 17th centuries as well as records in State Archives Office. The earliest court record used for this research is from June 1524 and the latest is from February 1691.

Slavery in the Ottoman Empire

The terms captive and slave were the same in early modern period.³ Both terms applied to people who were not free. Main sources for providing slaves were trade, wars, and piracy. Children born to slaves were also kept as slaves and this had a legal basis. Slaves entering the country from Mediterranean or Black Sea ports usually came as commodity whereas the ones entering from the Balkans were brought as war captives. When military expeditions began to fail in the 17th century, slave trade and provision

² Slave: translated into Turkish as “kul, bende, halayık, esir and “câriye/ odalık (female slave)”; in Persian “bende, gulâm, kenîz (female slave)”; in Arabic “abd, rakik, memlûk, kinn, gulam, rakabe, vasîf, milkü'l-yemin and memlûke/vasîfe/câriye/eme/gurre (female slave)” (Aydın and Hamîdullah, 2002: 237). In Latin: “servus, i, masculinum” (Kabağağaç and Alova, 1995: 551). In Greek: “δούλος, ou, masculinum” (Çelgin, 2010: 179).

³ Slavery starts with human history. It can be noticed in every civilization and period. The war captives were sold as slaves or *cariyes* in the Ottoman State. During the times of peace, black slaves were brought from Sudan and other African countries for rich people’s household chores. Some influential statesmen in ottoman history were picked among slaves and trained for state affairs (Pakalın, 2004: 300-302). People captured during military operations or piracy were called captive (esir) and the ones abducted and sold as servants were called slave (köle) (Çetin, 2015: 43).

became more difficult (Çetin, 2015: 79-81). The continuation of slavery required constant slave circulation.

As the Ottoman Empire grew and expanded, it took the *gulam* system as an example from previous Turkish-Islamic states and tried to satisfy the need for slaves (in the army and the palace) by using war captives (Uzunçarşılı, 1988: 9-12). During the rules of Sultan Osman and Sultan Orhan slavery was not an institution, but it gradually transformed during the rule of Sultan Murad I, who was known to bring captives from his Rumelia expeditions. Murad I also used *pençik*⁴ system, which was similar to *gulam* system and became the basis of Janissary Guild (Engin, 2002: 246-247). Slaves were initially stationed in the palace or the central army. These slaves directly served the Sultan and they were called household troops (*kapıkulu*)⁵. With the expansion of the empire and the reforms in military headquarters came the slave shortage. The empire solved this problem by gathering non-Muslim youngsters from conquered lands and training them for the army and the state service. Slavery became more and more vital for the social structure. Slaves became an indispensable part of the bureaucracy as they climbed the social ladder towards high-ranking positions. These slaves, however, never tried to establish a new state of former-slaves. The Ottoman developed the classical Islamic slavery system by means of *devşirme* (gathering) system (Uzunçarşılı, 1998: 13-21).

The conscript boys were trained for about eight years by gathering wood for the palace, working on construction sites, carrying ice, serving in hospitals or bakeries etc. (Uzunçarşılı: 1988: 5-12; Erdem: 2004: 22). Nonetheless, people needed slaves in domestic life too (İnalçık, 2008: 123-137). Slaves were used in agriculture, trade, shipping, dockyards, household chores, silk industry, and as tradesman apprentices. People in cities owned slaves according to their financial status. Slaves owned by common people were usually put to housework (Nalçacı, 2015: 24-49).

The features of slaves were usually recorded to some extent. Court records reveal some information about the slaves in cities. During the court cases about slaves, they were described in detail: *name, father's name, gender, nationality, skin and eye colour, scars on the eyebrows, height, occupation and age* (Nalçacı, 2015: 310). Sometimes their religion was also mentioned. They were not forced to convert to Islam, but they usually chose Islam for adaptation. These slaves were given Turkish-Islamic names. The most common male names were *Karagöz* and *Şirmen* while the most common female names were *Bülbül*, *Tuti*, *İnci*. When a slave converted to Islam, their father's name was recorded as *Abdullah* which meant "God's subject." When there was no specific information in court records about a defendant who was mentioned as "*ibn Abdullah*" or "*binti Abdullah*," this person was thought to be a slave (Sahillioğlu, 1983: 218-219).

Although slavery was not a common phenomenon during the early years of the Ottoman state, it grew and remained a vital part of social life (Slavery was not so common in the foundation process of The Ottoman but it was seen in the context of war captives. Beginning with the period of Mehmed II., slavery grew in many parts of Ottoman society). Providing slaves became a main task both at military expeditions and commercial activities in Africa, Caucasia, and northern Russia. Slavery survived as an institution throughout the world. There were various attempts to abolish slavery in the 19th century. The first reactions against slavery appeared in the Ottoman after the reforms in 1839. The Empire did not abolish slavery but initiated some reforms. For example, İstanbul captive market was abolished in September, 1846. Black slave trade was banned in 1847 and Cherkes slave trade was banned in 1855.

⁴ *Pençik* means "one fifth" and the system put one-fifth of war captives into state service. During the early years of the state, the war veterans shared all the captives and kept them as their property. With the growing need for soldiers, one-fifth of these captives went to the army. If an owner wanted to keep the captive for himself, he paid 25 silver coins to the army per captive. The guild of conscript boys was made up of either captives taken as *pençik* or children of Christian families.

⁵ The term *kapıkulu* was used to define various military ranks which directly answered to the Sultan. The term connoted the central army force (see Ozcan, 2002: 347 for further details).

With Paris Treaty in 1856, the Empire promised that slave traders would be punished and existing slaves would be given documents of emancipation. However, the state broke its own rules by not abolishing slavery and continuing slave trade activities. Slavery continued under the disguise of adoption and by means of undercover purchases. Rich families kept slaves as indentured servants, butlers, or nannies (see Erdem, 2004: 34/129-231 and Parlâtır, 1983: 823-826 for abolition of slavery in Ottoman).

1. The Backyard of Slavery: Child and Adolescent Slaves

Slavery became an important element in social life as expansion, progress, settlements, and urbanization increased in Ottoman. The numbers of slaves increased drastically according to the social and agricultural needs in urban and rural areas. Slaves were common commodities in important cities (such as İstanbul, Bursa, Crimea, Cairo). There are some studies on slave trade, slave workforce, slave emancipation, slave traders and slave lodges (Erdem, 2004: 34/129-231; Parlâtır, 1983: 823-826; Nalçacı, 2015: 310; Çetin, 2015: 79-8; Kokdaş and Araz, 2018; Yağcı, 2017; Toledano, 2010; Bono, 2003; Barkan, 1956).

The word slave is usually associated with adults. However, the existence of child and adolescent slaves is undeniable. Their number was rising drastically. In a study about the history of childhood in the Ottoman Empire, Araz (2018) examines court records and states “during the second half of the 18th century, the number of child slaves brought from Anatolia or Rumelia for rich families in İstanbul was stunning.” Still Araz does not clarify whether these children were servants or *tebenni*⁶ but writes that children adopted from poor families were charged with household chores after a period of training. After the decrease in slave labour in the 18th century, adopted children provided additional workforce (Araz, 2013: 156-157). The younger a slave was, the more valuable he/she was considered. As young age increased the slave’s value, people tended to use immoral methods for providing child slaves.

According to Islamic law, a free man’s child was born free. Even when a male slave married a free woman, their children were deemed free. Such marriages were banned, especially the ones among farm workers, because they could diminish the slave population in the long term. Slaves were forced to marry among themselves, as Islamic law permitted (İnalçık, 2008: 136). However, a master was free to marry his handmaiden (*cariye*).⁷ Despite the regulations and rules, immoral practices were implemented in order to increase the number of child slaves. As indicated on a document dated April 3, 1856, slaves of African origin were used on farms in western Anatolia (the districts of Aydın, Denizli, Menteşe). This document also stated that these slaves were treated in inhumane ways and forced to beget children out of wedlock. Such violence and ruse functioned as means of providing more child slaves for free and the parent slaves were stopped from marrying free people. Most of these actions went unnoticed by the state. Later, some precautions and penal sanctions were implemented against forced slave reproduction⁸.

There were “captive fairs” where trophies and captives were put on display for the Sultan and for public. Women and children, though few in number, were exhibited during these fairs. Women and children were usually harvested from conquered castles⁹ (Çetin, 2015: 63-66).

As it was seen in the example of war captives harvested in Peloponnese War in 1715, there were no standards concerning the age of slaves in the Ottoman Empire. Çetin lists the children captured during

⁶ Adopting a child whose family is known (Pakalın, 2004: 429).

⁷ Masters enjoyed various rights on their handmaidens. If impregnated by her master, a handmaiden could not be sold. The child was born a free person and the handmaiden was emancipated after her master’s death (see Toledano, 2010: 1).

⁸ BOA. A.MKT.UM., nr. 2313/46, Rajab 127 (April 3, 1856). This document shows that some baby slaves who were born unmarried through forced relations in some farms around Aydın were purchased like *taking the sheep from the lamp* without the permission of their slave parents.

⁹ Ebussud gave a fatwa against capturing children during Nakhichevan expedition (1553-1554) (Erdem, 2004: 37).

the abovementioned war: “there were 5 newborn babies, 4 boys and 1 girl. One boy, called Halmar (?), was fifteen days old; a girl called Zayle was 1 month old; Yoraki was two months old; Mayto was 3 and Dimitri was 6 months old. Ottoman sources mentioned 14 babies, called *şirhor*, between the ages of 1 and 3. Five of these were girls and nine were boys. There were 31 children at the ages ranging from three to eight. Thirteen of these were girls, called *duhterek* and eighteen of them were boys, called *beççe*. There were 30 children aging between 8 and 15. Sixteen of these were girls, called *duhter*, fourteen were boys, called *gulamçe*. There were three *gulams* (boys) at the ages between 15 and 18” (Çetin, 2015: 134)¹⁰

1.1. Physical Appearance of Child and Adolescent Slaves

The court records, as the primary source of this study, listed the names, physical traits, and origins of the slaves. A major problem of this study is inadequate details about the slaves’ ages in the court records. We tried to detect child and adolescent slaves by collecting the descriptive details such as “sağır (child), sağır oğlan (little boy), *emred* (young boy), *şabb-ı emred* (young boy), *baliğ* (adolescent), *baliğ olmayan* (pre-adolescent).” Some slaves were recorded with their ages. The terms *emred* and *şabb-ı emred* also connoted beardless persons, so slaves described merely with these two terms were not classified as child or adolescent. One tangible example of court records showing a slave’s age is as follows: a decree at Galata court, dated October 1577, stated that a child slave named İlyas bin Abdullah and aged 1.5 years, was emancipated (Galata Court Records, 7, 26a-1). The reason for emancipation could be that he was adopted by his master or he was given away for adoption. Another example is a court case in Manisa in December, 1630. The records of this case mentioned a slave’s age. A 10-year-old boy, named Yusuf bin Abdullah, was given by his master, Nasuh b. Hamza, as a gift to Nasuh’s daughter Aişe (Manisa Court Records, 124, 66-b2). Yusuf remained a slave for Aişe. A third example is a court decree in Galata in October 1577. In this decree, a slave named Murad bin Abdullah was described as a youngster emancipated after his master’s death (a practice called *tedbir-i mukayyed*) (Galata Court Records 7, 30a-2). In Tekirdağ a slave named Lisyon veled-i ... (at the age of 12) was emancipated by his master Papa Alexi veled-i Yoriki in June 1624 (Rodosçuk court Records, 1572, 4b-5). All the scanned court records revealed only 4 children or adolescent slaves with their exact age mentioned. The last example shows that a non-Muslim person buys a non-Muslim slave. The slaves in these court records can be categorized as child or adolescent slaves.

The main problem faced during the research is to categorize court decrees on the basis of slaves’ ages. The word “*emred*” did not denote child and adolescent slaves in some decrees. An example is a court decree from June 1607 in Galata Court. A slave named Rıdvan b. Abdullah was described as “... a slave (*memlük*) of middle height, with open eyebrows and hazel eyes, *emred*, *Eflakiyyü’l-asl*, bearing a scar on the left hand, *hâfiz-ı hâze’l-kitâb* (the one who could recite Kuran), named Rıdvan b. Abdullah.” In this description the word *emred* describes the face (beard) of the slave rather than his age (Galata Court Records, 32, 4a-1).

In some records, child and adolescent slaves were described through some distinguishing features (wounds, scars, illness, disability). 64 child or adolescent slaves were found in the scanned court

¹⁰ According to *pençik* law, children were classified on the basis of their ages. This determined whether they were suitable for recruitment. Children under the age of three were classified as *şirhor*, children between three and eight were *beççe*, the ones between eight and twelve were *gulamçe*, adolescents were *gulam*, and older ones called *pir* (Uzunçarşılı, 1988: 9-10). Some slaves were described in registries. Üsküdar records mention some slaves’ ages: “...open eyebrows, hazel eyes, dark complexion, about thirteen years old, Georgian origin, *adb-i memluküm*” (138, 158b-2), “...hereby olive-skinned, open eyebrows, green eyes, *Eflaku’l-asl*, presumably at the age of ten or twelve, named Hasan *abd-i abık*” (107, 135a-3), and “...hereby I bought for seven thousand silver coins the one with hazel eyes, open eyebrows, dark complexion, at the age of twelve, *Eflaku’l-asl* Yusuf bin Abdullah (107, 19a-3). The reason why the slaves’ ages were mentioned could be that they were children. Other records did not mention anything about age (Akkaya, 2011: 210).

records. These slaves were described as fair, olive or dark skinned; hazel, blue, brown or black eyed; of middle height or tall; open browed or beetle browed. In addition, scars on various body parts (chin, arm, and head), tattoos, moles, or birthmarks were also included in the physical descriptions.

A slave named Ferhad was described as “blond, blue-eyed, open-browed, dressed in felt hat, felt jacket and rawhide sandals” in 1524 in Üsküdar Court Records (48b-1). Another slave was described in Üsküdar Records in 1564 as “olive-skinned, open-browed, brown-eyed, of middle height, and dressed in felt cap” (17, 91b-2). In Balat Court Records, adolescent and child slaves were described with details such as “middle-height, open brows, scars on eyebrows” (2, 82a-1). A child slave in Manisa Records was said to be wounded on the left arm (100, 5b-2).

Table 1. Physical Traits of Child and Adolescent Slaves

Height	Number	Skin Color	Number	Eye Color	Number	Eyebrows	Number	Origin	Number
Short	3	Fair	18	Hazel	19	Open	42	Russia	26
Middle-height	25	Olive	6	Greenish hazel	12	Beetle browed	4	Cyprus	4
Tall	4	White	2	Green/blue	9	Bushy	1	Cherkes	4
		Dark	2	Black	4	Fair	1	Hungary	2
		Red	1	Light brown	2	Black	1	Ethiopia	2
				Blue	1	Monobrow	1	Georgia	2
						Bald ¹¹	1	Moldova	2
								Bosnia	2
								Wallachia	1
								Maghrep	1
								Croatia	1
								Bucharest	1
								<i>Origin not identified</i>	13
								<i>Not mentioned</i>	6

The majority of data came from the court records in İstanbul, Eyüp, Galata, and Üsküdar. Other records are from Manisa, Bursa, Konya, and Tekirdağ (Rodoscuk). Table 1, which has been composed of data from Anatolian court records about child and adolescent slaves, shows physical details of the slaves. When the slaves’ ages are considered, it was natural to record them as middle-height. Most slaves

¹¹ GŞS 7, 30a-2

were fair-skinned, hazel-eyed, and open-browed. The frequency of these features mostly resulted from the slaves' origins. Most slaves were Russian, Cherkes, and Georgian. Other large groups came from Cyprus, Maghrep, the Balkans, and Europe. These features were considered desired beauty standards and increased slave sales.

Some slaves were recorded with their distinguishing features. A child slave was described with a mole on the left side of his/her nose in Manisa Court Records (MCR 30, 61-52-6). Another slave was described with a scar on the head in addition to his/her open brows and crossed eyes (Eyüp Court Records 37, 82b-2). In Bursa Court Records there were two cases describing child/adolescent slaves with their distinguishing features. The first one mentions smallpox scars on the face (Bursa Records 151, 18a-3); the other one mentions a cross mark on the right side of the face (Bursa Records 151, 30a-1).

Table 2. Child and Adolescent Slaves with Distinguishing Features

Court Record and Number	Name	Mark
Üsküdar 84, 123b-2	Ali	Tumour on the left eyebrow, infection behind the head
Üsküdar 84, 124b-5	İlyas	Infection on left side of the head
Bab 2, 50b-3	Muzaffer b Abdullah	Wound on the head
Bab 2, 82a-1	Yakud b. Abadullah	Scar on limbs
İstanbul 12, 137b-3	Yusuf b. Abdullah	Scar on the upper lip
Bab 3, 129a-3	Yuvan	Dislocation on the right elbow
Manisa100, 5b-2	Kenan	Wound on the left arm
Manisa 30, 61/52-6	Yusuf b. Abdullah	Mole on left side of the nose
Hasköy 5, 38-1	Hüseyin b. Abdullah	Scar under the chin
Hasköy 5, 89-1	Asvador	Scars on the right arm
Eyüp 19, 6a-1	Yusuf b. Abdullah	Scar on the head
Eyüp 37, 82b-2	Yusuf b. Abdullah	Crossed eyes, mole on the forehead
Eyüp 49, 16a-1	Hüseyin b. Abdullah	Scars on the right hand fingers
Eyüp 74, 189 40a-2	Hasan b. Abdullah	Sparse teeth, mark on the chin
Eyüp 74, 88a-1	Ahmed b. Abdullah	Scar on the forehead, beaky nose
Eyüp 82, 27b-1	Şaban b. Abdullah	Wound on the right of the head
Bursa A 151/97	Yusuf Bursa	Smallpox on the face
Bursa A 151/30a-1	Nasuh b. Abdullah	Cross mark on the right of the face
Galata 37, 51b-1	Recep b. Abdullah	Scars on the right hand fingers

It was important to list any defects on the slaves as they were considered commercial commodities. A distinguishing feature could increase or decrease the price¹². These features would

¹² For an example of court record showing the sale price of a defective slave, see: Hasköy Court Records 5, 107-3.

also help identify the slave when he/she fled. The features would be recorded along with witnesses. The master would state any specific marks to prove that the runaway slave belong to him/her. Most distinguishing features were facial ones such as crossed eyes, sparse teeth, mole on the nose, facial scars. Other features worth mentioning were dislocated elbow, scars on fingers, and cross mark on the face.

1.2. Attire of Child and Adolescent Slaves

There is no definite evidence as to whether slaves in the Ottoman Empire were dressed in a particular way. Runaway slaves might have carried lightweight clothes for speed and convenience. Some records indicate some unlikely attire, e.i. janissary uniform, found on slaves. Most court cases were about runaway slaves. During the cases about child and adolescent slaves, their attire was also recorded in addition to their physical features. During a court case in Üsküdar in June 1524, a young runaway slave, of Russian origin, named Ferhad was described with his clothes. He was dressed in a felt cap, an old cloak, and rawhide sandals (Üsküdar Court Records 5, 48b-1). In Üsküdar court, a case dated July 1525 recorded a slave with unknown name and origin as dressed in a red skull cap and tattered cloak (Üsküdar Court Records 5, 53b-2). Another runaway slave record described the slave in yellow conical hat, tattered cloak, rawhide sandals (ÜCR 9, 135b-3). A Bosnian adolescent slave was brought to Üsküdar court in janissary uniform and shoes (ÜCR 17, 75b-7). A Cherkes runaway slave named *Ali b. Abdullah* was captured in October 1563 with a red skull cap and collared shirt (ÜCR 17, 91b-2). The runaway child slave İlyas, with his green vest, red skull cap, white belt, and navy blue trousers, was caught by a woman named *Cihane binti Minnet* and delivered to a guardian (ÜCR 84, 124b-5). The attire of runaway slaves came in various forms. It suggests that slave clothes in the Ottoman Empire were not standardized. It is remarkable that a slave was caught by a woman named *Minnet* and this suggests that the runaway slave was small and fragile. As this decree indicates, the slaves analysed in this study are under the age of puberty.

1.3. Chores

The majority of population in the Ottoman Empire was engaged in agriculture, so people usually settled in rural areas. As a result, small children participated in production. Whether slave or not, children were usually considered work force and put to work. This practice created the term of child labour. In the Ottoman Empire, children started apprenticeship training much earlier than their peers in western societies (Araz, 2013: 144-146). Only one court record used in this study reveals the chores done by child slaves. An adolescent slave called *Yusuf bin Abdullah* was trained by a weaver called Master *Mehmet*.¹³ It was common to use child and adolescent slaves for housework and for apprenticeship. The number of slaves decreased in the 19th century and this increased the need for slave workforce. The ones who had been used to having slaves for housework started to employ indentured servants. Until the beginning of the 20th century, rich families unofficially adopted poor children, provided them with education and lodging, and used them for domestic chores. These servants were allowed to get married and start a family. This practice brought the end of slavery in the Ottoman Empire (Toledano, 2010: 66-67).

2. Case Subjects Concerning Child and Adolescent Slaves

2.1. Emancipation

In the Ottoman State, slavery could be provisional in a slave's life. A child born to slave parent was unlikely to remain a slave. A handmaiden could bear a child of her master. If master adopted this child, he/she lawfully became a person after the father's death. In other words, a slave's fate was in the hands of the master (Faroqhi, 2010: 115). Slaves could be freed by the court. Two witnesses would be

¹³ In October 1630, *Yusuf b. Abdullah* was sent away to be trained as a weaver by Master Mehmet (Manisa Court Records 124, 29b-2).

adequate for the emancipation. The emancipated slave would be given a document of emancipation. There were various ways for slaves to be freed. The first one was to emancipate the slave out of benevolence for God's mercy.¹⁴ Another method was *tedbir*. The master stipulated that the slave was freed after the master's death. *Tedbir-i mutlak* meant that the slave was emancipated if one third the heritage left after the master's death was equal to the slave's current worth. If the one third of the heritage was less than the slave's worth, the slave bought his/her freedom. *Tedbir-i mukayyed* meant the freedom officially promised by the master near or after his/her death (Sahillioğlu, 1983: 220-223). *Mükâtebe* was an Islamic law term meaning the agreement between a slave and the master.¹⁵ The master agreed to free the slave for money or after a task was completed. In his study about the slave work force in weaving industry in Bursa, Halil Sahillioğlu gives the example of a slave who was emancipated in 1477 after weaving 80 batches of silk fabric (Sahillioğlu, 1983: 222).

As seen in the abovementioned examples, Islam encouraged emancipation in various ways. This is observed in the analysed court records. Most decrees scanned for this study were about emancipation. The number is around 37. Slaves were emancipated in the Ottoman Empire in various ways within the framework of religious law (Sak, 1992: 85-120).

When emancipation cases are classified, it is seen that most acts of emancipation were done for God's mercy. According to the records, 14 acts of emancipation were for God's mercy, 9 were through *tedbir*, 6 were through *tedbir-i mutlak*, 4 were through *mukatebe*, and 2 were through *tedbir-i mukayyed*. Apart from all the abovementioned categories, an example of emancipation occurred in November 1637 in Hasköy Court. A non-Muslim family wanted to own slave Asvador, but the master of the family called the slave "my son" and treated him as his own child. When two witnesses stated this situation, the slave was emancipated (Hasköy Court Records 5, 89-1). This case was different from the common methods of emancipation. An example of *mukatebe* occurred in March 1671 when the slave Şaban b. Abdullah agreed to work for his master for three years and the master certified the agreement and kept his word (Eyüp Court Records 82, 27b-1). Non-Muslim people also emancipated slaves. In June 1624 in Tekirdağ (Rodoscuk), a slave named Lisyon veled-i ... was emancipated by the master Alexi veled-i Yorke (Rodoscuk Court Records 1572, 4b-5).

2.2. Escape

Slaves sought freedom for centuries probably because slavery could not be internalized easily. This was also true for child or adolescent slaves who reacted even more due to their age and fragility. Court records did not show exact numbers of slaves who fled to their homelands or to different locations, so we cannot indicate how many slaves ran to their freedom.

14 court records used in this study are about runaway child or adolescent slaves. Young slaves usually fled to cities with large transportation networks or to the ones on the coast, especially Istanbul. Üsküdar was a largely deemed a slum area of the capital city and became a center of runaway slaves (Şener, 1998: 307). Records also show that most child or adolescent slaves were caught before they could reach particular points.¹⁶ There were slaves living on the run for a long time. For example, a slave named *Reyhan b. Abdullah* belonging to *Ali b. Ahmed* remained on the run for three and a half years until April 1676. The slave was later caught and delivered to the master (İstanbul Court Records 27b-3). Slaves led a free life when on the run. When caught, they turned into slave according to the existing conditions.

¹⁴ In travel writings of Jean Thévenot, it was narrated that in the 17th century in İstanbul some masters freed their slaves at their old age and on their death beds. This practice could be interpreted as emancipation for God's mercy (Jean Thévenot, *Thévenot*, 2014: 97).

¹⁵ See Atar, 2006: 531-533 for *Mükâtebe*

¹⁶ See ÜCR 5, 48b-1; ÜCR 17; 75-7; ÜCR 84; 82b-1; MCR 61, 91-4; ECR 90, 34a-2; Bursa CR A151, 197 for caught runaway slaves.

How a slave would be treated when caught was regulated by general and local codes of law. If the runaway slave was male, he was called *abd-ı abık*; if female, she was called *cariye* or *kenizek*. When a runaway slave was caught, this person was brought to court. If the fugitive could not prove that he/she was a free person, he/she was delivered to guardians for custody. The person who caught the slave could demand the expenses from the owner according to judge's verdict. The owner also paid a tip to the person who caught the runaway slave. The master of the runaway slave would declare to the court, along with two witnesses, that he/she owned the slave. The slave had to confirm the master, too. Then the owner would pay the tip and other expenses specified by the judge. If a slave's master did not show up for six months, he/she would be put on the market again. The money taken from the sale would compensate the tip and other expenses, the remainder would go to the public purse.¹⁷

The courts specified certain amounts of money for compensation that would be paid for the captor's and the captive's expenses. This was the same for child and adolescent slaves. Table 3 shows the amounts per year.

Table 3. Compensation for Runaway Child and Adolescent Slaves

Decree Number	Date	Amount
ÜCR 5, 48b-1	June 1524	2 silver coins
ÜCR 5, 53b-2	July 1525	2 silver coins
ÜCR 5, 61a-1	July 1525	2 silver coins
ÜCR 9, 135b-3	May 1535	2 silver coins
ÜCR 17, 75b-7	October 1555	2 silver coins
ÜCR 17, 91b-2	October 1563	2 silver coins
ÜCR 84, 123b-2	October 1563	3 silver coins
ÜCR 84, 124b-5	July 1592	4 silver coins
ECR 74, 82a-2	August 1662	8 silver coins
ECR 90, 34a-1	December 1679	6 silver coins

The money paid for daily expenses almost quadrupled from the beginning of the 16th century to the end of 17th century. This suggests the steady increase in daily life expenses.

2.3. Sales

In the 15th and 16th centuries, slaves were a common sight in social and economic spheres. Slaves were considered commodities and described as talking or non-talking things (Sahillioğlu, 1983: 220). The court records mostly revealed the subjects of emancipation and escape of child and adolescent slaves. There few instances of sales, chores, or adoption in the records. One slave mentioned to be sold for 14.000 silver coins in June 1664 was Dilaver from Russia (İstanbul Court Records, 77a-3). Another decree mentioned that Yoyğan of Fodiya was in fact a free person, but was sold for 60 Dutch coins (Bab Court Records, 54, 78a-2). The subject of sales in court records concerning child and adolescent slaves was limited. The reason for this could be the frequency of adoption and emancipation at their young age.

¹⁷ See Sak, 1992: 149-164; Yağcı and Ataş, 2017: 303-309, Şener, "Âbık", s. 306-307 for further analyses on runaway slaves.

Conclusion

Children, a part of the society, have hardly been analysed in academic studies. They did not enjoy certain rights until recently and their lives were in the hands of adults. This had been the case for a long time, even in today's developed societies, until the 19th century. Children in the Ottoman Empire were the silent actors in life. They were mentioned in court records in the events of adoption, custody, crime, apprenticeship, or slavery.

The treatment of child slaves before law was the same as the cases of adult slaves. In social life, they could be adopted or trained for a particular craft. Child and adolescent slaves were generally used for minor domestic chores due to their fragility. The reason why a child became a slave was that he/she was born to slave parents or captured during a war. Although the existence of child or adolescent slaves, who were pre-destined to be slaves at birth, has been known for a long time, there are few studies about their status in society. One reason could be the limited amount of records or the lack of classification in the archives. As a small group within the Ottoman society, child and adolescent slaves were generally treated as adults before the law. Most of the data about these slaves was obtained from the court records.

Child and adolescent slaves are described in detail in this study, which analyses court records and presents specific information about the role of slavery in the lives of children and adolescents in the Ottoman Empire. These slaves could be identified in society because of their distinguishing features and were brought before the court for various reasons. The records were classified according to the physical traits of child and adolescent slaves, their attire, and the chores assigned to them. The descriptions concerning their appearance mostly included eyes, hair, skin, height, and origin. The descriptions concerning their attire suggested that there were no standards of clothing and they were recorded with the clothes they were wearing while on the run. The physical traits were critical for the sales prices and for the identification when they were caught. Consistent with other studies about adult slaves, this study indicates similar physical features of child and adolescent slaves. The records usually described youngsters with hazel, greenish hazel, and blue eyes. The large number of slaves from northern countries, particularly Russia, was undeniable.

Child and adolescent slaves were brought before the law for the subjects of emancipation, escape, and sales. Some slaves were emancipated through different methods (such as acts of benevolence, tedbir, and mukatebe) while others tried to find freedom through escape. Most of child and adolescent runaway slaves preferred Istanbul due to its transportation network, but were usually caught in Üsküdar before they could reach the European side and their homelands. Some court cases, though limited in number, were about the sales of child slaves. Their young age increased their value. As it is seen in an example mentioned above, 14000 silver coins is a remarkably high price for slave trade. Probably because of the frequency of emancipation among child and adolescent slaves, the subject of sales rarely appeared in court records. Some child and adolescent slaves became apprentices to be trained for crafts although most of them were assigned with domestic chores.

This study, which investigates the status of child and adolescent slaves – the backyard of slavery – in the Ottoman Empire, tries to emphasize the small hands of slave work force. It can be complemented with further studies on a similar subject based on prison records, sales records in slave lodgings, and customs records in the Ottoman archives.

Archive documents

A.MKT.UM. 231.46.01.01

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Bab Şer'iyye Sicili (Bab Court Records): 2-3-54.

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Galata Şer'iyye Sicili: 7-32-37.

Hasköy Şer'iyye Sicili: 5.

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