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A History of Slavery in Central Asia: Shīṭī Muslim Enslavement in 19th Century Bukhara

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

Despite more than a century of interest on the part of western scholars and historians in the region of Central Asia, in many respects our knowledge of many topics in Central Asian history remains limited. To date, when compared to the body of historical works treating the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas, or even the history of slavery within the Arab-Muslim world, the history of slavery in Islamic Central Asia has received little attention. Thus, it stands to reason that the history of the enslavement of Shīṭī Muslims in the early modern and modern eras has been likewise neglected, often being mentioned in passing or dealt with in a few pages within larger works. Considering the extent to which both Bukhara and Khiva depended upon Shīṭī slaves as agricultural workers, domestic servants, bureaucrats, and such, this history of slavery in Central Asia is a topic that demands closer scrutiny. This paper will therefore consider the history of the enslavement of Shīṭī Muslims in the Emirate of Bukhara during the nineteenth century. As an institution, slavery was ideologically rationalized and sanctified according to long-standing sectarian prejudices, in this instance those of the Sunnī Muslims towards the Shīṭī Muslims, in the Central Asian states of the nineteenth century. This can be verified by an examination of the extant sources; as a preliminary examination of the topic, therefore, this study will draw primarily from nineteenth century travel accounts. By re-examining such works we can begin to fashion a more coherent narrative for the history of Shīṭī enslavement in Islamic Central Asia. However, before examining the travel accounts, the institution of slavery in relation to Islamic tradition must first be considered, as this will provide some perspective when we turn our attention to the enslavement of Shīṭī Muslims in Central Asia.

A coward to the end, the Levite conveniently excludes his part in the death of his wife and, instead, points an accusing finger at the Benjaminites. The result is a civil war that breeds more violence, rape, death, destruction, and the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin. It is no coincidence that the final verse of the book of Judges echoes the verse that began the tragedy: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

Judges 19-20 graphically illustrates a humanity bereft of all compassion, mercy, and love, but unlike Tribble I can’t reduce the problem to patriarchy and misogyny, for they represent variations on a fundamental abuse of power established in the Fall (Gen. 2) and perfected in a “might makes right” mentality that asserts itself at all times, at all levels of society, and against all human beings. In such a world, all are victims, all are violated, all become less than human. Consequently, the Levite and the concubine suffer equally but in different ways: The woman is brutally sacrificed and the man and his kinsmen go off to war to be slaughtered for the sake of power and their pride while the status quo remains the same. Centuries later this abusive mentality and its various manifestations (e.g., sexism, racism, homophobia) are still firmly in place and the destruction continues.

Ultimately, Phyllis Tribble’s attempt at literary-feminist reading goes too far. Although there is great benefit in feminist readings of biblical texts, it is a mistake to perceive and interpret the Bible as a literary champion or apologist for a particular gender or worldview. The Bible is a mirror from which we come to understand basic truths about ourselves and the human condition, truths that both indict and inspire the human heart. The Bible was, for the most part, written, compiled, and edited by men; however, in all fairness, these were men who also included women’s voices and who had some understanding of the suffering of women—as well as the suffering of slaves, the poor, the sick, and the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. Feminist writers like Tribble do a great disservice to the biblical writers when they overlook that fact. Tribble simply needs a lighter, more inclusive touch.

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A History of Slavery in Central Asia:

Shī’ī Muslim Enslavement in 19th Century Bukhara

Despite more than a century of interest on the part of western scholars and historians in the region of Central Asia, in many respects our knowledge of many topics in Central Asian history remains limited. To date, when compared to the body of historical works treating the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas, or even the history of slavery within the Arab-Muslim world, the history of slavery in Islamic Central Asia has received little attention. Thus, it stands to reason that the history of the enslavement of Shī’ī Muslims in the early modern and modern eras has been likewise neglected, often being mentioned in passing or dealt with in a few pages within larger works. Considering the extent to which both Bukhara and Khiva depended upon Shī’ī slaves as agricultural workers, domestic servants, bureaucrats, and such, this history of slavery in Central Asia is a topic that demands closer scrutiny. This paper will therefore consider the history of the enslavement of Shī’ī Muslims in the Emirate of Bukhara during the nineteenth century. As an institution, slavery was ideologically rationalized and sanctified according to long-standing sectarian prejudices, in this instance those of the Sunnī Muslims towards the Shī’ī Muslims, in the Central Asian states of the nineteenth century. This can be verified by an examination of the extant sources; as a preliminary examination of

the topic, therefore, this study will draw primarily from nineteenth century travel accounts. By re-examining such works we can begin to fashion a more coherent narrative for the history of Shī'ī enslavement in Islamic Central Asia. However, before examining the travel accounts, the institution of slavery in relation to Islamic tradition must first be considered, as this will provide some perspective when we turn our attention to the enslavement of Shī'ī Muslims in Central Asia.

Since the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, the attitude of Muslims in general toward the institution of slavery has varied. According to the Qur'ān and Hadīth traditions, slavery was discouraged, not prohibited, and those who chose to keep slaves were urged, though not necessarily required, to treat them humanely as equals before God: one scholar, W. Arafat, informs us that there are some nineteen verses in the Qur'ān in which the manumission or emancipation of slaves is expressly recommended; the releasing of a slave from bondage was recommended as “expiation for a broken vow” or some other wrong, and slaves might also be manumitted by decree of their master’s will upon his death.¹ The conclusion reached by the nineteenth century Near Eastern scholar Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, that while the Qur'ān and Hadīth allow for slavery as an inherited reality of the age, they often encourage the manumission of the slaves whenever possible, further supports ‘Arafat’s assertion.² In lieu of manumission, it is known that Muhammad himself encouraged the practice of *mukātabat*, whereby a slave – in agreement with his master – could work to buy his freedom.³ If a slave were unable to save sufficient funds, money collected as *zakat* could be used to supplement, and thereby enable the slave to obtain his freedom. ‘Arafat further informs us that according to Hadīth, masters were encouraged to assist their slaves in their labor whenever possible.⁴ Norms for the treatment of slaves espoused by the Qur'ān and Hadīth were predicated on the belief that the slave, just as the master, was possessed of a soul, and although he was by circumstance an inferior being socio-economically speaking, in the eyes of God the slave was every bit his master’s equal.⁵ Thus in ‘Arafat’s estimation – and this conclusion is maintained by many other scholars as well – from the advent of Islam forward, the tendency was “towards the presumption of freedom.”⁶

Such is, of course, an ideal interpretation of some number of recommendations pertaining to the institution of slavery and the treatment of slaves as presented in the holy book and traditions attributed to Muhammad, and we might never be certain the extent to which such Qur'ānic instructions or examples of the Prophet were carried out or put into practice by ordinary Muslims on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, as Bernard Lewis notes, “The Prophet Muhammad and those of his Companions who could afford it themselves owned slaves; some of them acquired more by conquest,” and “While maltreatment was deplored, there was no fixed *shāri'ah* penalty.”⁷ Still, in the final analysis Islam did serve to raise the slave from the status of chattel to that of a “human being with a certain religious and hence social status...with certain quasi-legal rights.”⁸ Islamic jurisprudence came to the conclusion that, while all human beings were free in nature, such was not the case in more complex societies.

While the institution of slavery may have theoretically been discouraged in Islam, it was by no means done away with, and persisted as a legal institution in some parts of the Islamic world until the twentieth century. The conclusion that all human beings were by nature free never reflected reality, and men, women and children continued to be enslaved by those in a position to do so. However, there were restrictions within the Islamic tradition regarding who could be enslaved. ‘Arafat tells us, “The two

¹ W. ‘Arafat, “The Attitude of Islam to Slavery,” *The Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1966): 15.

² G. W. Leitner, “Mohammedanism and Slavery,” *The Athenaeum*, No. 2942 (1884): 346.

³ ‘Arafat, “Islam to Slavery,” 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1990): 5, 7.

⁸ Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, 6.

lawful sources of slavery are: to be born in slavery or to be captured in war...In the second category jurists emphasize that it must be a lawful defensive war declared on behalf of Islam.”⁹ By this he means *jihād*, or holy war. One other important point to keep in mind is that after the establishment of Islam and the beginnings of a Muslim legal tradition, it became unlawful to reduce an Arab, or a Muslim, to slavery. This being the case, the main source of slaves in the Islamic world, including Central Asia, became the *Dār al-Harb*.

As most all of us know, the rift between Shī’ī and Sunnī Muslims has existed from the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and has occasioned a great deal of bloodshed since that time. Still, as the enslavement of fellow Muslims was prohibited, it remained uncommon for members of either sect to take the other as slaves – that is until the early modern era. From the creation of the Safavid state in 1501 and Shāh Ismā’īl I’s establishment of *Ithnā ‘Ashariya* or the Twelver brand of Shī’ī Islam as the state religion, Persia came to be seen as being part of the *Dār al-Harb*, and its inhabitants all potential slaves. This proved to be a significant development with regard to the continuance of the slave-trade in Islamic Central Asia.

According to Nikolai Veselovskii, the trend towards the enslavement of Shī’ī Muslims in Mavarannahr was encouraged by the conquest of the Shībānid Uzbeks at the dawn of the sixteenth century, an event which occurred simultaneously with the rise of the Safavids in Iran. Veselovskii states,

Having captured the settled population of Mavarannahr and settled in cities and towns, the Uzbeks had neither the desire nor the propensity for the hardships of settled living; it was necessary to work the land with slaves. This was only possible by increasing the number of slave hands.¹⁰

Obviously, given that they professed Sunnī Islam, the Uzbeks were prohibited from simply making slaves of the inhabitants of Mavarannahr, who were also primarily Sunnī. They were therefore compelled to look beyond their own borders for a sustainable source of slaves. Initially, the Uzbeks’ appetite for slave labor seems to have been satiated by a steady supply of Indian captives, infidel Hindus, who were traded primarily for Central Asian horses.”¹¹ As time wore on and Muslim armies continued their centuries’ long pacification of the Indian subcontinent, the reservoir of Indian slaves gradually dried up, prompting slave-traders to seek a new supply.¹² Accordingly, the Uzbeks set their sights south and west of the Amu Darya, towards the Safavid frontier. The province of Khurasan in particular continued to be the prime target of predatory Uzbek raids and Uzbek military ambitions. In order to justify their forays across the Amu Darya, the Uzbeks often employed the terminology of holy war, here directed against their heretical Shī’ī neighbors.

Veselovskii emphasizes the importance of the religious justification for the Uzbeks’ incessant warring against and subsequent enslavement of Persians, and traces the roots of this religious justification to the period just prior to the Shībānid conquest of the Tīmūrid realm.

He states:

Shortly before the invasion of the Uzbeks in Mavarannahr, the clergy of Central Asia, with Shams al-Dīn Herāfī at its head, promulgated the *fatwa* by which Shī’ī Muslims could be sold into slavery just as infidels. With this, it became fully possible to procure slaves from Persia, and the demand for them in Central Asia only increased. This came in very handy

⁹ ‘Arafat, “Islam to Slavery,” 16. In stating this, ‘Arafat cites one A. A. Jāwīsh, *al-Islām Dīn al-fitra*, p. 79.

¹⁰ Н. Веселовский, «Русские невольники въ среднеазятскихъ ханствахъ.» *Материалы для описания Хивинского похода 1873 года*, Вып. 5 (Ташкент, 1881): 1. Translation from Russian is my own.

¹¹ Scott Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 63-67.

¹² Levi, *Indian Diaspora*, 69.

for the Uzbeks; without this justification, they would have been unable to keep Persian slaves, since, according to the Qur'ān, every Muslim must be free.¹³

This fatwa and others like it essentially legalized the enslavement of Shī'ī Muslims in Central Asia – primarily Persians, although Shī'ī Kurds and Ismā'īlīs are also mentioned in various sources. Collectively, these fatwas gave greater license to both those who made a living capturing Shī'ī Muslims for sale as slaves and slave dealers.

Turgun Fayziev suggests that beneath the rhetoric of the fatwa and the language of *jihād* rested more fundamental political and economic concerns. He remarks,

Such *fatwas* were not issued on the part of the 'ulamā' solely with the intent of glorifying the religion of Islam and showing their sectarian support. Rather the purpose of such *fatwas* was rooted in aggressive and belligerent political-economic goals. While doing something for the general public, at the same time the above-mentioned *fatwas* no doubt served the interests of the khans, amirs, begs, and large land-holders. For example, one such *fatwa* was issued for the Shībānīd Khān of Bukhara, 'Abd Allāh Khān, in 1586. Before laying siege to the city of Herat, he had the 'ulamā' of Bukhara issue a *fatwa*, the contents of which stated "if the people of the city are Shī'ī, they should be taken and plundered."¹⁴

Here religion is used to sanctify and condone political and economic gain through plunder and violence at the expense of the Shī'ī inhabitants of Herat. In truth, it is likely that no one reason alone can sufficiently account for the expansion of Shī'ī enslavement during the early modern and modern eras into the nineteenth century. Rather, political, economic, and religious arguments in favor of plundering, capturing, and enslaving Shī'ī Muslims would all have been equally valid, given the right context at the right time. Thus, as time passed and the nineteenth century dawned, increasing numbers Shī'ī Muslims were taken prisoner and dragged to the markets of Qaraqol, Qarshi, Charjui, Bukhara, and so on,¹⁵ to satisfy the growing demand for slaves.

The first travel narrative to be considered herein is that of Baron von Meyendorf who, as part of the Negri embassy sent to Bukhara by Tsar Alexander I in 1820, was tasked with compiling geographical and statistical records on the countries through which they would pass. Meyendorf realized almost immediately how widespread the institution of slavery was in Bukhara: he estimated the number of Persian slaves as being anywhere from thirty-to-forty thousand,¹⁶ noting "Every wealthy and respectable inhabitant of Bokhara owns slaves, mostly Persians."¹⁷ The average slave-holder maintained around forty slaves, while the Qosh-Begi himself, Meyendorf reports, retained upwards of one hundred; it is safe to assume these were mostly Persian captives, given their percentage of the slave population.¹⁸

Economically speaking, in Meyendorf's opinion, the Emirate was dependent upon slave labor for the fact that it was the slaves – Shī'ī Persians – who were responsible for "cultivation of the soil," the agricultural product of which brought in the bulk of Bukhara's revenue.¹⁹ However, the use of Persian slaves was not limited to the agricultural sphere. According to Meyendorf, slaves played an essential role

¹³ Веселовский, «Русские невольники», 1.

¹⁴ Т. Файзиев, *Бухоро феодал жамиятида қуллардан фойдаланишига доир ҳужжатлар* (Тошкент: Ўзбекистон «ФАН» нашриёти, 1990): 8-9. Translation from Uzbek is my own.

¹⁵ Balfour, 676.

¹⁶ Baron von Meyendorf, *A Journey from Orenburg to Bokhara in the Year 1820*, trans. Captain E. F. Chapman, R. H. A. (Calcutta: Foreign Department Press, 1870): 58, 61.

¹⁷ Meyendorf, *Journey from Orenburg*, 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

in the day-to-day operations of the Emirate's bureaucracy. This he noted while considering the nature of the Uzbek regime, stating:

...the spirit of the Bokharian Government is of a marked arbitrary character. Indeed, what else can one expect when...[the Amīr's] slaves, who have been bought with money, play an important part in possessing his confidence? The slaves of the Koosh-beghi hold important state offices, and it may be said that the whole of the administration is in the hands of the Koosh-beghi family and slaves.²⁰

Thus, if we trust Meyendorf's account, and the vast majority of slaves in Bukhara were Persians, including those of the Amīr and the Qosh-Begi, then we might read here that the government of Bukhara was staffed by Persian captives. That being the case it seems that in some instances Shī'ī slaves were able, after enduring the horrors of being inducted into the slave community, to rise to positions of relative prestige within the Emirate. Of course, Meyendorf states further that "the mass of government *employés* in Bokhara must be looked upon as the scum of the population," revealing what little respect he had for the slaves-come-bureaucrats of the Bukharan state.²¹

Some years after Meyendorf completed his mission and returned home, Alexander Burnes, a British lieutenant serving in India, made his way overland to the emirate of Bukhara. His account of this journey provides us with a good deal of information with regard to the enslavement of Shī'ī Persians in Islamic Central Asia. As to the origins of Shī'ī enslavement, the story provided by Burnes is in line with the opinion of Veselovskii, stating that, "The practice of enslaving Persians is said to have been unknown before the invasion of the Uzbeks."²² Burnes continues with an anecdote that provides a religious "justification" for the enslavement of Shī'ī Muslims, which must have been circulated throughout the Emirate: Burnes states, "A few Bokhara priests visited Persia, and heard the three first caliphs publicly reviled in that country; on their return, the synod gave their "futwa," or command for licensing the sale of all such infidels."²³ This fits in well with the explanation provided by Veselovskii and seconded by Fayziev mentioned earlier, that around the time of the Uzbek invasion of Mavarannahr the 'ulamā' of Bukhara, under the direction of Shams al-Dīn Herātī, issued a fatwa which allowed for the legal enslavement of Shī'ī Persians. Surprisingly Burnes, who throughout most of his narrative expresses nothing but sympathy for the Persian slaves he encounters, declares that as the Shī'ī Persians were in the regular habit of publicly denouncing the caliphs Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, and "the report of the Bokhara priests is true, the Persians have brought their present calamities upon themselves."²⁴ In his final assessment, however, despite his finding fault with the Shī'ī and their practices vis-à-vis the first three caliphs, Burnes roundly condemns the trafficking of human beings in Central Asia as an "odious violation of human rights and liberties."²⁵

According to Burnes, Persian slaves were captured by and transported to the markets of Khiva and Bukhara primarily by Turkmen raiders, and that the markets of Bukhara were supplied in the main by Turkmen raiding parties loosely under the suzerainty of the khans of Khiva.²⁶ We learn from other sources that the slave-traders in urban areas were mostly Sarts or Tajiks, and in some instances Persians, and not Uzbeks themselves.²⁷ From Burnes' account, one can imagine how frightening this first step in becoming a slave, being stolen and spirited away by the Turkmen, must have been: while moving from Bukhara to Mashhad, Burnes and his caravan stopped at Charjui, where they encountered a troop of

²⁰ Ibid., 51.

²¹ Ibid., 51.

²² Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. I (London: John Murray, 1834): 343.

²³ Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, 343.

²⁴ Ibid., 344.

²⁵ Ibid., 344.

²⁶ Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1834): 386-387.

²⁷ Balfour, 676.

Turkmen slavers with a handful of Persian captives en route to the slave markets of Bukhara. Burnes writes: “They had been seized by the Toorkmuns at Ghaeen, near Meshid, a few weeks before... They were weary and thirsty, and I gave them all I could, – a single melon; a civility, little as it was, which was received with gratitude.”²⁸ On the treatment of the Turkmen towards their chattel, Burnes tells us, “The Toorkmuns evince but little compassion for their Persian slaves... They give them but a scanty supply of food and water, that they may waste their strength, and prevent their escape.”²⁹ Mohan Lal, a companion of Burnes in his travels who produced his own travel narrative of their journey, goes into greater detail regarding the treatment that these Persians received at the hands of their captors, stating:

The poor souls were forced by the cruel Turkmans to walk on foot, without shoes, in such a fiery desert. Their hands and necks were fastened together in a line with a long iron chain, which was very heavy and troublesome to their bare necks. They were crying, and appeared to be exhausted with hunger and thirst, while their oppressive drivers were deaf to their entreaties. They were Shias, and inhabitants of Qayan, a place in Persia. They saluted us, shedding a flood of tears at the same time.³⁰

Assuming these Persian captives survived their forced march through the desert, they would have next found themselves at one of a number of slave markets located in various cities north of the Amu Darya.

The city of Bukhara itself possessed such a market, which Burnes calls the slave bazaar. Burnes described the scene he witnessed: “Here these poor wretches are exposed for sale, and occupy thirty or forty stalls, where they are examined like cattle, only with this difference, that they are able to give an account of themselves *viva voce*.”³¹ Burnes goes on to relate the steps of the transaction: first, the slave is asked whether or not he is a Muslim, and by Muslim the buyer would mean a Sunnī Muslim. Satisfied that the slave was not Sunnī, the buyer would then inspect the physical condition of the slave, to be sure he or she was free of any visible disease or infirmity, or that they were physically appealing. Following this, buyer and seller would haggle over a fair price for the slave. Predictably, the Uzbeks assured Burnes, who must have been visibly sickened by the scene of the slave bazaar, that all the Persian slaves within the emirate were treated humanely and that, moreover, in purchasing these poor Persians the Uzbeks were in fact doing them a favor, insofar as they were removing them from the path of heresy and bringing them into the true *ummah*.³²

At another point in his narrative, the aforementioned Mohan Lal testifies to the animosity which existed among the people of Bukhara for the Shīʿī, stating that,

The Qizal Bash, or Shias, who follow the principles of Ali, and do not believe in the three friends of Mohammed, are treated with indignity by the Sunnis, who molest, and even sell them, at their pleasure. All punishments are inflicted by the Qazi, who is the head of the law. The people are very bigoted, and call the Shia by the name of kafar, and even think him much worse than Hindus.³³

According to Lal’s account, the Shīʿī and their ways came to be so detested in Bukhara that to call someone a Shīʿī was among the worst insults one individual could hurl at another. Lal informs us that

²⁸ Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. II, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰ Mohan Lal, *Travels in the Panjab, Afghanistan, and Turkistan, to Balk, Bokhara, and Herat, and a visit to Great Britain and Germany* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1846): 154.

³¹ Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. I, 281.

³² *Ibid.*, 282-283.

³³ Lal, *Travels*, 129.

such was the case with Hakim Beg, the Qosh-Begi of Amīr Nasrallāh Bahādur (r. 1827-1860), who was often referred to by the inhabitants of Bukhara as “a Qizal Bash slave, and not a real Uzbek” due to his favorable attitude regarding trade with Persia and the support he gave to the city’s merchants who handled such trade.³⁴

The last narrative we will consider is that of the renowned scholar Arminius Vambery, who in the early 1860s travelled throughout Anatolia, Persia, and Central Asia disguised as a dervish, or Sufi mystic. Vambery first encountered Shī’ī slaves on Bukharan soil as he was near to death from thirst, having traversed the desert en route from Khiva to Bukhara. Having fallen asleep and, by his own account, expecting soon to die, Vambery awoke surrounded by a group of Persian slaves, shepherds who, although having next to nothing themselves, nursed the author and his companions back to health. Vambery tells us a rather poignant story of one of their number, a five-year-old child:

He had been, two years before, captured and sold with his father. When I questioned him about the latter, he answered me confidingly. ‘Yes; my father has bought himself (meaning paid his own ransom); at longest I shall only be a slave two years, for by that time my father will have spared the necessary money.’ The poor child had on him hardly anything but a few rags, to cover his weak little body; his skin was the hardness and colour of leather.³⁵

One can scarcely imagine the hardship this child likely endured, or the heartbreak of his father who was compelled to leave without his son, and of his mother who may well have died without knowing her son’s fate. Of course, his character does not resurface at some later point in Vambery’s narrative; his story, like those of most Shī’ī slaves who lived and died in the Emirate of Bukhara in the nineteenth century, is lost to history.

Herein we have briefly considered four travel narratives which provide information relating to the history of the enslavement of Shī’ī Muslims in the Emirate of Bukhara in the nineteenth century. The sources examined confirm that the institution of slavery was ideologically rationalized and sanctified in accordance with sectarian prejudices harbored by Sunnī Muslims towards the Shī’ī Muslims in Mavarannahr. While this essay has shed light on the history of slavery in Islamic Central Asia, further investigation of this subject is warranted, both to expand our knowledge of the history of slavery in Central Asia and to bring this history fully into the broader narrative of the history of human bondage. Additionally, this highlights the persistence of the sectarian divide that has existed in Islam between the Sunnī and the Shī’a since the seventh century, a divide that a very small minority of extremists within the global Muslim community – both Sunnī and Shī’ī – have exploited and continue to exploit in order to justify oppression and violence.

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The Proverbs 31 Woman, Then

Before she became a cultural icon of Christian womanhood, before she was invoked in funeral eulogies, and even before she was recounted by Jewish husbands to their wives on the Sabbath, the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 represented an elite masculine perspective among the *golah* community

³⁴ Ibid., 139.

³⁵ Arminius Vambery, *Travels in Central Asia: Being the Account of a Journey from Teheran across the Turkoman Desert on the Eastern Shore of the Caspian to Khiva, Bokhara, and Samarcand; Performed in the year 1863* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865): 198.