

THE ROLE OF MALE SLAVES IN THE SAUDI STATE

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Abstract

The research deals with the role of slave men in the Saudi state with their three roles with its imams and kings, which are represented by their personal guard, their political and military participation, their assignment as messengers and preachers for the state outside it, and their assumption of many administrative positions, in addition to their assumption of several other internal affairs.

Keywords: Slave, Mamluks, Saudi state.

Introduction:

This research is concerned with studying the role of slave men among the imams of the Saudi state, with their three roles in particular, as slaves in general represented one of the segments of the society of the Saudi state. They were treated with humanity, the likes of which we rarely find if we compare them with their counterparts in some other countries. This treatment stems from the values of the Islamic religion first and from their Arab morals, customs, and traditions second. They lived a good life under the rule of the imams and kings of the state, and they were considered part of the men of the ruling class.

The existence of slaves as a segment of Saudi society is an undeniable fact, and they played an important role in the Saudi state in its three roles: Stemming from the humane treatment with which they were treated by the imams of the state first, and from their loyalty, love, and devotion to the second, This role has not been given its proper due in historical studies of the history of the Saudi state, and this may be due to several reasons, including This group represents a social segment that does not possess wealth, and many historians have devoted themselves to writing the history of heroes and palace owners. In addition to the difficulty of sorting out their role from the vast sources of the history of the Saudi state, in addition to the lack of emergence of people from this category that chronicled its role and history,

The researcher believes that the roles they played in the history of the Saudi state should be studied and recorded by us.

Research Importance:

The research provides a historical dimension to the role of slave men in the Saudi state, which represented a segment of Saudi society, which was not given its due due in previous studies.

Reasons for choosing the topic:

The reasons for choosing the topic can be summarized in the following points:

- The importance of studying the topic.
- The importance of knowing the roles played by slave men in the Saudi state.

Research Problem:

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are their duties as personal guards?
- What are the aspects of monitoring their political and military participation?
- What is their role as messengers and advocates for the state outside it?
- What administrative positions did they hold?
- What are their actions in other internal affairs?

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are summarized as follows:

- Knowing their personal guards.
- Monitoring their political and military participation.
- Highlighting their role as messengers and advocates for the state outside it.
- Identify their administrative positions.
- Determine their work in other internal affairs.

Previous studies:

Through the researcher's review of the information bases for university dissertations and scientific research in research centers, the researcher did not find an independent, documented scientific study covering all the objectives of the study, and no explicit or implicit topic emerged that dealt with "the role of slave men in the Saudi state."

Research Methodology:

The research relied on the descriptive and analytical historical method, which is based on collecting scientific material from its original sources and extrapolating it, then monitoring and classifying it according to the research plan, and then analyzing and criticizing it scientifically and objectively. To reach the picture closest to the historical truth regarding the research topic, while adhering to the temporal and spatial frameworks, Then, formulate the scientific material in a precise scientific manner, taking into account the rules of language, the interconnection between the information, and the sequence of its events, to reach the desired results that the research aims to achieve.

Research Plan:

It is divided, along with the introduction and conclusion, into five axes:

First: their personal guard.

Second: their political and military participation.

Third: Messengers and advocates for the state outside it.

Fourth: Their administrative positions.

Fifth: They take over a number of other internal affairs.

Research sources:

The scientific material included published and unpublished documents, contemporary sources of local and foreign study, and the country’s official newspaper, Umm al-Qura.

Attitude towards slaves and slavery:

It seems that the first problem that can be faced when extracting source evidence about this segment of society is the term. The Arabic term commonly used to refer to it is “*abīd*” = [slaves]”, although it refers only to black slaves, and its opposite is “mamluks”, which is used to describe white slaves. The comprehensive term that unites them is “*ar-raqīq*,” whether male or female.¹ The present paper will use the term “*ar-raqīq*” in a sense that includes either black or white males.

¹ Definition of "Al-Rig" [slavery] linguistically: Al-Rig with Kasrah under the letter "ra" is the source of Raq "slaved something" Yariq "slaving it" i.e. it becomes a slave, and it is said that so-and-so enslaved his slave, and "slave him": that is, the opposite of "emancipated him". "ar-Riq" [slavery] is “possession and control of a person i.e enslavement”, and the origin of slavery is submission. "ar-Raqiq" [a slave], whether male or female, is "Mamluk" [owned], and the female slave is called "Raqiqah" [slave], and the plural is "Raqiq" [slaves] and "Ariqa'a" [slaves]. Muhammad Yaqoob Al-Fayrouz Abadi: Al-Qamus Al-Volume 23, Issue 01, March 2024

In the Arabian Peninsula during the modern era, slaves were acquired in several different ways, either by birth, as gifts and spoils of war, or by purchase or gifting, which was the most common method.² The slave trade centers in Muscat and the port of Sur in Oman were an important center and a popular market for this trade in the early nineteenth century, and from there slaves were brought to the Arabian Peninsula, the Arabian Gulf, Iraq and Iran.³ In the Arabian Peninsula, they were sold in a special market known as “sūq al-‘abīd”, i.e. the slave market. In Jeddah and Mecca, slaves were sold in markets including the “Dakatar-raqīq” in Mecca, which is one of the most famous slave markets in modern times.⁴

Slaves enjoyed a good life under the rule of Imams and Kings of the Saudi State and were considered an important part of the ruling class. They received their full rights, including marriage, reproduction, education, and medication, and were rewarded for their work.⁵ They were also treated with respect and humanity. It is noted that they were given good names, such as: Furayḥ (Hilarious), Yaqūt (Ruby), Maṣṣūr (victorious), Farḥān (happy), Sa‘d (happiness), Fayrouz (Turquoise), and others. They were also given the names and nicknames of their masters, for example, “Fayrūz Al-‘Abdul‘azīz” and “Farḥān Al Sa‘ūd”.⁶ The slave could also call his master “uncle”, even though this title was used for (biological) uncle. They did not use titles such as “sīdī”, i.e. sir or master. Perhaps these titles were used for closeness, loyalty, mercy, and breaking barriers between the master and his slave.⁷ They were also allowed to marry, start a family, study, get treatment, etc. The imams and kings of the state gave zakāt, especially the annual zakāt al-Fiṭr in Ramadan, and alms and donations to needy slaves. Efforts were also made

Muhit [Arabic Dictionary], investigation by the Heritage Office at Al-Resala Foundation, 3rd ed., Al-Resala Foundation, Beirut, 1413 AH / 1993, p. 1146.

² Harry St. John Philby, *Arabian Jubilee of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, arabized by Abbas Sayed Ahmed, reviewed by Abdullah Mohammed Al-Munif, *Obeikan Bookshop*, Riyadh, 1424 AH / 2003, p. 252.

³ J. G. Lorimer, *The Historical Gazetteer of Gulf*, translated by the office of the Emir of Qatar, *Bin Ali Press*, Doha, (n.d), 5/2900; Muhammad bin Ali al-Hasani, *The Auction of Female and Male Slaves in the Arabian Peninsula Through the Ages*, *The Arab House for Encyclopedias*, Beirut, 2017, p. 130, p. 130.

⁴ Abdulaziz Dolchin, *The Secret Journey of the Russian Colonel Abdul Aziz Dolchin to the Hijaz*, *Arab House for Encyclopedias*, Beirut, 2008, p. 192.

⁵ Dixon, Harold Richard, *Arabs of the Desert*, p. 459.

⁶ Al-Ruwaished, Abdul Rahman, *The Sixty Immortal Men, the Vanguard of the Restoration of Riyadh and the Unification of the Kingdom*, 1419 AH/1899 AD, pp. 92, 193.

⁷ Dixon, Harold Richard, *Arabs of the Desert*, *House of Contemporary Thought*, Beirut, 1998, p. 458.

by imams and kings to liberate them for the sake of God,⁸ such as the case of Jawhar, who was emancipated by Imam Turki ibn ‘Abdullah.⁹

The German doctor Herbert Pritzke, who visited Al-Aḥsa in 1368 AH/1949 AD, described the slaves and their living situation, saying that they are the focus of great attention from their masters, as they represent them. They are treated well, and receive comprehensive medical care.¹⁰ Pritzke goes on to say that slaves were so content with their lives that one could inflict no harsher punishment on them than to free them. He refers to cases of freed slaves who returned to their former masters pleading with their eyes full of tears.¹¹ This description given by Dr. Bretzke is similar to what was stated by Dr. George Rentz, the Arab Affairs Advisor at Aramco, who lived in Saudi Arabia for nearly fifty years. He points out that slaves in the Kingdom were treated as members of the family, and many of them refused freedom if it was offered to them.¹² Perhaps this explains why slaves remained in the service of their former masters after their liberation.

The number of slaves in the first Saudi state became so large that it became impossible to reside in the homes of their masters, especially those whose services were not directly related to the palaces. To solve this problem, they were moved to their own neighborhood called “Ḥayy al-‘Abīd”, i.e. the slave neighborhood.¹³ Ibn Bishr estimates the number of slaves during the reign of Imam Sa‘ūd ibn ‘Abdulaziz by calculating the value of Zakāt al-Fiṭr that the Imam pays annually at the end of Ramadan. He concluded that the number of male slaves ranged from five

⁸ Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, Part 2, investigated and commented on by some distinguished researchers by order of the Ministry of Education, *Sader Press*, Beirut, (n.d.), p. 169.

⁹William Belgrave, Central and Eastern Arabia, vol. 2, translated by: Sabri Muhammad Hassan, Supreme Council for Culture and Translation, Cairo, 2001 AD, pp. 4-6.

¹⁰Herbert Britske, The Bedouin Doctor, Adventures of a German Officer in the Middle East, translation and commentary: Ahmed Ibish, National Book House, Abu Dhabi, 2011, pp. 279-280.

¹¹Herbert Britske, The Bedouin Doctor, Adventures of a German Officer in the Middle East, p. 280.

¹²Grant C. Butler, American Kings and Beauty in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, translated by: Atef Faleh Yousef, King Abdulaziz House, Riyadh, 1433 AH, p. 163.

¹³ Ibrahim Obaid Al Abd Al-Muhsin, Tadhkirat Uli Al-Nahi wa Al-Irfan bi Ayam Allah Al-Wahid Al-Daian wa Dikr Hawadith az-Zaman, Part 1, 1st ed., *Al-Noor Foundation Press*, Riyadh, (n.d), Vol. 1, p. 57; Abdullah Muhammad Al-Mutawa: Diriyah Community in the Era of the first Saudi State, *Saudi Historical Society*, 14th ed., Muharram 1424 AH / March 2003, p. 77.

hundred to a thousand, and estimated the slaves of the Imam's household, including servants, maids, and orphans, at approximately one thousand and three hundred.¹⁴

In addition, slaves in the Saudi State, when they become free, were integrated into society without discrimination. Belgrave expressed his astonishment that Jawhar, the Minister of the Treasury who was freed during the reign of Imam Faisal ibn Turkī, has a prominent personality and a high position. He walks and moves with two black guards was a very elegant black Negro man, dressed in luxurious clothes. Jawhar was later released by Imam Faisal ibn Turki.¹⁵ The policy of eliminating slavery and the slave trade in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was implemented in stages and gradually. King Abdul Aziz started it by an agreement with Britain,¹⁶ and the page of slavery in the Kingdom was finally folded during the reign of King Faisal.¹⁷

Slaves in the Saudi State, when they become free, were integrated into society without discrimination. Belgrave expressed his astonishment that Jawhar, who was freed by Imam Turkī ibn 'Abdullah and assumed the Ministry of the Treasury during the reign of Imam Faisal ibn Turkī.¹⁸ Belgrave referred to him as being about forty-five years of age, sweet-natured, but somewhat hot-tempered, pliable, trustworthy, of a prominent character, of high rank, easy-going and about with two negro guards. He also described his appearance as a very elegant black Negro man, tall, dressed in luxurious clothes, and hanging a sword with a gold handle.¹⁹

Belgrave also described son of Jawhar, Maḥbūb, who was 25 years old when he met him in 1862 AD, as the prime minister of Imam Faisal Ibn Turkī, the son of a Georgian maid, whom Abbas Pasha had gifted to Imam Faisal. He also described Maḥbūb's appearance as very boyish, non-Najdi, and also non-Arab, with white skin, soft colored hair, and blue eyes, skilled, intelligent young man, bold, arrogant and ostentatious, with tyrannical cruelty and reckless

¹⁴Ibn Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, vol. 2, p. 169.

¹⁵ William Belgrave, Central and Eastern Arabia, translated by Sabri Mohammed Hasan, *Supreme Council for Culture and Translation*, Cairo, 2001, Vol. 2, p. 4.

¹⁶ Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, Issue No. 627, 27 Ramadan 1355 AH / 11 December 1936, p. 1.

¹⁷ Umm al-Qura Newspaper, Year 40, Issue 1944, Document for the Abolition of Slavery in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Friday 12 Jumada al-Thani 1382 AH / 9 November 1962, p. 1.

¹⁸ William Belgrave, Central and Eastern Arabia, translated by Sabri Mohammed Hasan, *Supreme Council for Culture and Translation*, Cairo, 2001, Vol. 2, p. 4.

¹⁹William Belgrave, Central and Eastern Arabia, vol. 2, translated by: Sabri Muhammad Hassan, Supreme Council for Culture and Translation, Cairo, 2001 AD, pp. 4-6.

behavior, a connoisseur of literature, a lover of research, intellectual independent, and of a strong personality.²⁰ Belgrave also described Maḥbūb Coffee, which he visited more than once during his stay in Riyadh, and mentioned that it contained a large library that was considered one of the richest libraries he had seen in the Arabian Peninsula.²¹ Whatever the accuracy of what Belgrave said about Maḥbūb, his account is an important indicator of the treatment of slaves in general in the Saudi state.

Another example is King Faisal's appreciation for one of his black slaves whom he had recently freed, as he invited him to the dining table and seated him to his right in a place of honour. This slave was the first black guest to enter the "Wadgood" room at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York.²²

The policy of eliminating slavery and the slave trade in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was implemented in stages and gradually. King Abdul Aziz started it by an agreement with Britain. It was signed in Jeddah on Friday, Dhul-Qi'dah 18, 1345 AH / May 20, 1927 AD. The representatives of both governments were Gilbert Clayton, the intelligence officer and representative of the colonies, and Prince Faisal ibn 'Abdulaziz, the Viceroy of Hijaz. Article Seven of this treaty stipulated: "His Majesty the King of Hijaz, Najd and its annexes undertakes to cooperate by all means in his power with His British Majesty in eliminating the slave trade".²³ This treaty was published in the country's official newspaper (Umm Al-Qura).²⁴

Also, Umm Al-Qura newspaper published - on Friday, Rajab 16, 1355 AH / October 2, 1936 AD - a news item under the title "Instructions regarding slave trade" which included sixteen articles.²⁵ These instructions were republished in the same newspaper the following year, on Friday, Rabi' al-Awwal 11, 1356 AH/May 21, 1937 AD, to confirm them, especially what was stated in Articles Nine and Ten. Given the importance of these instructions, their

²⁰William Belgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia*, vol. 2, 115.

²¹William Belgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia*, vol. 2, 118.

²²Khairallah, George, *The Renaissance of the Arabian Peninsula*, translated by: Wadih Filastin, King Abdulaziz House, Riyadh, 1430 AH/2009 AD, p. 195.

²³Muhammad Bahaa al-Din Metwally, *The Saudi-British Treaty of Jeddah 1927 AD*, Arab Historian Magazine, Union of Arab Historians, Cairo, No. 12, 2004 AD, pp. 291-293.

²⁴Umm Al-Qura newspaper, No. 126, Year 3, Jeddah Treaty between the Hijaz and Najd and Britain, Friday 25 Dhul-Qi'dah 1345 AH / May 27 1927 AD, p. 1.

²⁵Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, Issue No. 617, Year 13, Instructions Concerning Slave Trafficking, Friday 16 Rajab 1355 AH / 2 October 1936 AD, p. 3.

comprehensiveness, and the articles contained therein obliging the owner or administrator to give the slave their full rights, it is important to mention its articles as follows:²⁶

- Article One: Given that the provisions of Sharia law stipulate that nationals of the treaty countries must not be enslaved or purchased, it is strictly prohibited:

1. Bringing slaves from any country to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by sea.
2. Bringing slaves into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by land unless the slave bringer has a government document proving that the person brought was recognized as a slave in the country from which he was brought when this order was published.
3. Enslavement of free people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
4. Any violation of what was mentioned in the previous paragraphs requires the perpetrator to be punished with the following penalty:

1. The slave is declared free and released.
2. Applying customs regulations in effect to smugglers.
3. Severe penalty of imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year.

- Article Two: The slave has the right that his owner should support, clothe and to house him, treat him kindly and to work him with kindness, compassion and not cruelty, the right to nurse him and pay for his medical treatment, and in general he has all the rights that a man's dependents or guardians have as stipulated in the noble Sharia.

- Article Three: Every slave who complains of mistreatment by his owner, the competent authority shall bring both the complainant and the defendant against him. If it is proven that the complaint is valid, it warns the owner for the first time and gives him a period not exceeding two months to reconsider the complainant's condition. If it is proven to it the second time that the reasons for the complaint still exist, it forces the owner to remove the complainant from his ownership, either by selling him or otherwise. If the owner fails to remove the complainant from his property, either by selling it or otherwise, he will be punished the first time with a financial

²⁶Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, Issue No. 650, Year 13, Instructions Concerning Slave Trafficking, Friday 11 Rabi' al-Awwal 1356 AH/May 21 1937 AD, p. 8, 1.

fine not exceeding one pound, and if the violation is repeated, he will be sentenced to double the financial fine, and he may be sentenced to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one week.

- Article Four: Every slave who is able to prove that he was born free and that he was enslaved in a manner contrary to Sharia law during the period that has passed since the establishment of the government of His Majesty the King in the year 1344 AH / 1925 AD has the right to be free, and the competent authority must accept the case and give a fair ruling on it. .

- Article Five: It is not permissible for the owner to separate two slaves whose marriage contract was concluded legally except by a legal order.

- Article Six: The King has no right to separate children from their mothers as long as they are under the age of majority.

- Article Seven: A slave may request correspondence from his owner, and the owner must respond.

- Article Eight: Every slave born outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has the right to choose his place of residence when he is emancipated in accordance with the provisions of this law, or under any other form considered by Sharia law.

- Article Nine: All existing slaves must be registered in a special register kept by the competent authorities. Each slave must be given an identity paper containing his appearance and photograph (if male). The identity papers must be made of three copies, one of which must be kept with the competent authorities, one with the owner, and one in the hand of the slave. All transactions related to the slave are recorded on the identity paper, and slave owners must complete registration transactions within one year from the date of publication of this system.

- Article Ten: Every slave whose owner has not registered him as stipulated in the previous article may apply to the competent authority requesting a certificate of his freedom.

- Article Eleven: When slaves are transferred from hand to hand, they must be presented to a doctor from the Department of Public Interest to obtain a certificate of their health condition.

- Article Twelve: It is not permissible for a person to work as an agent or broker in slavement except under an official license issued by the competent authority.

- Article Thirteen: An employee designated for slaves shall be appointed, called the Inspector of Slave Affairs, and he shall have a mobile assistant when necessary.
- Article Fourteen: The local competent authorities must submit a semi-annual report on the implementation of the effect of this system, containing a summary of the transactions that have been completed. The semi-annual reports, along with the notes of the slave inspector, shall be submitted to the Minister of the Interior within two months from the expiration date of the six months for which the report was given.
- Article Fifteen: The competent authorities referred to in this system are the Ministry of Interior in the capital and the Emirates in the regions. When cases are considered in accordance with the provisions of this system, the competent authority forms a body composed of its representative, a representative of the police department, and a member of the Administrative Council to consider the case and issue a ruling.
- Article Sixteen: This system shall become effective from the date of its publication.

Efforts continued during the reign of King Saud ibn ‘Abdulaziz. He formed a committee headed by His Royal Highness Prince ‘Abdul Mohsen ibn ‘Abdulaziz, Minister of Interior, and with the membership of Sheikh Muḥammad Al-Ḥarkān, President of the Jeddah Court, and other officials, to look into the slave issue. In the year 1382 AH / 1962 AD, a decision was issued to free the slaves, and the government paid generous compensation for the masters of freed slaves. This decision was included in a ministerial statement issued by the King’s Viceroy at the time, Prince Faisal ibn ‘Abdulaziz, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister. This statement stated: “It is known that the position of Islamic law on slavery calls for the liberation of slaves, and it is also known that the slaves existing in the present era have violated many of the legal conditions required by Islam to permit slavery. Since its establishment, the Saudi state has faced a problem of slavery and slaves, and worked by all gradual means to eliminate it, first prohibiting the slaves’ import and imposing sanctions on that, then recently prohibiting their sale or purchase. The government now finds the opportunity to announce the absolute abolition of slavery and the liberation of all slaves. The government will compensate those who are proven worthy of

compensation." Prince Faisal's efforts continued when he assumed the reins of power, and the page of slavery in the Kingdom of was finally closed during his reign.²⁷

Slaves as bodyguards:

One of the roles of slaves in the Saudi state is to act as a personal guard for the imams and kings of the state during their stay and travel. They accompanied Imams and Kings in palaces, *majalis* [sitting rooms/places of social and political gatherings], mosques, religious science lessons, pilgrimages, travel, battles, etc. The Saudi family usually allowed its boys to grow up with their young slave boys, so the relationship between them began from a young age, so they would play with them when they were young, and guard them when they were old. Therefore, they were the most loyal soldiers to them in secret and in public, and the greatest in defending them,²⁸ carrying out their orders without hesitation, no matter the cost.²⁹ These guards are often characterized by strength, courage, and bravery. They are armed with their weapons and swords, and they sacrifice everything they can to protect the imams and kings of the state.³⁰

During the reign of Imam Sa'ud ibn 'Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad, the guards had a specific protocol and organization. Perhaps this was behind the assassination of his father. Ibn Bishr described this organization when Imam Saud went out to a religious sciences lesson, saying: "...then the sons of Saud come in groups of people, each of them coming with a large group of those close to him and his slaves and servants When the people gathered, Saud came out of the palace with a large ceowd of people, whose noise would be heard as if it is the popping and crackling of fire in the dry wood due to clanking of swords banging against each other as a result of the intensity of the crowd. It is rare to see white men among them. Rather, all of his mamluks were black slaves carrying precious swords adorned with gold and silver, and he to them is like the moon seen through the clouds. When he comes to the place of that gathering,

²⁷ Umm al-Qura Newspaper, Year 40, Issue 1944, Document for the Abolition of Slavery in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Friday 12 Jumada al-Thani 1382 AH / 9 November 1962, p. 1; Muhammad Abd al-Jawad, The Legal Development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Cairo, Cairo University Press and University Book, 1977 AD, pp. 210-211.

²⁸ Ibrahim bin Ubaid Al Abdul Mohsen, The First Remembrance of Prohibition and Acknowledgment of the Days of God, the One Judge, and Mention of the Events of Time, Volume 1, Al-Rushd Library, Riyadh, 1428 AH - 2007 AD, p. 370

²⁹ Dixon, Harold Richard, Arabs of the Desert, p. 458.

³⁰ Ibn Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, vol. 2, p. 166.

those on his way stand up for him, lest the slaves tread on them until he reaches his seat". Regarding the method of guarding during prayer in the mosque, Ibn Bishr said: "...and when he (i.e. Imam Saud) would start to pray in his palace mosque two of his brave Mamluks would stand behind him - fearing for his safety - with their swords until he finished the prayer." Also about his prayer during his battles and pilgrimages, Ibn Bashir says: "...when he enters the prayer, six of the closest brave mamluks, carrying their swords, gathered around him, two in front of him, two behind him - between him and the second row - and two behind the second row." Regarding slaves accompanying the Imam on his conquests and pilgrimages, Ibn Bashir said: "During his conquests and pilgrimages, when he rides his mount/horse, great group of people from the heads of the Muslims and his mamluks [slaves] gather around him, riding NajaiabOmaniat [a type of camels] decorated with all kinds of luxurious adornments, and they surround him when he walks."³¹

Maḥbūb, the personal bodyguard of Imam Faisal ibn Turkī, accompanied him on his movements and official receptions of delegations and visitors. He enjoyed a great position, and many tasks were assigned to him.³² Belgrave, who visited Riyadh in 1862 AD, described him as the Prime Minister.³³ King ‘Abdulaziz also made sure, in all his movements and travels, whether for the purpose of Hajj or ‘Umrah, or during his battles and land trips, that a number of slaves accompanied him as his personal guards. They were distinguished by their diligence, love, sincerity, and devotion in guarding and serving him.³⁴ Regarding the organization of King ‘Abdulaziz’s guard, when he rode his car, two of his men stood next to it, each carrying a rifle, and the driver of the car had his own rifle, and if he walked on foot, an armed guard walked behind him with a rifle, a pistol, a dagger, and a *janabiya*. This guard follows him wherever he goes, and does not pray with the group while he is in the mosque, but rather remains standing and watches every movement around the king. King ‘Abdulaziz has followed the customs of his

³¹ Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, pp. 166-168, 172.

³² Lewis Pelly, A Trip to Riyadh in 1865 AD, pp. 80, 88, 98.

³³ William Belgrave, Central and Eastern Arabia, vol. 2, 114.

³⁴ Philby, Harry St. John, The Arab Memory of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, pp. 237, 252; Al-Kazemi, Ahmed bin Ali, Memoirs of Ahmed Ali bin Asad Allah Al-Kazemi, prepared for publication by Fahd bin Abdullah Al-Sammari, submitted and reviewed by Zuhair bin Ahmed bin Ali Al-Kazemi, Volume 1, King Abdulaziz House, 1438 AH / 2016 AD, p. 371.

ancestors, since the assassination of Imam ‘Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad, in his mosque in Dir‘iyah, and stabbing him with a dagger while he was praying in the year 1218 AH/1803 AD.³⁵

Political and military role:

One of the roles of slaves was to represent the imams of the state in concluding political treaties. In 1218 AH/1803 AD, Sālim Al-Ḥariq concluded a treaty with the ruler of Muscat, Sulṭān ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa‘īd, which stipulated that the ruler of Muscat would pay the first Saudi state an amount of 12 thousand riyals annually, and allow its followers to preach in Muscat.³⁶ Another example is the slave Maḥbūb ibn Jawhar, whom the British traveler Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Pelly met when he visited Riyadh in 1281 AH/1865 AD, and described him as the one responsible for Imam Faisal ibn Turkī’s dealings with the outside world. The Imam authorized him to conclude a treaty with Pelly, due to his trust in him, particularly after the Imam became old and blind. Pelly mentions that Maḥbūb tried with him to conclude two treaties between the Imam and Britain. The first was a treaty under which the Arabs of Oman, Tire, and the Arabian Gulf would be excluded from Britain’s anti-slavery piracy, and that they would receive from Britain the same privilege that the Sultan of Zanzibar received, by concluding a treaty with the Imam under which he would be given the freedom to trade in slaves. The second treaty was to deter the Arabs of Oman and the Gulf from committing acts of looting or sabotaging Britain’s telegraph facilities. Pelly criticized him for his sharp temper and ferocity when dealing with others.³⁷

The slaves also contributed to the political events that took place within the Saudi ruling house. Maḥbūb ibn Jawhar involved in the civil war that took place between Imam ‘Abdullah, who was pledged to rule as successor to his father, and his brother Sa‘ud, who revolted against him, wanting to rule. Maḥbūb was not in agreement with Imam Abdullah, so after assuming

³⁵Khair al-Din al-Zirkli, *The Brief Biography of King Abdulaziz*, Dar al-Ilm Lil-Malayin, Beirut, 1977, p. 325.

³⁶ Bin Ruzaiq, Hamid. *Al-Fath al-Mubin fi Sirat Al-Bu Sa‘idiyyan*, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Oman, 1397 AH, p. 332.

³⁷Lewis Pelly, *A Journey to Riyadh in 1865 AD*, translation and commentary: Ahmed Ibish, National Book House, Abu Dhabi, 1431 AH/2010 AD, p. 97.

power Maḥbūb sided with Prince Saud, and remained with him in Al-Ahsa in 1288 AH / 1871 AD, when he seized it.³⁸

The slaves also participated in the coup of Mashārī ibn ‘Abduraḥman against Imam Turkī ibn ‘Abdullah in 1249 AH / 1834 AD. When Imam Turkī was assassinated by his servant Ibrahim ibn Hamza, his slave, Zuwayid was one of his most loyal people in Riyadh. When Zuwayid witnessed the assassination, he drew his sword and attacked Mashārī’s men, killing two of them.³⁹ When the males of Imam Turkī’s family were forced to recognize Mishari as ruler in exchange for their safety, Imam Turkī’s body was carried to Zuwayid’s house, where he was washed, and from there he was transferred to the Riyadh cemetery.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Zuwayid succeeded in escaping, and joined Faisalson of Imam Turkī near Qatif. He returned with Faisal’s forces to Riyadh and contributed to eliminating his father’s killer, Mashārī, and regaining power from him.⁴¹

When the conflict occurred between Imam Faisal ibn Turkī and Prince Khālid ibn Sa‘ūd ibn ‘Abdulaziz Al Sa‘ūd, the latter was one of the prisoners who moved to Cairo after the fall of Dir‘iyah and was appointed by Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt, to rule Najd. Then Muhammad Ali sent an Egyptian military campaign led by Khālid ibn Sa‘ūd and Ismā‘īl Bey in 1251 AH/1835 AD to eliminate the rule of Imam Faisal ibn Turki. Slaves played a political role in turning the balance of this conflict. Among them were Khayrallah and Zuwayid, who were close to Imam Faisal, and he relied on them in many matters. But when Khalid ibn Sa‘ūd's military campaign arrived, they sided with him against their master, Imam Faisal.⁴² In a long poem that Imam Faisal composed after the Battle of Al-Ḥilwaḥ in 1253 AH/1820 AD, he addresses his servants Khayrallah and Zuwayid, blaming them.⁴³ Perhaps this is the only incident in which available sources indicate that slaves were involved in a coup against their owner. Later, after the Egyptian military campaign was able to enter Riyadh, Zuwayid became one of the

³⁸Lewis Pelly, *A Trip to Riyadh in 1865 AD*, p. 123.

³⁹Othman bin Abdullah bin Bishr, *Title of Glory*, vol. 2, pp. 292-293.

⁴⁰Richard Bayly Winder, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century AD*, reviewed and commented on by Fahd Abdullah Al-Sammari, *King Abdulaziz House*, Riyadh, 1434 AH, p. 180.

⁴¹Othman bin Abdullah bin Bishr, *Title of Glory*, vol. 2, p. 292-293.

⁴² Abdullah bin Khamis, *Popular Literature in the Arabian Peninsula*, *Al-Farazdaq Press*, Riyadh, 2nd ed., 1402 AH, p. 326.

⁴³Abdullah bin Khamis: *Popular Literature in the Arabian Peninsula*, *Al-Farazdaq Press*, Riyadh, 1402 AH, p. 326.

persons close to Khālid ibn Sa‘ūd and one of the men he relied on. Zuwayid also defended Khālid ibn Sa‘ūd in his war against Prince ‘Abdullah ibn Thunayān until Zuwayid was captured and killed by Ibn Thunayān in 1257 AH/1841 AD.⁴⁴

The slaves also had a consistent and well-known role in leaving Riyadh after the end of the rule of the Second Saudi State, accompanied by its last imam, ‘AbdulRaḥman ibn Faisal, his family, servants, and those loyal to him in 1309 AH / 1891 AD. They also participated with King ‘Abdulaziz in retaking Riyadh in 1319 AH/1902 AD, alongside men of the Al Sa‘ud family, and they had an effective contribution to restoring Saudi rule and recovering the capital, Riyadh. They had similar roles in King ‘Abdulaziz’s battles to unify the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1351 AH/1932 AD. Examples of participants include: Farḥān Al Sa‘ud: He is a slave of Imam ‘Abdullah ibn Faisal, and was known as ‘Farḥīn’. He was one of those who went out with Imam ‘AbdulRaḥman to Kuwait, participated in the recovery of Riyadh, and participated in most of King ‘Abdulaziz’s battles⁴⁵. Mas‘ūd Al Mabrūk, one of the most famous slaves of Imam ‘AbdulRaḥman and the most prominent in equestrianism, and one of those who went with the Imam to Kuwait, and participated with King ‘Abdulaziz in the recovery of Riyadh. He had a special status with the Al Sa‘ud, so King ‘Abdulaziz distinguished him from others by giving him the sword (Rayḥān), which is considered one of the most famous swords of the Al Sa‘ud, in Kuwait during their departure to reclaim Riyadh.⁴⁶Fayrūz Al-‘Abdulaziz is one of the slaves of Imam ‘AbdulRaḥman, who went with King ‘Abdulaziz to Kuwait, participated in the operation to retake Riyadh, and witnessed all of the king’s battles until his death in 1354 AH.⁴⁷

During the visit of Colonel Robert Edward Hamilton, the British Political Agent in Kuwait, to Riyadh in 1336 AH/1917 AD, he mentioned that when Prince Turki bin Abdulaziz received him, half of his knights’ strength were black-skinned slaves.⁴⁸Cunlief Owen, a member of the British mission to Najd in 1336 AH/1917 AD, mentioned that King Abdulaziz had armed his slave men with modern weapons that he had seized from the Turks, which were Mauser

⁴⁴ Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, Part 1, p. 200.

⁴⁵ Abdul Rahman Al-Ruwaished, The Sixty Immortal Men, p. 92.

⁴⁶ Abdul Rahman Al-Ruwaished, The Sixty Immortal Men, pp. 163-165.

⁴⁷ Abdul Rahman Al-Ruwaished, The Sixty Immortal Men, p. 193.

⁴⁸ IOR/R/15/5/104, Robert Edward Hamilton, Diary of Colonel Hamilton's Visit to Najd 1918, 19 September 1917-28 December 1918, p. 35.

pistols.⁴⁹ Many of them were known for their horsemanship and bravery in military battles, and many of them held a great position with King Abdulaziz. So reward them with gifts.⁵⁰ A large number of them were also martyred in the battles to unify the state.⁵¹

A number of brave slaves also took command of battles and military companies, and large numbers of them participated as soldiers in battles during the establishment, expansion, and defense of the Saudi state during its first and second stages. In 1224 AH / 1809 AD, Imam Saud ibn Abdulaziz sent his servant Sālim Al-Ḥariq at the head of a large force to fight several battles in the Syrian desert. Al-Ḥariq also played a major role in Saudi military activity in the areas adjacent to Oman during the era of the First Saudi State.⁵² Bilāl, son of Sālim Al-Ḥariq, had a similar role in those areas during the era of the Second Saudi State. As for the slave leadership of the military companies, Imam Faisal ibn Turki sent his slave Zuwayid at the head of a company to the al-Shananah region in 1252 AH/1836 AD.⁵³

The slaves also played a role in imposing security throughout the country, whether urban or desert.⁵⁴ They carried out the orders of their imams and kings regarding the punishment imposed on the aggressor, regardless of his position and status, without hesitation or delay in doing so. The slaves who carried out this task were usually strong blacks, as one of them was able to arrest a great sheikh among his own clan, and bring him prisoner to Dir'iyah.⁵⁵

As messengers and advocates for the state:

Sālim ibn Bilāl Al-Ḥariq was one of the most famous messengers of the first Saudi state. He carried a letter from Imam Abdul Aziz ibn Muhammad bin Saud to the ruler of Oman in 1215 AH, in which he called on the ruler of Oman to obey him. He attached with it the book *Kashf al-*

⁴⁹Khaled Abdullah Al-Kariri, A Mission to Ibn Saud, October 1917 AD to March 1918 AD, Translated Research, Darat King Abdulaziz Magazine, Issue 1, Jumada Al-Awwal 1441 AH / January 2020 AD, Year (46), Riyadh, p. 212.

⁵⁰Abdul Rahman Al-Ruwaished, The Sixty Men, pp. 163-165.

⁵¹Abdul Rahman Al-Ruwaished, The Sixty Men, p. 92, pp. 159-165.

⁵² Burckhardt, John Lewis, Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahhabis, translated and commented on by Abdullah Al-Saleh Al-Othaimeen, *King Abdulaziz Foundation*, Riyadh, 1434 AH, pp. 417, 444.

⁵³Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, Part 1, pp. 125-142, Part 2, p. 341.

⁵⁴ Burckhardt, John Lewis, Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahhabis, p. 396.

⁵⁵John Lewis Burekhardt, Notes on the Bedouins and Wahhabis, p. 396.

Shubuhāt [Revealing suspicions] written by Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab.⁵⁶ Imam Faisal ibn Turkī also assigned his slave Jawhar an official mission in Bahrain.⁵⁷ Also, when the Saudi ruling family moved to Kuwait, Imam Abdulrahman ibn Faisal assigned one of his servants to carry the messages exchanged between him and the people of Riyadh to find out their news and see the condition of his opponent, Ibn Rashid.⁵⁸

Administrative positions:

The slaves were among those relied upon by the imams and kings of the Saudi state to manage administrative positions, including:

Financial affairs: Imam Faisal ibn Turkī relied on his servants to collect zakat from the towns and tribes. He sent his servant Khayrallah with men to Al-Qassim in 1251 AH/1835 AD. Khayrallah resided there and sought to collect zakat from the tribes.⁵⁹ He also relied on his slaves Jawhar⁶⁰ and Zuwayid for this mission as well.⁶¹

Receiving delegations, visitors, and senior officials: The slave played a major role in the reception ceremonies for those coming to visit the state's imams and kings, including princes, ambassadors, travelers, messengers, delegates, and others. Their responsibilities were to receive them, provide them with suitable housing, guard them, provide them with servants, organize their travel schedule, meet them with imams and kings, organize the exchange of gifts between the two sides, check on their conditions and what they needed throughout their stay, and carry out the duty of hospitality until their departure. These slaves are usually characterized by intelligence, courtesy, and diplomacy, and remain silent in the presence of their masters unless they are allowed to speak. Examples of slaves who carried out these tasks include Maḥbūb, who

⁵⁶ Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Bahdal, Efforts of Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud, may God have mercy on him, in *al-Dawah and Al-Ihtisab*, Master's thesis, Al-Imam University, (n.d.), p. 290.

⁵⁷ William Belgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia*, p. 223.

⁵⁸ Abdulrahman al-Ruwaished, *The Sixty Men of Eternal Memory*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, *Title of Glory in the History of Najd*, Part 2, p. 313.

⁶⁰ William Belgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia*, p. 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, Part 2, p. 293.

received and hosted Lewis Pelly and Belgrave in Riyadh, and Farahāt, who took care of Belgrave in Qatif.⁶²

Management of the royal palace and the affairs of the ruling family: there were many slaves who served in the palace, took care of the women and children of the ruling family, and carried out tasks such as cooking and cleaning, supervising the palace's supplies and providing it with what it needs, preparing coffee and carrying out hospitality duties.⁶³ For example, the German doctor Herbert Bretzke refers to About two hundred slaves served in the palace of the Emir of Al-Ahsa, Sa'ud ibn 'Abdullah ibn Jalawi, and each of them had a specific task. Preparing coffee, for example, was distributed among three slaves. One carried out the process of roasting and grinding the coffee, one prepared the coffee, and the other served it. This was the case in all tasks.⁶⁴ Barclay Raunkiær, the Danish traveler who visited Riyadh in 1330 AH/1912 AD, mentioned that the one who prepared coffee and tea for him was one of King 'Abdulaziz's slaves.⁶⁵ Also, after the death of his brother, Prince Sa'd ibn 'AbdulRaḥman, in the Battle of Kenzan in 1333 AH/1915 AD, King 'Abdulaziz ordered one of his slave men to stop participating in the battles and assigned him to supervise the affairs of his brother's young children and take care of them.⁶⁶

Regional administration: The state used slaves to govern and manage some regions. In 1214 AH/1800 AD, Imam Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad ibn Sa'ud appointed his slave Sālim ibn Bilāl Al-Ḥariqas Emir of Al-Buraimi.⁶⁷ Imam Faisal ibn Turki sent his slave Zuwayid to Qatif in 1251 AH / 1835 AD, and Zuwayid ordered, forbade, dismissed, and appointed employees.⁶⁸ This reflects Imam Faisal's confidence in him, after his defense of his father, Imam Turki bin Abdullah, at the moment of his assassination.⁶⁹ Imam Faisal also appointed Bilāl ibn SālimAl-

⁶²Lewis Pelly, *A Trip to Riyadh in 1865 AD*, pp. 80, 88, 98, 100; William Belgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia*, vol. 2, 116-120, 219, 221.

⁶³Dixon, Harold Richard, *Arabs of the Desert*, p. 458.

⁶⁴Herbert Britske, *The Bedouin Doctor, Adventures of a German Officer in the Middle East*, p. 280.

⁶⁵ Barclay Raunkiær, *Through Wahhabi Lands On The Back Of A Camel*, Translated by: Mansour Mohammed Al-Khuraiji, 2nd ed., Obeikan Bookstore, Riyadh, 1424 AH / 2003 AD, p. 185.

⁶⁶ Abdulrahman al-Ruwaished, *The Sixty Men of Eternal Memory*, p. 190.

⁶⁷ Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Bahdal, *Efforts of Imam Abdulaziz ...*, p. 490.

⁶⁸ Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, *Title of Glory in the History of Najd*, Part 2, p. 311.

⁶⁹Richard Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century AD*, p. 193.

Ḥariqas Emir of Qatif for a period.⁷⁰ Imam Faisal also appointed his slave Farḥāt as Emir of Qatif, and he hosted Belgrave when he came to Qatif. Belgrave described him as the representative ruler of Imam Faisal, and praised his way of administering government. He said: *He takes charge of the most important ports in the east of the Arabian Peninsula. He is famous, good-natured, intelligent, elegantly dressed, easy-going and moderate.*⁷¹ Also, Prince Sa‘ud ibn Faisal ibn Turkī appointed his slave Farḥān ibn Khairallah as Emir of Al-Hofuf in 1288 AH / 1871 AD.⁷² After his seizure of Riyadh, Prince Sa‘ud ibn Faisal sent the slave Maḥbūb ibn Jawhar at the head of a small garrison to Al-Buraimi, where he remained as a governor for the House of Saud after the killing of its prince.⁷³

To clarify the limits of the powers granted to the slave governors of the regions, it is sufficient to point out that he is subordinate to the position of the Crown Prince, and has broad powers in the region assigned to him. These powers are:⁷⁴ 1. He is the general official in the region and the Imam’s representative. 2. Equipping the fighting forces if the Imam’s order comes to him, and sometimes he is the commander of these forces. 3. Collecting zakat and tithes in his territory, through personally appointed collectors called agents, i.e. *wukalā’*, and thus sending this money to Riyadh. 4. If the region launches an invasion on foreign countries or a punitive campaign against rebellious Bedouins, the governor must send a fifth of the spoils to the treasury in the capital. 5. Distributing the gifts sent by the Imam to the leaders and the poor in his region.

Supervision and Hisbah: Some slaves supervised matters of religion and its implementation. They reminded people of the times of prayer, and the obligation of performing it in congregation in the mosque, and to adhere to it regularly. This was in addition to supervising weights and measures, observing the provisions of Sharia in buying and selling, and preserving public morals and behavior. Perhaps the most famous story mentioned in this regard is the story of the poet

⁷⁰Richard Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century AD*, p. 271.

⁷¹William Belgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia*, pp. 220-221.

⁷²Richard Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century AD*, p. 271.

⁷³Lewis Pelly, *A Trip to Riyadh in 1865 AD*, p. 123; Abdel Fattah Abu Ali, *History of the Second Saudi State 1256-1309 AH/1840-1891 AD*, Al-Marikh Publishing House, Riyadh, 1411 AH/1991 AD, p. 295.

⁷⁴Abdel Fattah Abu Ali, *History of the Second Saudi State*, pp. 279-280.

Mū'ayyidi Al-Baraziah, to whom Imam Faisal bin Turki sent his slave Salama to forbid her from singing.⁷⁵

Other tasks: Slaves also played a role in many other service affairs. Imam Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad Al Saud put a slave man in Dir'iyah called 'Ubayd ibn Yaish to look after a group of loose camels and undertake their herding and watering and do whatever it takes to do that, and the camels were breeding and increasing while preserved until their owners would come to take them.⁷⁶ The slaves also had a contribution to the movement of books and libraries endowment. They also contributed to preserving the popular and historical heritage, and through my reading of Al-Ruwayshid book, I found that he relied on that heritage in the news that he reported.⁷⁷

Conclusion:

- In all three stages of the Saudi State, slaves have been considered as one of the Saudi society's segments, and they obtained all their rights from marriage, reproduction and education.
- Men slaves gained the trust of the Saudi State's Imams and Kings, and occupied sensitive positions in the State. They served as bodyguards for the State's Imams and Kings, as commanders of their battles and their military companies, and as their representatives abroad in the conclusion of political treaties.
- The Imams of the State assigned their slaves to act as messengers and advocates for them, which is evidence of the high confidence of Imams in them and their loyalty and sincerity to the Imams.

⁷⁵ Abd al-Rahman Zaid al-Suwayda, Pearls of poetic or folk poetry during five centuries from 900-1415 AH, Part 2, 2nd ed., *Dar al-Suwayda for Publishing and Distribution*, Riyadh, p. 1099.

⁷⁶ Bin Bishr, Othman bin Abdullah, Title of Glory in the History of Najd, Part 1, p. 122

⁷⁷ Abdulaziz Abdulghani Ibrahim, The Relationship of the Coast of Oman with Britain: a Documentary Study, King Abdulaziz Foundation, Riyadh, 1982, p. 227; Abdulrahman al-Ruwaished, The Sixty Men of Eternal Memory, p. 73.

- In the Saudi State, slaves held several positions, such as financial affairs, management of the ruling palace and ruling family affairs, regional administration, and enjoining good and forbidding evil.
- Slaves held several roles in domestic affairs, such as herding loose camels, and preserving the popular and historical heritage.
- The loyalty of slaves to the imams and kings of the state was inherited by sons from their fathers. Therefore, we find evidence indicating the service of the father and his son to the ruling family. This indicates the good treatment.