



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



Muhammad Al-Saed

Slaves with the rank of sultans!!

How did slaves turn secretly from servants in the Ottoman palaces into sultans who ruled and issued orders and firmans? It is the story of the ascent through the journey of pain that surrounded the slave class inside the Ottoman palaces.

Like all human cases, this class was able to create passages and mechanisms for itself to ascend the ladders of power. They subjected the sultans to the rule of weak slaves and concubines and later controlled them, sometimes by satisfying the sultans' needs, desires and lusts, or through their own intelligence, ambition, and abilities at other times.

Slavery within the Ottoman Empire was not criminalized, prohibited, or reprehensible because of its repression and bad reputation. Rather, it was an organized and acceptable act that was made legal by the sultan's firmans. Later, this behavior became a significant part of the Ottoman economy and its traditional society.

It was as if the royal palaces had turned into insatiable monsters that devoured all the millions of slaves who were sent from the occupied territories to the sultans' palaces. For example, Ottoman statistics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicated that Istanbul's imports - only - of slaves from the Black Sea totaled about 2.5 million, and about one fifth of the population consisted of slaves.

The most dangerous of all types of slavery and enslavement organized by the Ottomans was "sexual slavery", which included both sexes, men and women. It was organized for the benefit of sultans, princes, senior statesmen and influential people. Sexual slavery was an important component of imperial rule and a pathway to the social reproduction of the elite.

Male boys were widely sexually enslaved. Sources state the following: In places like restrooms and cafes, historians documented many men indulging in sexual behavior with other men. Moreover, visual artworks from this period revealed what was going on. The workers in those baths, whether (masseurs), (dressed dancers), or sommeliers (wine stewards) were young and without a beard.

The eunuch slaves in the Ottoman Empire were not only part of the system that was established over centuries in the Sultanate, but they turned into part of the ruling system, with its influence and tools, and over time it was able to transform into a soft power within the palace.

The Ottomans castrated their slaves and made them lose their sexual abilities, but they did not control their political ambitions. The slaves were able to penetrate into the political and military life, until some of them reached the Grand Vizier "the Prime Minister".

The truth is that the control of the Ottoman sultans' seat was not limited to eunuchs or aghas only, but the concubines were able to penetrate deeply into the centers of government, to the point of controlling the mechanism of the transfer of power between rulers and Crown Princes. Perhaps the clearest example is summarized in the story of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (Suleiman I) with his beautiful Russian concubine "Roxlan". This woman sought to have the Sultan kill his son, the crown prince, to place her young son as crown prince.

We can also mention the story of Sultan Mehmed III, who killed 19 brothers for fear that they might pose a threat to him one day, to add to them his son, Prince Mahmoud, in a terrifying meal of executions that included 3 infants and 5 children.

There are many paradoxes here; because the sultans did not respect the so-called purity of the Turkish race, and therefore most of their wives were European slaves. They are mostly very young girls who are stolen during wars or raids on the frontiers of the empire. Within years, after entering the palaces, these female slaves became wives of the sultans and mothers of future sultans, and the rulers of the empire from behind the secret walls of palaces or the so-called "Haramlek".

They were able to exclude princes and ally with ministers and senior statesmen. They excluded rivals and even caused the killing and extermination of many princes and crown princes. If the walls of the closed rooms inside the palaces of the sultans had the ability to speak, they would have talked about the pain and blood that ran down the corridors.

The slaves in the Ottoman Empire were of different types. White slaves were the children who were stolen from Europe and Arab countries. These slaves were brought in and enslaved. A large part of them were moved to the army, where they joined the battalions of the Janissaries, which were raised on violence and blind devotion to the Turkish race. As for other slaves, they were taken to the palaces to serve inside them, joining the black slaves from Africa. These slaves are deliberately castrated in order to be able to stay and work inside the palaces among the women and concubines.

During the reign of Sultan Murad III, the penetration of slaves reached its maximum extent. One of the aghas of castrated African slaves called "Mullah Ali" was able to rise to the top of power. This was because of the rivalry between politicians and pashas and also because of his personal skills. "Mullah Ali" was able to be a deputy judge, inspector of the Royal Endowments, the judicial head of the capital, then he became "Kadiser", or chief judge. He was the first black man of the slave class to be a member of the Imperial Council. He was described as the person who was ruling the empire. All of this gives us an important indication, how a weak person with no family or lineage can control the fate of a large country such as the Ottoman Sultanate. Because of the imbalance in the class and social structure caused by the sultans themselves; They were not the ones who protected it "Ottoman Empire" on one hand, nor were they the ones who prevented its penetration, on the other hand.