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THREE ENSLAVED HUSBANDS: LAYERS OF ENSLAVEMENT IN THE EARLY MODERN CRIMEAN KHANATE

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the layers of slave status in the Crimean Khanate through court records involving three enslaved men who had married freewomen. These unions—situated within the intersectional overlapping of legal structures, social hierarchies, and collective memory—reveal the tensions inherent in a society where the boundaries between freedom and enslavement, while somewhat porous, were persistent and deeply consequential. Viewing these asymmetrical relationships through a micro-historical lens, the article shows how the legal conundrums arising from the marriage of a freewoman and an enslaved husband destabilize our conventional notions of ownership, guardianship, and authority. In doing so it sheds light on the broader legal and theological doctrines of the Ḥanafī Islamic jurisprudence that governed manumission, social integration, and the evolving status of the formerly enslaved. By questioning the binary of 'enslaved' and 'free', the article demonstrates that manumission did not initiate a definitive rupture with slave status but rather a forward move within a continuum of constrained personal agency and still-negotiable social status and personal identity. This demonstration should encourage a reconsideration of marital relationships in a society where enslavement operated not simply as a legal designation but as an omnipresent structure shaping personal lives, social hierarchies, and juridical thought.

Key words: Crimean Khanate; enslaved men; freewomen; marriage; legal status; manumission; social integration.

INTRODUCTION

The Crimean Khanate was central to the early modern Black Sea slave trade, serving as a primary hub for the movement of slaves and a cornerstone of the

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