Introduction

A Forgotten Slave Trade

> *The indolent, enervated Orientals may still regard with bitter resentment and rancor the efforts of Europe in the cause of humanity; but the sale and purchase of human beings is everywhere practiced with a certain reserve arising from a sense of shame, or, to speak more correctly, of fear of European eyes. This trade is now to be found unfettered and unembarrassed only in Central Asia.*
>
> Arminius Vambery, *Sketches of Central Asia*, 1868[1]

By the time of the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s, the region's social landscape had been shaped by a millennium of slavery. Slaves served as farmworkers, herdsmen, craftsmen, soldiers, concubines, and even, in rare cases, as high-ranking officials in the region between the Caspian Sea and westernmost China. The institution of slavery in the region had never been seriously challenged by any internal or external forces down to the nineteenth century. It thrived especially in the khanates of Khwarazm and Bukhara. As the nineteenth century wore on, however, negotiations over the release of slaves began to factor heavily in these khanates' relationship to Iran, Russia, and Great Britain. By the end of the century, tens of thousands of slaves would be free.

This book examines the period from 1750 to 1873, which saw both the flourishing of Central Asia's slave trade and its collapse, and it focuses in particular on the region extending from Khurasan in the south to the Kazakh–Russian frontier in the north, and encompassing Khwarazm, Bukhara, and their environs.[2] It is not a political history of Central Asia,

[1] Arminius Vambery, *Sketches of Central Asia* (London: W.H. Allen, 1868), 205.

[2] Slavery was also prominent in other regions of Central Asia, such as Afghanistan and East Turkistan, but I have chosen not to cover those regions in the present work, in part because, as we shall see, the region extending from Khurasan north across the Caspian coast and

nor another diplomatic history of the so-called Great Game. Rather, the purpose of this book is to advance two arguments about slavery and abolition in the region. First, drawing on slaves' testimonials as well as eyewitness accounts and official sources, I challenge the historiographical consensus that Russian military force ended the slave trade and show how Russian efforts toward fostering abolition often had ulterior motives as well as wildly mixed results. Second, I argue that slaves influenced the nature of their captivity through their own initiatives and ingenuity, and I show how slaves in the khanate of Khwarazm launched an uprising, little-known even among historians of Central Asia, which served as the catalyst for abolition in the region as a whole.

While evidence of slavery and the slave trade in Central Asia is plentiful, scholarship on it is nearly nonexistent.[3] Despite its extraordinary scale,

along the Russian–Kazakh frontier can be considered a distinct and bounded (albeit roughly) ecosystem in which slaves circulated. The slave trade in East Turkistan, for example, which revolved around Tarim Basin trade networks and also involved Chinese slaves and Chinese traders, is deserving of separate study, and Laura Newby (see below) has broken ground in that effort. A recent dissertation by Benjamin Levey has offered groundbreaking insights into the fate of slaves along China's Kazakh frontier: "Jungar Refugees and the Making of Empire on Qing China's Kazakh Frontier, 1759–1773" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2013).

[3] The only monograph on the topic remains a slim but important Soviet-era volume in Uzbek, by Turgun Faiziev: *Buxoro feodal jamiyatida qullardan foidalanishga doir hujjatlar (XIX asr)* (Tashkent: Fan Nashriyoti, 1990). Some related works of note include Laura Newby, "Bondage on Qing China's North-Western Frontier," *Modern Asian Studies* 47:3 (2013), 968–994; Scott Levi, "Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush: Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 12:3 (2002), 277–288; Benjamin Hopkins, "Race, Sex, and Slavery: 'Forced Labor' in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the Early 19th Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 42:2 (2008), 629–671; Alessandro Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2014), 63–100; Elena Smolarz, "Speaking about Freedom and Dependency: Representations and Experiences of Russian Enslaved Captives in Central Asia in the First Half of the 19th Century," *Journal of Global Slavery* 2 (2017), 44–71; and Yuan Gao, "Captivity and Empire: Russian Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction" (M.A. thesis, Nazarbayev University, 2016). Valuable information on slavery along the Chinese–Central Asian frontier is provided in James Millward's *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); see, for example, 305–306n28, 238, 123. On slavery in premodern Central Asia, see Peter B. Golden, "The Terminology of Slavery and Servitude in Medieval Turkic," in Devin DeWeese, ed., *Studies on Central Asia in Honor of Yuri Bregel* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2001), 27–56. The paucity of published work on the subject is not entirely surprising, as the scarcity of research on slavery in Islamic Central Asia mirrors the broader scarcity of research on slavery anywhere the Muslim world. In Joseph C. Miller's comprehensive bibliography of scholarly works on slavery, published in 1999, we find a table showing the distribution of works on the subject according to their geographical focus: Among the thousands of works on slavery published between 1900 and 1991, a mere 3.3 percent focused on the Muslim world. Between 1992 and 1996, the

Central Asia's slave trade has largely been forgotten. This is no great surprise: Central Asia remains among the least-studied regions of the world. As Alexander Morrison has observed, even the Russian conquest has been the subject of surprisingly little research.[4] There is no consensus on what motivated it. This does not mean, however, that Russian imperial officials and propagandists failed to articulate a justification at the time. Ending the slave trade was at the heart of their justification.

European abolitionists, meanwhile, had high hopes for the conquest. Herbert Wood, writing soon after the Russian military took the town of Khiva in 1873, praised the Russian "civilizing mission" in the most generous terms: "Though Russia's position in the Central Asian Khanates may not yet be assured," he writes, "it is certain that without her leave no dog may bark in the bazaars of Khiva, Bokhara, and Kokand. And if a strong government which preserves social order and has put down brigandage, slavery, and man-stealing is worthy of sympathy, it is impossible not to feel that in undertaking the thankless and costly task of introducing civilisation into Turkestan, Russia is fully entitled to the good wishes and gratitude of every Christian nation."[5] It is natural, perhaps, that European observers would have expected abolition to constitute a major feature of the Russian "civilizing mission" in the East, given that Western European powers tended to cast many of their own conquests and interventions in this era as emancipating enterprises. Indeed, the nineteenth century was an age of global abolitionist intercessions, even if not all interventions were successful, and even if many were mere foils for more pressing (and more selfish) motivations. The British Empire led the way, officially abolishing the slave trade throughout its imperial holdings by 1807, and other colonial powers soon followed: Portugal signed a treaty stifling the importation of slaves into its colonial possessions in 1810; Sweden banned the trade in 1813; the Netherlands did the same the next year; and Spain and France followed soon after, the former promising to abolish the trade by 1820 and the latter by 1819. In the decades to come, the freeing of Christian captives was presented as a major incentive for the French conquest of Algiers (though, as W. G. Clarence-Smith observes, "they failed to extend their liberality"

proportion dipped slightly, to an even 3 percent (Joseph C. Miller, *Slavery and Slaving in World History: A Bibliography*, 2 vols. [Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999], xi–xii).

[4] Morrison, "Introduction: Killing the Cotton Canard and getting rid of the Great Game: rewriting the Russian conquest of Central Asia, 1814–1895," *Central Asian Survey* 33:2 (2014), 131–142.

[5] Wood, *The Shores of Lake Aral* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1876), 182–183.

to non-Christian slaves),[6] while the British Empire attempted to foster abolition throughout the Ottoman world, sometimes with the assistance of Ottoman rulers and elites and sometimes in spite of their opposition.[7] The British likewise led the way in efforts to undermine the Atlantic slave trade, though the last slave ship to arrive in the American South did so as late as 1858.[8] Indeed, colonial emancipation projects often achieved their ends, if at all, only very gradually, and sometimes over the course of decades.[9] Nevertheless, in this climate of global abolition, the Russian efforts in Central Asia, which came not long after the abolition of serfdom within the Empire itself, were naturally regarded by many Western observers as yet another mission to end the misery of bondage, whatever its other motivations may have been.[10]

While historians have long cast a critical gaze on Western empires' moral pretenses for conquest, the Russian Empire has generally been sheltered from similar scrutiny. Historians within the Soviet Union shared a tendency to interpret the conquest of Central Asia purely as a means of extending Russian industry into the region, while historians in the West have generally preferred a "Great Game" narrative that explains the conquest as a simple race for regional dominance between England and Russia. Proponents of both approaches tend to avoid the question of the "civilizing mission" entirely. Meanwhile, some of the (few) recent works addressing the issue of slavery directly have tended to concur with the Russian "abolitionist" narrative: Liubov Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan has recently argued that Russian abolitionism in Eurasia culminated in the eradication of slavery in the Caucasus, suggesting that the "civilizing mission" was both sincere and effective, and M. D. Farah has argued that the Central

[6] Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, 100.

[7] Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998); Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression: 1840–1890* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); Ismael M. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013).

[8] W. E. B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), 181–185.

[9] Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, 99–218.

[10] Several recent works have offered important insights on the ulterior motives—and, oftentimes, the evident insincerity—of abolitionist efforts among Western powers: see, for example, Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Ehud R. Toledano, "Abolition and Anti-Slavery in the Ottoman Empire: A Case to Answer?" (forthcoming); and Behnaz A. Mirzai, *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017).

Asian slave trade essentially ended with the Russian military conquest of Khiva.[11] In this book, I come to the opposite conclusions concerning the Russian "civilizing mission" in Central Asia.

Indeed, Russian abolitionism in Central Asia is a myth. The overall mechanism of abolition in Central Asia, and the means by which the region's new Russian rulers would patrol and monitor the slave trade were evidently never articulated even among the tsar's top generals and officials. If indeed there had been a grand, overarching plan for general emancipation in Central Asia (and we have no evidence such a thing existed), it was certainly implemented in a scattershot – perhaps even improvised – manner. Russian demands for abolition were applied unequally across the conquered territories, and enforcement seems to have been non-existent – a fact that, as we shall see, agitated some Russian officers who had anticipated more active antislavery efforts.

As I show in Chapter 7, the most important force behind the liberation of Central Asia's slaves was the slaves themselves – particularly the slaves of Khwarazm,[12] who seized the occasion of the Russian invasion to launch a courageous uprising against their masters. Witnessing this uprising, the Russian general in charge of the invasion hung two rebel slaves in the town square as a warning to other rebels. Evidently, this general preferred to seize an orderly town of slaveholders rather than a chaotic town of self-emancipated slaves. Russian threats notwithstanding, the slave uprising continued until the general had no choice but to support it. It was abolition *sans* abolitionism, in other words.

Notwithstanding these dramatic events, which culminated in an "official" abolition decree, the slave trade continued. Even if the Russians had attempted to patrol it, which they did not, the trade could not have been stopped without a relentless and wide-ranging enforcement strategy. This is because, as Chapter 2 shows, the slave trade was not

[11] Liubov Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan, *The Tsar's Abolitionists: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); M. D. Farah, "Autocratic Abolitionists: Tsarist Russian Anti-Slavery Campaigns," in William Mulligan, ed., *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2013), 97–117. While I do not always agree with Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan's conclusions, her work deserves recognition as a groundbreaking and important study. It is interesting to contrast this book with Irma Kreiten's valuable article: "A Colonial Experiment in Cleansing: The Russian Conquest of Western Caucasus, 1856–65," *Journal of Genocide Research* 11:2–3 (2009), 213–241.

[12] In most Russian and Western European sources, the khanate of Khwarazm is referred to as Khiva, often resulting in ambiguity as to whether an author is referring only to the capital city or to the khanate as a whole. In Central Asian sources, however, the khanate was always referred to as Khwarazm, and I will maintain that usage here.

confined to the urban centers and their bazaars; Central Asia's slave trade was decentralized and widely dispersed, with many slaves traded in villages and nomadic encampments. Indeed, the nomads of the hinterlands played a key role in the slave trade, not only as raiders but also as merchants and slave-owners. In contradiction to many previous studies, which allege that nomads did not need or use slaves, I will argue here that slave ownership in Central Asian nomadic communities was commonplace. However, while nomadic raiding was a key feature of the slave trade, helping to ensure its survival after the fall of major towns to Russian armies, it was hardly the only means by which individuals were seized for enslavement. As I argue in Chapter 1, selling captives into slavery was a normative part of warfare across the region; this practice was not limited to nomads, and the Russians themselves sometimes took part in the slave-dealing economy in Central Asia.

When it comes to the nomads, slave-raiding and slave-trading served more than just their immediate commercial interests. Turkmen and Kazakh nomads developed complex, symbiotic relationships with merchants in the towns of Khwarazm and Bukhara that revolved around the commerce in slaves. Turkmens traded slaves for grain, for example, which these desert-dwellers had no way of growing for themselves. The slaves were often put to work on plantations, growing grain – a cyclical commercial system.

Slave-raiding was also a form of resistance. In the nineteenth century, Turkmen and Kazakh nomads occupied territories encircled by sedentary powers, with the Russian Empire encroaching inexorably from the north and Qajar Iran threatening always to encroach (and occasionally invading Turkmen territories) from the south. Destabilizing sedentary borderland territories through raiding helped to keep these powers at bay. Central Asian sedentary states used this dynamic to their own advantage: Khwarazmian khans – threatened simultaneously by Iran and Russia – alternately allied with Turkmens hostile to Iran and with Kazakhs hostile to Russia, benefiting from whatever limited, proxy defensive capacity these borderland nomads provided. As Chapter 6 shows, Russia later adopted this "nomadic proxy" strategy against Iran, continually prompting "client" Turkmens to raid Iranian territory, or at least offering protection to those who did.

In the decades before the Russian conquest, the issue of the slave trade was at the heart of Russian and Iranian diplomacy with the khanates of Khwarazm and Bukhara. As we shall see in Chapter 1, diplomats from Russia, Iran, and Britain even converged simultaneously in Khiva at one point and issued a joint request – hopelessly, of course – for the

emancipation of all the slaves in Khwarazm. Both Russia and Iran had expansionist ambitions in Central Asia; Both protested the enslavement of their citizens in the khanates; and both raised the issue of slavery in order to justify threats.

In other respects, however, the positions of these two empires differed dramatically. First, the total number of Russian slaves held in Central Asia was miniscule compared to the total number of Iranian slaves. Second, Russia's military resources were vastly greater than Iran's; by the mid-nineteenth century, the threat of a Russian conquest was palpable, while the threat of a major Iranian conquest anywhere in Central Asia (at least after the early 1830s) probably seemed remote. Finally, while Iranian travel literature from the nineteenth century often casts Central Asia as a historically Iranian-dominated region, and sometimes even as a rightful Iranian possession, one scarcely perceives in these "imperial" literatures the pretenses of a "civilizing mission."

British activities in Central Asia, meanwhile, were peripheral in every sense, and the British Empire will factor very little in this book. This omission may surprise some readers, given the extensive literature concerning British "players" in the Great Game. For all their great adventures, miseries, and ambitious pretenses – Captain Arthur Conolly, for example, planned in 1838 to concoct an Anti-Slavery Confederation in the region[13] – the impact of British officers and adventurers on the Central Asian slave trade was negligible. The greatest British accomplishment on this front was the alleged role of the officer Richmond Shakespear in convincing the Khwarazmian khan to release over 400 Russian slaves following General Persovskii's failed campaign against the khanate in 1839.[14] Certain other British efforts were characterized by a grandiosity that smacks of madness, such as the petition penned by the independent traveler Joseph Wolff while imprisoned in Bukhara in 1844; he addressed his dispatch "To all the monarchs of Europe":[15]

> Sires!
>
> . . . I do not supplicate for my own safety; but, Monarchs, two hundred thousand Persian slaves, many of them people of high talent, sigh in the kingdom of Bokhara. Endeavour to effect their liberation, and I shall rejoice in the grave that my blood

[13] See, for example, Evgeny Sergeev, *The Great Game, 1856–1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 4.

[14] Russian accounts tend overwhelmingly to deny Shakespear credit for the release of these slaves.

[15] Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara, in the Years 1843–1845*, Vol. 2 (London: John W. Parker, 1845), 104.

has been thus the cause of the ransom of so many human beings. I am too much agitated, and too closely watched, to be able to say more.

Suffice to say, Wolff received no reply from the monarchs of Europe.

British and American travel writing on slavery is nevertheless precious, since visitors like Conolly, Wolff, Alexander Burnes, and Eugene Schuyler provide us with some of the most detailed ethnographic reportage in existence concerning slaves' experiences. The abolitionist bias of these authors is undisguised, and should always be borne in mind, but this fact by no means proves that the eyewitness evidence they provide is falsified. When it comes to the role of the British Empire in nineteenth-century Central Asia, however, this book leaves its officers and adventurers at the periphery – which is precisely where they ought to be, considering their minimal impact on Central Asian slavery.[16]

This book is not concerned only with empires, however. It is concerned with slaves' lives too, and I have tried here to illuminate something of slaves' experiences. For this effort, I have found two types of source especially useful. First, I have relied on interviews conducted by Russian border officials with slaves who escaped from the Kazakh steppe. These interviews are preserved in the archives of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Chapters 2, 5, and 6 make extensive use of these documents and shed light on their contents and implications. These interviews, while precious for the rare glimpse they provide into the nature of the slave trade, are typically quite concise, rarely running to more than a few pages, and sometimes comprising no more than a few lines. A far more detailed source – indeed, the greatest single source for the study of slavery in the region – is the Persian-language memoir of Mīrzā Maḥmūd Taqī Āshtiyānī,[17] whose extraordinary story of survival and hardship is recounted in Chapter 3.

Another key source for this book is a rare manuscript history of Central Asian slavery composed in Chaghatay Turkic in the early Soviet period. Called the *Āzādnāma*, this work offers details on the fate of Khwarazm's

[16] See Alexander Morrison's insightful recent comments on this subject: "Killing the Cotton Canard and getting rid of the Great Game: rewriting the Russian conquest of Central Asia, 1814–1895," *Central Asian Survey* 33:2 (2014), 131–142 (see especially 132–133). For those interested in the British role in Central Asia and in Anglo-Russian relations, there is no shortage of literature on the subject; Morrison's up-to-date bibliography in the above-mentioned article directs readers to the major works.

[17] Mīrzā Maḥmūd Taqī Āshtiyānī, *ʿIbratnāma: Khatirati az dawran-i pas az jangha-yi herat va merv*, ed. Husayn ʿImadi Ashtiyani (Tehran: Nashr-i markaz, 1382/2003).

freed slaves that are found nowhere else.[18] Chapter 7 makes use of this manuscript in reconstructing the conquest of Khiva and its aftermath.

T. Faiziev's collection of nineteenth-century legal documents concerning the slaves of Bukhara is another crucial source for the study of Central Asian slavery. These documents, which include numerous manumission deeds, provide critical documentary proof that the slave trade continued well after the Russian conquests – and even into the late 1880s. They also demonstrate that slavery was formalized and regulated, at least to some extent, by the region's Hanafi Muslim legal system.

Russian imperial officers, diplomats, and travelers in Central Asia, like their British counterparts, were keenly interested in the issue of slavery, and their eyewitness reportage, while sometimes lurid, is likewise vital for any study of the subject. In citing Russian witnesses, I have tended to privilege reports of a "military-statistical" or diary-like nature over the more overtly "literary" products of the captivity-narrative genre, whose target readership was resolutely popular and whose details sometimes strike me as fantastical and suspect.

While I will focus here on slavery in the Muslim societies of Central Asia, it is important to observe that slavery was not introduced to the region by Muslims, and neither were captive-taking and slave-owning exclusive to Muslims. Furthermore, as I will show, Muslim Central Asia was home to a great diversity of slave systems, some of which invite comparisons beyond the Muslim world.[19] In Khwarazm, for example, where we find slaves laboring on large agricultural estates, the prevailing system of slavery shares more common features with plantation slavery in the American South than it does with urban slavery in Istanbul. Slavery among the nomadic Kazakhs, meanwhile, shares more in common with slavery among nomadic non-Muslim groups such as the Mongols than with either Khwarazm's plantation slavery or Istanbul's urban slavery. Aside from its diversity of forms, the extensiveness of slave-owning also

[18] MS IVAN Uz No. 12581. I am grateful to Paolo Sartori for providing me with a copy of this manuscript.

[19] The terminology of slavery in Central Asia is vast – *ghulām, qul, chūrī*, and *mamlūk* are just a few of the many terms for slaves that we shall encounter over the course of this book – and the word "slave" is hardly adequate in reflecting that diversity. What unites the roles defined by all of these terms is best captured in Seymour Drescher's definition of slavery: "The most crucial and frequently utilized aspect of the condition [of slavery] is a communally recognized right by some individuals to possess, buy, sell, discipline, transport, liberate, or otherwise dispose of the bodies and behavior of other individuals" (Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Anti-Slavery* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 4–5).

varied by region: Even as the trade thrived in Khwarazm and Bukhara, it remained strikingly small in scale in the neighboring Muslim khanate of Kokand.[20] Given this, it is possible to discuss Central Asian slavery as a regional phenomenon, extending beyond the borders of Muslim-majority territories.[21] A *longue durée* view of slavery in the region might inspire the view that slavery among Muslims was merely a continuation of a region-wide practice that can be traced into the distant pre-Islamic past, as well as into neighboring, contemporary, non-Muslim societies.[22]

However, we must keep in mind two facts that demonstrate that slavery among Central Asian Muslims was not regarded as a mere "pre-Islamic survival." First, Hanafi Muslim law both governed the slave system and justified it. It is clear that the Muslim jurists of nineteenth-century Bukhara and Khwarazm did not see the institution of slavery as "un-Islamic"; if they had, they would not have countenanced it by producing bills of sale for the slave trade or adjudicating disputes concerning slaves and their masters. Second, religious differences typically distinguished slaves from their Sunni Muslim owners, and the usual justification for the enslavement of non-Sunnis in Central Asia was explicitly religious. Iranian Shiʿites and Russian Orthodox Christians, among others, were licit to enslave because they were not Sunni Muslims.

Finally, a note on terminology: When I refer to Central Asian "slaves," I have in mind those people classed as *qul* and/or *ghulām* – two words that appear commonly in Turkic and Persian sources from the region. These two words are almost always rendered in English as "slave," and for good reason: both imply a condition of unfreedom in which an individual can

[20] The main reason for this is likely Kokand's relative distance from Khurasan, the region that supplied most of the slaves kept in Khwarazm and Bukhara.

[21] This approach contrasts with that taken by a number of recent works on "Muslim" slavery, most notably William Gervase Clarence-Smith's ambitious comparative synthesis, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[22] The last two decades have seen the steady development of research on Eurasian slavery beyond Central Asia, and I will mention just a few notable works here. On slavery in early modern China, see Pamela K. Crossley, "Slavery in Early-Modern China," in David Eltis and Stanley Engerman, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 186–216; on South Asian slavery, see Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, eds., *Slavery & South Asian History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). On slavery in Iran (still a relatively little-studied topic), see Thomas Ricks, "Slaves and Slave-Trading in Shi'i Iran, AD 1500–1900," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 36:4 (2001), 407–418; and Mirzai, *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran*. Valuable studies of slavery and the slave trade in regions to the west and southwest of Central Asia can be found in Christoph Witzenrath, ed., *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History, 1200–1860* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015).

typically be bought and sold licitly, and in which an individual requires a formal deed of manumission to become free.[23] By the nineteenth century, Hanafi legal norms had been used to manage issues of slavery for nearly a millennium; as one might expect, there is little evidence of confusion over something as basic as which individuals could legally be bought and sold, or which individuals required deeds of manumission to gain the same formal legal rights as those characterized as "free" in the Hanafi legal nomenclature. There were, however, a few exceptional cases in Central Asia for which I suspect that formal legal procedure was hazier: Military servitude among Kazakhs and Mongols, for example, has sometimes been described by outsiders using the language of slavery, but I have not seen any record of such military "slaves" being processed or defined as unfree people by Muslim jurists. Another ambiguous case is discussed at length in Chapter 5—namely, slaves among the Kazakhs who are alleged either to have been "adopted" as children or who have been given their own independent living-space and means as adults (typically comprising both a tent and livestock). Nevertheless, for the vast majority of the victims discussed in this book – who are generally Iranian Shiʿites taken captive in Khurasan and forced to labor on plantations or other private estates – I consider the word "slave" an appropriate description, both because it approximates the formalized free/unfree distinction made by the region's native legal system and because, as we shall see, their experiences and roles were in many respects remarkably similar to those of "slaves" in the English-speaking world.

In short, this book is an attempt to consider Central Asian slavery both from the "bottom-up" and from the "top-down." I aim to provide a window on slaves' experiences while locating their activities in the broader geopolitical framework of Central Asia in the age of imperial expansion. I hope to show how slaves' agency and resistance not only impacted their experiences, but also influenced the slave system itself, forming a pattern of autonomous activity that culminated in the Khivan slave uprising of 1873.

Slaves were certainly the most powerless, subaltern population in the region. And yet it is these slaves – as well as the trade that ensnared

[23] Mīrzā Maḥmūd, our Persian memoirist, prefers to describe himself as an *asīr*, a term generally better translated as "captive," and which can suggest a kind of temporary military imprisonment as opposed to the ten years of private ownership and forced labor that he endured. But he too required a letter of manumission to gain his freedom, and this fact – along with the other major details of his ordeal – has inclined me to translate *asīr* as "slave" in his case.

them – that bound together the "core" and the "periphery," the nomadic and the sedentary: Russian tsars and Iranian shahs were repeatedly drawn to their respective Central Asian "peripheries" on account of the trade, while for the Central Asian khanates themselves, the trade linked major towns (Bukhara, Urgench, Khiva) and remote oases via nomadic transit and caravan routes. The story of colonization, local resistance, caravan commerce, diplomatic rivalries, and imperial conquests in nineteenth-century Central Asia all converge around the problem of the slave trade.

Chapter 1 introduces historical, social, and political settings of slavery in early modern Central Asia, arguing that slavery and slave-taking were not unique to borderland nomads, but rather that they were normative features of Eurasian warfare over the course of centuries; that slavery gained particular prominence in the region with the expansion of agricultural plantations in the late Timurid period; and that, in the centuries to come, it would become a key issue in diplomacy between Iran, Russia, and Central Asia. Chapter 2 explores the geography of slavery, using evidence from slaves' testimonials to argue that slavery was a largely rural, agricultural phenomenon in the region, and that the slave trade was intimately connected with overland caravan routes. Because of the trade's decentralized nature, I argue, it was nearly impossible to police. Chapter 3 focuses on the experiences of Mīrzā Maḥmūd, who spent nearly a decade as a slave, first among the Turkmens and then in Bukhara, and has left us the richest firsthand account of slavery in the region. Chapter 4 draws on other autobiographical sources as well as eyewitness reports to describe slaves' occupations and roles, revealing that slaves could be found at all levels of Central Asian society.

Chapter 5 considers the curious fate of the many slaves who fled their masters for the Russian border, only to be pulled into serfdom as part of the Tsar's plan to settle and cultivate the borderlands. Here, I challenge the notion of Russian "abolitionism" in the region while further exploring slaves' means of resistance. Chapter 6 reveals how imperial powers employed Central Asian "native informants" in an attempt to pacify the borderlands and liquidate captive-taking among nomads. I weigh the mixed results of these efforts, further challenging longstanding assumptions about the Russian "abolitionist" program. Chapter 7 concludes the book by showing how slaves throughout Khwarazm joined together in the largest slave uprising in Central Asian history. I argue that this revolutionary, little-known episode triggered the abolition of slavery in the region as a whole.