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# Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System

*Daniel Pipes*

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**Daniel Pipes : Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System*:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Joint Review of Crone and PipesBy R. AlbinThese are 2 interesting books on the distinctive institution of military slavery. Many readers are probably familiar with this phenomenon, whose best known examples are the Ottoman Janisseries and the Egyptian Mamluks. As the authors point out, this institution is almost unique to the Islamic world and appeared in a wide range of Muslim societies over several centuries. Both Crone and Pipes address how this institution developed and why it was so strongly associated with the Muslim world. Of these 2 books, Pipes' is definitely the most readable. Crone's book, which is really a long essay as much of the book is reprinting of primary documents and an impressively long bibliography/footnotes, was clearly written for subspecialists and is hard going for general readers. To be fair to Crone, her book is also an analysis of the development of early Islamic states and considered an important interpretation of that topic. I think that Crone's and Pipes' analyses of military slavery are essentially identical.Pipes has a nice discussion of what constitutes military slavery. This is not the plantation chattel slavery familiar to most readers. Islamic military slaves were often powerful individuals with significant rights. Some important Ottoman Viziers were slaves. They were the personal dependents of the rulers of states investing in military slavery. The prototype military slaves were very much like the Janissaries, men obtained via capture, purchase, or other means, usually at young ages, and trained specifically to be soldiers. They usually originated from the peripheries or outside the borders of the states using military slaves, and usually underwent involuntary conversion to and indoctrination in Islam.Why was military slavery a common feature of so

many Islamic states? Crone and Pipes point to at least one major feature of Islam and a series of contingent events. Both Crone and Pipes suggest that the evolution of Islam and Sharia law resulted in a situation in which essential features of life were independent of the state and all governments lacked fundamental legitimacy. This made it relatively difficult for Islamic rulers to develop armies based on legitimate claims of service from subjects, particularly when warfare involved conflicts with other Muslim states. In somewhat complementary narratives, Crone and Pipes trace the evolution of military slavery from early events in Islamic history. Key features include the fact that Islam prevented the conquering Arabians from adopting governing methods of the societies they came to dominate, that the tribal organization of early Islamic societies that also prevented governments from dominating early Islamic armies, and the use of large numbers of personal dependents in early Islamic armies. Early leaders of the Abbasid Caliphate crystalized the institution of military slavery and set a pattern that persisted for centuries.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Why Do Islamic Fanatics Write Reviews Regarding Islam By CounterJihad Mr. Hamad's poorly stated review is very typical of the mindset of radical Muslims. They can broach no criticism of Islam, any of its aspects or its long and violent history of expansionism. In the first place Mr. Hamad should really be more conversant in English if he is going to review books written in English. This is not a criticism of his language skills per se, he writes far better English than I do Arabic, however his ham-fisted bruising of syntax and grammar make it difficult to really understand his viewpoint in a precise manner. A few observations:

1. Dr. Daniel Pipes is a Harvard trained PhD and has taught at that level. So he probably has forgotten more about Middle Eastern history than Mr. Hamad ever knew. Dr. Pipes has written probably over 20 serious academic works. He is an acknowledged expert on Middle East history worldwide.
2. Pipes is of the Jewish faith, therefore to allege that he is a Christian is so stupid as to defy description.
3. Pipes is not an Islamophobe, actually is fascinated by Arabic culture and has spent more time in the Middle East [including a long stint in Egypt] than most blindered "experts," such as Hamad.
4. Pipes is fluent in Arabic, and has been so for probably 40 years. Therefore he has read the Qur'an in its original language, not a translation.
5. Hamad's apparent suggestion that historically, Muslims never employed slave soldiers is completely absurd. Actually since the Abbasid dynasty [Islam's first dynastic assemblage] onward through the Mamluks and the Ottomans, Islam was so dependent on slave soldiers that historians have speculated that the Islamic empires could not have been built without the institution and that possibly as a result, Islam might not have lived on to modern times. The existence of these slave soldiers is beyond argument. It is historical fact, a troubling one as far as Hamad is concerned, but nonetheless true.
6. Islamist represent Islam in the way in which they want it to be perceived, not as it actually is. I suggest that those who might have views similar to Mr. Hamad's read *The Origins of Political Order*, by Francis Fukuyama [2011 publish, I believe]. I have a feeling that Mr. Hamad could not possibly even read with understanding such books because of his apparent lack of scholarship in general and his poor English skills.

In summation, Pipes work is ESSENTIAL in understanding the rapid spread of historical Islam, because it could not have possibly been spread without the employment of slave soldiers. Just so you know Mr. Hamad, the early Muslims also used slaves to help administer their growing empire and in most cases they were treated fairly kindly, if you ignore the fact that they were serving under duress, were separated from their largely Christian families at a very young age, forcibly converted to Islam and never saw their parents again. In general, at least as far as the administrators are concerned these slaves lived a far less cruel existence than slaves held by other societies during this period. Pipes has NEVER claimed that he can interpret Islam. Islam is what it is and the only authority on such matter is imams who are trained in the Qur'an and do not agree as to what it is even among themselves, there is no such concept as a Muslim Pope. As a matter of fact Dr. Pipes continually criticizes non-Muslim for trying to define Islam because they are not imams. He famously criticized George W. Bush, who said Islam is a religion of peace, by gently ridiculing him as "imam Bush." This was not appreciated in the conservative community but Pipes was 100% correct. Outsiders can only "judge" Islam from proven historical facts which are uncontested by knowledgeable scholars, all of these point to the only conclusion that has validity. From the outside, all we can do is look at what has happened, not interpret a work [believed by Muslims to be revealed word of God, Allah in their iteration] which is difficult to even understand in Arabic. Non-Muslims do this at their peril. You can however gain some sense of Islam by reading such works as "Advice of the Traveller," which is widely recognized within the Ummah [Islamic world] as being a major and authoritative source regarding Islamic law, Shari'a. In my extensive collection of works pertaining to the Middle East I have numerous Qur'ans, one beautifully bound in leather, with gold inlaid edges. It was mailed to me free by a radical Islamic organization here in the United States, a front group for the Muslim Brotherhood an Egyptian terrorist group [which created HAMAS], the Council on American Islamic Relations. CAIR was listed as an unindicted co-conspirator in *U.S. vs. Holy Land Foundation*, and court documents relating to that prosecution and written by appeals judge Jorge Solis, tie CAIR to Hamas. Therefore I consider this text to be authoritative, though of course I can not comprehend it in the manner an imam or lay Muslim would, just as a non-Christian can not read the Bible and then proclaim the nature of Christianity. Does contemporary Islam have problems? Absolutely, witness the modern phenomenon of terror whose self-declared Islamic proponents say they are following the Qur'an. Westerners can't help it if the practitioners who act in a barbarous manner claim that their actions are justified by their religion. The fact is that Islam was spread largely by military actions which heavily relied on the employment of slave warriors. I am sorry

that the facts hurt, Mr. Hamad, but the truth is the truth and no amount of name calling and vilification [such as his nonsensical contention that Pipes is Christian] can ever change that. As to the book itself its available for free from the Middle East Forum for free [in pdf format, the first printing 1981 is out of print and used copies go for over \$100] it is indispensable in understanding Islamic expansionism, which continues to this day, though under different circumstances and different methodologies. Comment and contra-review by William Mayer, E P [...], my Twitter handle and that site itself are hardly ever used, but I am and anti-Jihadist and am not an Islamophobe, have had personal friends who were Muslim, fwiw, this was a great and caring family. 13 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Critics on Slave Soldiers and Islam By A Customer "On the one hand it is a specialist contribution to the history, particularly the early history, of Islam, on the other it is an important and original contribution to the growing corpus of military sociology... an original book on an important subject... with an intelligence and certainty of purpose which ensures its appeal to scholars far beyond the margins of Islamic studies." - John Keegan, The Times (London), December 18, 1981 "His book has an attractiveness of argumentation, grounded on the necessary solid research, that makes it a stimulating contribution to Islamic historical studies." - C. E. Bosworth, American Historical Review, 1982 "This vital and creative work will serve as an important stimulus to further debate on the nature of medieval Islamic institutions." - Fedwa Malti-Douglas, The Middle East Journal, Spring 1982 "This book is a fascinating and closely researched account of the rise of the military slave system in early Islam. Portions of the work appeared previously in the Journal of Turkish Studies and the Journal of Strategic Studies, suggesting its broad appeal." - Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs, Spring 1982 "This thought-provoking book... carefully reasoned... students of Islam, the Middle East, and military institutions will all profit from this stimulating book." - Donald M. Reid, Military Affairs, April 1982 "Interesting and informative... an important contribution to our knowledge of early Islamic society. He begins with a useful and comprehensive survey... Pipes has unearthed some valuable new material, for which he deserves credit, and has shed light on an important aspect of Islamicate societies... through this book Pipes has made some original, sizeable contributions to Islamic studies." - Stephanie White, International Journal of Middle East Studies, 1983 "Copiously documented arguments which are stimulating, even provocative... the fullest discussion of military slavery in medieval Islamic civilization to appear thus far." - Donald P. Little, Muslim World, 1983

Even a cursory glance at the history of Muslim peoples reveals the extraordinary role played by men of slave origins in the armed forces...

On the one hand it is a specialist contribution to the history, particularly the early history, of Islam, on the other it is an important and original contribution to the growing corpus of military sociology... an original book on an important subject... with an intelligence and certainty of purpose which ensures its appeal to scholars far beyond the margins of Islamic studies. --John Keegan, The Times (London), December 18, 1981 "Interesting and informative... an important contribution to our knowledge of early Islamic society. He begins with a useful and comprehensive survey... Pipes has unearthed some valuable new material, for which he deserves credit, and has shed light on an important aspect of Islamicate societies... through this book Pipes has made some original, sizeable contributions to Islamic studies. -- Stephanie White, International Journal of Middle East Studies, 1983 "This vital and creative work will serve as an important stimulus to further debate on the nature of medieval Islamic institutions. --Fedwa Malti-Douglas, The Middle East Journal, Spring 1982

About the Author Daniel Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum and Taube/Diller distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. CBS Sunday Morning says he was years ahead of the curve in identifying the threat of radical Islam. Unnoticed by most Westerners, he wrote for example in 1995, war has been unilaterally declared on Europe and the United States. The Boston Globe states that If Pipes's admonitions had been heeded, there might never have been a 9/11.