

## THE *SAQĀLIBA* SLAVES IN THE AGHLABID STATE<sup>1</sup>

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This paper deals with the slaves denoted in the Islamic literature by *Saqāliba*, a name the meaning of which is still the subject of scholarly discussion. Some specialists believe that this name denotes only Slavs, but others put forward a broader interpretation of the term, suggesting that the word *Saqāliba*, when applied to slaves in the medieval Islamic world, means eunuchs, European captives, etc.<sup>2</sup> Some introductory notes are useful here to clarify our point of view on this matter.

1. If the idea that *Saqāliba* first meant Slavic servants (I am speaking now about the *Saqāliba* in the Islamic world only) and then eunuchs, slaves in general etc., then the sphere of use of this term expanded, and the number of references to *Saqāliba* can be expected to grow as well. However, quite the opposite happens: after the first third of the eleventh century, references to *saqlabī* slaves almost disappear from Islamic sources. By *Saqāliba*, therefore, were meant not slaves or eunuchs in general, but slaves belonging to a special category.

2. In the works of Islamic geographers, especially of those who had contacts with the Slavs themselves (the unknown author of the description of Northern peoples found in the treatises of Ibn Rustah,<sup>3</sup> Gardizi,<sup>4</sup> Marwazi<sup>5</sup> and the anonymous geography *Hudūd al-Ālam*,<sup>6</sup> then Hārūn Ibn Yahyā<sup>7</sup> and Ibrāhīm Ibn-Ya'qūb),<sup>8</sup> the name *Saqāliba* is applied to Slavs.

3. Islamic authors, when speaking about the origins of the *saqlabī* slaves, state that the *Saqāliba* came to the Islamic world as prisoners taken in wars which the Ifranj (Franks; the Muslims applied this name not only to Frenchmen, but to other western Christians including Germans as well) waged against the pagan *Saqāliba*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered at the 35th Congress of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS), Budapest, July 9, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Dozy, R., *Histoire des musulmans d'Espagne jusqu'à la conquête de l'Andalousie par les Almoravides* (711-1110), Leiden, 1861. vol. 3. 59-61.; Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 3 vols., 1950 (1-2), 1967 (3), vol. 2. 123-124, and vol. 3. 179.; Verlinde, Ch., *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, vol. 1. *Péninsule Ibérique - France*. Brugge: De Tempel, 1955. 211-212.

<sup>3</sup> *Kitāb al-Ā'lak an-Nafisa auctore ... Ibn Rosteh et Kitāb al-Buldan auctore ... al-Jakībī*, ed. M.J. De Goeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* (BGA), vol. VII, Leiden, 1892. 143-145.

<sup>4</sup> Bartold, V.V., "Izvlecheniye iz sochineniya Gardizi 'Zayn 'al-'Akhbār' [An Extract from Gardizi's Treatise *Zayn 'al-'Akhbār'*]", *Sobraniye sochineniy* [Complete works], Moscow, 1973, vol. VIII, 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Sharaf Al-Zaman Tahir Marvazi on China, the Turks and India, ed. and trans. by V. Minorsky, London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1942. text 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Hudūd al-Ālam*, Kabul: Faculty of Philology of the University of Kabul, 1963. 425-426.

<sup>7</sup> *Kitāb al-Ā'lak an-Nafisa auctore*, 127-130.

<sup>8</sup> Bakrī, al-, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*, ed. A. Van Leuwen, A. Ferré, Tunis: al-Dīr al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Kitāb, al-Muassasa al-Wataniyya li-l-Tarjama wa l-Dirāsāt "Bayt al-Hikma", 1992. 330-340.

<sup>9</sup> Maqqarī, al-, *Nāḥ al-Tīb min Ghūṣn al-Andalus al-Ratīb*, ed. I. 'Abbās, 8 vols., Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1968. 144-145.; *Cosmographie de Chems ed-Din Abou Abdallah Mohammed ed-Dimichqui*, ed. A.F. Mehren, St-Petersburg, 1866. 261.; and see also, Bakrī, al-, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*, 914.

By there wars is most likely meant the German advance on the Slavic lands.

4. In Early Medieval Europe it was much easier to trade in pagan slaves than in Christian ones, for the Church and the lay authorities could somehow protect the latter, but did not care about the former at all. Conditions were thus much better for trading in pagan Slavic captives than Christian. Moreover, Slavic prisoners were supplied in great numbers because of wars, whereas to acquire Christian captives, one had to think about peculiar ways of doing it (kidnapping, stealing, purchasing peasants from feudal lords, etc.).

These observations suggest that by *Šaqāliba*, Slavs and, in the context of this paper, Slavic slaves are usually meant. However, it is impossible to claim that the use of the word *Šaqāliba* was perfectly accurate in all cases. The possibility of error should be admitted. We abstain therefore from saying Slavic slaves, but use the term *Šaqāliba* slaves, recognising that most of the *Šaqāliba* whom we see in the Islamic sources were Slavs.

The history of the *saqlabī* slaves attracted the attention of scholars long ago. The first books dealing with this subject appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> At present we have some works dealing with the history of the *Šaqāliba* but it should also be said that for some regions and periods the topic remains unexplored. Speaking about the *saqlabī* slaves in Africa, scholars usually address Fātimid history and say little about the *Šaqāliba* in other Islamic states of North Africa.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, I am going to attempt to partially fill this gap by showing what is known about the *saqlabī* slaves in the Aghlabid state.

First of all, let us see how the *saqlabī* slaves were brought to North Africa. It seems that one may speak about two main routes of the slave trade. One of them went through Spain: captives, usually taken prisoner by the Franks, later on by the Germans, during their wars or incursions against Slavic peoples, were brought by slave traders through Germany and then through France (down the Rhône towards Narbonne and Marseille) to Spain (by land through the Pyrenees or by sea to the eastern coast of al-Andalus). From Spain, as Ibn Khurdādhbih states in his treatise, traders went to Tanger and thence to Kairouan.<sup>12</sup> Not all the slaves were sold in al-Andalus; a number of them were carried farther to North Africa and even to the Mashriq. The second route

<sup>10</sup> Lamanskiy, V., *O slav'anah v Maloy Azii, v Afrike i v Ispanii* [On the Slavs in Asia Minor, Africa and Spain], St-Petersburg, 1859.; Szajnocha, K., *Slav'ane v Andaluzi* [The Slavs in 'al-'Andalus], Moscow, 1874.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Hrbek, I., "Die Slawen im Dienste der Fatimiden." In *Archiv Orientální*, vol. 21., (1953) 543 - 571.

<sup>12</sup> *Kitāb al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik* (*Liber viarum et regnorum*) auctore *Abu'l-Kāsim Obaidallah ibn Abdallah ibn Khordādhbeh* et *Excerpta e Kitāb al-Kharādj* auctore *Kodāma ibn Dja'far*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, BGA, vol. VI, Leiden, 1889. 154-155.

lay through Italy where Venice appears to have been the main center of the slave trade. The first data concerning the export of slaves from Venice to the Islamic world go back to the middle of the eighth century. Despite some hindrances the Venetian slave trade continued in the following centuries. Slavic slaves exported from Venice appear to have been partly supplied by the Slavs themselves (particularly by the Narentan pirates) and partly captured by the Venetians. There were other possibilities as well. Captives could be brought from France through the western passes of the Alps or from Austria and Bavaria through passes situated more to the east. Among the *Saqāliba* supplied to the Islamic world, there were thus representatives of almost all branches of Slavdom: Slavs from the Baltic region, Central Europe, the Balkans.

When did the *saqlabī* slaves appear in the Aghlabid state? Ibn Khurdādhbih's description of the Rahdānites' trade goes back to the year 846/7 when the first version of his book appeared, but the author speaks about lengthy trade routes which required years to be established. The date at which the first *saqlabī* captives were brought to North Africa should therefore be pushed some decades back, to the beginning of the ninth century. There are two reasons to support this date. First, the earliest references to the *saqlabī* slaves in Islamic Spain date from the beginning of the ninth century. Then, in the beginning of the ninth century, the Franks launched large-scale campaigns against the Slavs, and the wars started supplying captives.

In the sources dealing with the Aghlabid state, the first slaves appear during the rule of the first ruler of this dynasty, Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Aghlab (800 - 812). In an attempt to free himself from the influence of the army (*jund*), he built himself a new palace (al-Qaṣr al-Qadīm) and started purchasing slaves, mainly for his guard. When he bought enough of them, he moved with them and other people loyal to him to the palace.<sup>13</sup>

The sources do not specify the ethnicity of these slaves. Talbi considers them to be Negroes,<sup>14</sup> and this seems to be the most probable interpretation. However, *saqlabī* slaves appear soon as well. In 817, when 'Abd Allāh I (812-817) died, his place was taken by Ziyādat Allāh I (817-838). On coming to power, the new ruler attempted to eliminate his enemies, and several army officers were persecuted. This was the cause of the revolt raised by a certain Ziyād Ibn Sahl, known as *Ibn al-Saqlabiyya*, or son of a *saqlabī* woman, in 207 A.H. (May 27, 822 - May 15, 823 A.D.). The rebels, however, were defeated by the emir's troops, and many of them perished.

<sup>13</sup> *Liber expugnationis regionum auctore Imamo Ahmed ibn Jahja ibn Djabir al-Beladsoni*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Lugduni Batavorum: E.J. Brill, 1865. 234.; *Nuwayrfi, al-*, *Nihāyat al-Arab Fi Funān al-Adab*. Vol. 24, ed. °. Nasṣār, Cairo: Ed. du Scribe Egyptien, 1983. 102.; Raqīq al-Qayraw nī, al-, *Tārīkh Ifriqiyā wa-l-Maghrib*. Ed. al-Munjī al-Kā'bī. Tūnis: Raffiq al-Saqatī, 1968. 222.; Ibn 'Idhārfi, al-Bay n al-Mughrib, Beirut: Dār Śādir, 1950. Vol. 1, 117.

<sup>14</sup> Talbi, M., *L'émirat aghlabide (189-296 / 800-909) . Histoire politique*. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1966. 136.

The information we have concerning this episode is not indisputable. It is well-known that in terms of graphics the word *ṣaqlabī* is very close to *ṣiqillī* or *saqallī* (Sicilian) and can easily be confused with it. In similar cases one should always bear in mind that a scribe could have been mistaken when copying the *nisba* and give an incorrect transcription. A misunderstanding occurs in Ziyād's case as well. Ibn al-Athīr (all the editions which I have consulted - Būlāq, Leiden, Cairo, Beirut 1965, Beirut 1987)<sup>15</sup> and Ibn 'Idhārī<sup>16</sup> (Dozy, who edited this book, states that all the manuscripts give *Ibn al-Ṣaqlabiyā*)<sup>17</sup> write his *kunya* as *Ibn al-Ṣaqlabiyā*, whereas Ibn Khaldūn gives *Ibn al-Ṣiqilliyā*.<sup>18</sup> For this case I prefer the reading *Ibn al-Ṣaqlabiyā*. This transcription is found in sources earlier than Ibn Khaldūn's book; moreover, in the Būlāq edition of Ibn Khaldūn's treatise which I consulted, all similar *nisbas* are written as *ṣiqillī*, even in cases when it is known from elsewhere that the correct transcription is *ṣaqlabī*.

Most of the information we have about the *ṣaqlabī* slaves in the Aghlabid state goes back to the years of the rule of Abū Ishaq Ibrāhīm Ibn Aḥmad (875-902). In 264 A.H. (August 23, 879 / August 11, 880 A.D.), the freedmen of this ruler tried to revolt, and only the intervention of the population of Kairouan saved the situation. Having lost confidence in the freedmen, Ibrāhīm put them all to death and replaced them with new slaves: "He ordered new slaves to be purchased," al-Nuwayrī writes, "and numerous slaves were bought. He gave them jobs, provided them with clothes and went with them to wars, in which they showed bravery, persistence and strength."<sup>19</sup> Some of the new slaves were *Ṣaqāliba*. We learn about it in the following way. Some years later, Ibrāhīm, taking seriously the words of an astrologer that he would be assassinated by a palace slave, put his new servants to death. "In 278 A.H. (April 25, 890 / April 14, 891 A.D.) Ibrāhīm discovered that a group of his servants and *Ṣaqāliba* wanted to assassinate him and his mother, and he exterminated them all."<sup>20</sup> The participation of the *Ṣaqāliba* in this alleged plot is mentioned by Ibn 'Idhārī as well; the latter, however, places those events in 279 A.H. (April 3, 892 / March 22, 893 A.D.).<sup>21</sup>

One should stay in the years of Abū Ishaq Ibrāhīm Ibn Aḥmad's rule for a little

<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, Miṣr, 1290 A.H. - 1874 A.D., vol. 6. 122.; *Ibn al-Athīr Chronicon quod perfectissimum inscribitur*. Ed. C.J. Thorberg, Leiden, vol. 5, 1870, vol. 6, 1871.; vol. 6. 232.; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil Fi al-Tārīkh*, ed. 'A. Najīr, Cairo: Idārat al-Tibā'a al-Munīriyya, Vol. 5, 1938, vol. 6, 1934., vol. 5. 185.; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil Fi al-Tārīkh*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, Dār Bayrūt, 1965., vol. 6. 329.; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil Fi al-Tārīkh*, ed. M.Y. al-Daqqāq, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987., vol. 5. 433., respectively.

<sup>16</sup> *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne intitulée Al-Bayano'l-Mogrib par Ibn Adhari (de Maroc) et Fragments de la Chronique arabe d'Arib (de Cordoue)*, ed. R.P.A. Dozy, 1 vol., Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1848-1851., 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ṭabar*, ed. Būlāq, 1284 A.H. vol. 4., 197.

<sup>19</sup> Nuwayrī, al-, *Nihāyat al-Arab Fi Funūn al-Adab*, 129.

<sup>20</sup> Nuwayrī, al-, *Nihāyat al-Arab Fi Funūn al-Adab*, 131.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 163; and see also, *al-Uyūn wa al-Ḥadāiq Fi Akhbār al-Haqāiq*, ed. N.'A. Dāwūd, Najaf, 1972. 132.

longer, for two interesting anecdotes involving *saqlabī* slaves are connected to it. The protagonist of one of them is Abū 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Faraj, nicknamed Ibn al-Bannā, who had been a judge in Qaṣṭīliya for a while but was then relieved because of a conflict with the local people. The governor of Qaṣṭīliya sent him to Raqqāda where he had to defend himself before the ruler. During the interview with Ibrāhīm,

Ibn al-Bannā presented clearly his view and exposed the offence which was raised him. Ibrāhīm raised his head, turned to B.lāgh *al-fatā* and told him *bi-l-saqlabiyya*: 'I see that this man (he referred to Ibn al-Bannā) deserves that the *qalansuwa* of the judge (he referred to Ibn 'Abdūn [judge and Ibn al-Banna's opponent at the dispute]<sup>22</sup>) be taken off and put on his head.' Then he enrolled him as a scribe for his judge 'Isā Ibn Miskūn.

The other story is connected to a certain Abū l-'Abbās Ibn Ṭālib. This man, who was judge of Kairouan, did not approve of abuses committed by Ibrāhīm and was finally stripped of his post. The audience in the palace at which this happened is described by Abū l-Faḍl 'Iyād after the narration of Ḥamdīs, the court astrologer. During the audience Ḥamdīs suddenly asked permission to speak and opposed Ibrāhīm, saying in particular that God's will is above the emir's order:

At this point, Ḥamdīs continues, B.lāgh the Servant [or Eunuch - *khādim*] stood up and walked towards me in anger to deal with me, but the emir spoke to him *bi-l-saqlabiyya*, and he stopped.<sup>23</sup>

The information concerning B.lāgh which we possess at present is not abundant. It is difficult, for example, to specify how his name should be vocalised. Most sources only give B.lāgh. al-Azīz in his account of al-'Abbās Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭulūn's campaign against the Aghlabids writes *Ballāgh*, but Talbi, who used the *Tabaqāt* by Abū l-'Arab (the book which I, unfortunately, have not been able to consult, and where B.lāgh is referred to), calls the servant *Balāgh* throughout his *L'émirat aghlabide*.<sup>24</sup> Since I do not know whether the vocalisation *Balāgh* belongs to Abū l-'Arab, or not, I cannot make any conclusions on this subject.

The information on B.lāgh which the sources provide allows us to reconstruct the main stages of his career. B.lāgh was a palace servant. Speaking about Ibrāhīm Ibn Aḥmad, Ibn al-Abbār says that B.lāgh once did not let the poet Bakr Ibn Ḥammād al-Tāhartī enter the room where the emir was, for the emir at that time was enjoying the

<sup>22</sup> Mālikī, al-, *Kitāb Riyād al-Nufūs Fī Tabaqāt 'Ulamā al-Qayrawān wa Ifrīqiyā...*, 1 part, ed. H. Munis, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1951; 2 part, ed. B. al-Bakkūsh, Dār al-Maghrib al- Islāmī li-l-Tibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1981. vol. 2. 158-159.; see also, *Biographies aghlabides. Extraits des Madarik du cadi Iyad (1083 - 1149)*. Ed. M. Talbi. Tunis: Imprimerie Officielle, 1968. 372.

<sup>23</sup> *Biographies aghlabides*. 229.

<sup>24</sup> Wüstenfeld, F., *Die Statthalter von Ägypten zur Zeit der Chalifen*, Göttingen, 1875 (1-2 Abt.), 1876 (3-4 Abt.). vol. 3. 58.; Talbi, M., *L'émirat aghlabide*. 315 and 351, respectively.

society of his harem maidens.<sup>25</sup> Talbi states that B.lāgh's name appeared on some coins minted under Ibrāhīm.<sup>26</sup> Besides this, we know that in 880-881, when al-‘Abbās, son of Ahmad Ibn Tulūn, attacked Ifriqiya, B.lāgh was sent with troops to the Aghlabid governor of Tripoli Ibn Qarhab with the task of joining the attack against the invaders.<sup>27</sup> This evidence suggests the following interpretation of B.lāgh's career. At the beginning he served at the palace. Then he became one of the emir's favorite servants, and his name appeared on coins. As a servant who enjoyed the emir's confidence, he occasionally performed missions outside the palace.

What was the language in which the emir spoke to his servant? It appears that it was a Slavic language. The sources give *bi-l-ṣaqlabīyya*, and there are enough reasons to support this reading. A confusion may have been made in a *nisba*, but this case is different. There was no Sicilian language, so only *bi-l-ṣaqlabīyya* could originally be in the text. One cannot, unfortunately, specify what language it was, for no word is quoted, and Slavic slaves were brought to North Africa from various regions. Perhaps it was a mixture of different Slavic dialects which the *ṣaqlabī* servants used among themselves.

What prompted the emir to learn the language of his slaves (I say slaves, for the emir is not likely to have studied a language because of a single slave)? *Saqlabī* slaves served at the court, and some of them (this appears to have been B.lāgh's case) enjoyed the emir's particular confidence. The emir might have wished to find such a way of speaking to them that the words would remain incomprehensible to anybody else, and the information to be kept secret would be hidden from others. On the other hand, given that Ibrāhīm was almost maniacally suspicious, one can suggest another explanation: fearing a plot, the emir attempted to know about his servants as much as he could, including their language, so as to be better prepared to resist potential danger. A similar case happened later, when the Fātimid caliph ‘al-Mu‘izz studied a Slavic language to understand the meaning of a remark uttered by his *ṣaqlabī* slave Qayṣar.

No information about B.lāgh's further career has been preserved. Perhaps he was put to death together with other slaves at Ibrāhīm's order. The executed servants were replaced by newly bought black slaves. The latter were numerous although moderate evaluations of their number given by Ibn ‘Idhārī and Ibn Khaldūn, five and three thousand men respectively,<sup>28</sup> should be preferred to al-Nuwayrī's unrealistic figure of one hundred thousand.<sup>29</sup> However, this did not put an end to the *Saqālibā*'s presence in the

<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Hulla al-Sayrā*, ed. H. Munis, 2 vols., Cairo: La Société Arabe des Publications, 1963. vol. 1. 173.

<sup>26</sup> Talbi, M., *L'émirat aghlabide*. 351., note 4.

<sup>27</sup> Kindī, al-, *Wulāt Miṣr*, ed. H. Naṣṣār, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, Dār Bayrūt, 1959. 246.; Wüstenfeld, F., *Die Stathälter von Ägypten zur Zeit der Chalifen*, vol. 3. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughribī*, 164.; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, vol. 4. 123.

Aghlabid state. We know that some *Šaqāliba* served emir 'Abd Allāh II (902-903). This ruler was assassinated by his servants on *Sha'bān* 28, 290 A.H. (July, 23, 903 A.D.). These were *saqlabi*<sup>30</sup> eunuchs,<sup>31</sup> three according to Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn al-Abbār and Ibn al-Khaṭīb,<sup>32</sup> two according to Ibn ʻIdhārī. Ziyādat Allāh, the murdered emir's son, to whom 'Abd Allāh's head was brought, displayed anger (it is not known whether he was privy to the plot or not) and put the eunuchs to death.

Ziyādat Allāh was the last Aghlabid ruler in Africa. The movement of the *Kutāma* Berbers which paved the way for the establishment of the Fātimid state in North Africa was gaining momentum, and in 296 A.H. (September 30, 908 / September 19, 909 A.D.) Ziyādat Allāh had to leave his capital Raqqāda and flee to the East. The description of his flight as presented by al-Nu'mān shows an impressive procession: "He [Ziyādat Allāh] selected among his slaves, *saqlabī* servants [or eunuchs], one thousand men and girdled each of them with a belt with one thousand dinars inside, fearing to unite all the money he had into one burden."<sup>34</sup>

The evaluation of the slaves' number should not be understood literally. The study of Islamic sources reveals that the numbers which are quoted in them are usually exaggerated. Moreover, the *Šaqāliba* were not the only servants who accompanied Ziyādat Allāh.<sup>35</sup> One cannot, therefore, state that the *Šaqāliba* were exactly one thousand though the reference suggests that they were numerous. It is noteworthy, in this respect, that the *Šaqāliba* were selected by Ziyādat Allāh; they were probably his most loyal servants.

Some information has reached us concerning the fate of the Slavs who went to Mashriq with Ziyādat Allāh. When the procession stayed in Egypt, one of the *ghulāms* stole one hundred thousand dinars and fled. On passing through Egypt, Ziyādat Allāh reached Ramla where he stayed for a while. There he received some proposals from local noblemen who wanted to buy his slaves. He refused, but the noblemen presented a claim against him to Baghdad, and Ziyādat Allāh was not able to enter the capi-

<sup>29</sup> Nuwayrī, al-, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, 131-132.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Hulla al-Sayrā*, vol. 1. 175.; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil Fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 6. 103.; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʻIbar*, vol. 4. 205.

<sup>31</sup> Nu'mān, al-, *Iftitāḥ al-Da'wa*. Ed. F. al-Dashrāwī. Algiers: Dīwān al-Maṭbū'āt al-Jāmi'iyya, Tunis: al-Sharīka al-Tūnisīyya li-l-Tawzī', 1986. 152.

<sup>32</sup> *Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-ʻArabī fī al-ʻAṣr al-Wasīṭ*. *al-Qism al-Thālith min Kitāb A'māl al-A'lam li-l-Wazīr al-Gharnāṭī Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb*, ed. A.M. al-'Abbādī and I. al-Kinānī, Casablanca, 1964. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn ʻIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Nu'mān, al-, *Iftitāḥ al-Da'wa*. 234.; see also, Ibn ʻIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 232; Nuwayrī, al-, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, 147; *Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-ʻArabī fī al-ʻAṣr al-Wasīṭ*. *al-Qism al-Thālith min Kitāb A'māl al-A'lam li-l-Wazīr al-Gharnāṭī Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb*, 43.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn ʻIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 201.

tal. Moreover, at al-Raqqa he was accused of practising immoralities with his eunuchs. Only the intervention of the local judge saved the situation. The judge assumed the task of selling the slaves for Ziyādat Allāh. They were sold at al-Raqqa, and no further traces of them have been preserved.<sup>36</sup>

For the Aghlabid period we have some information about *saqlabī* slaves in the possession of private individuals. One of them is mentioned as being owned by Abū l-‘Abbās ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭālib, the judge of Kairouan referred to above. The anecdote in which this *saqlabī* is mentioned is related by al-Mālikī and Ḥiyād.<sup>37</sup> Both authors repeatedly write *saqlabī*, and this is a good reason to prefer this transcription to *ṣiqillī*, which is provided by a later writer, Abū Zayd al-Dabbāgh, who gives an abridged version of the story and refers to the slave just once.<sup>38</sup> At least two *saqlabī* slaves are reported to have been owned by Abū ‘Abd Allāh the Shi‘ite. One of them served him as a guard,<sup>39</sup> another one travelled together with Abū ‘Abd Allāh to Sijilmassa to meet ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī.<sup>40</sup>

On presenting the information on the *saqlabī* slaves in the Aghlabid state, which we possess at present, one can make some final observations. The import of *Ṣaqāliba* slaves to North Africa appears to have continued throughout the ninth century, that is to say, during the whole period of the Aghlabid government. On reaching Africa some captives were purchased by the court, others by private individuals. The *saqlabī* slaves became particularly numerous at the end of the ninth century, when one can speak about a considerable number of the *Ṣaqāliba* at the court. However, they do not appear to have ever become influential at the Aghlabid court. There were at the court forces much more powerful than slaves - first of all, the emirs who could put the slaves to death at any moment, then members of the Aghlabid house, army officers, local noblemen etc. Therefore, although we sometimes see slaves performing important duties (B.lāgh commanding troops), they never had positions in the state similar to those of the *Ṣaqāliba* party in al-Andalus, or of Kāfir and others on Barjawān in Egypt. Moreover, in the Aghlabid state the *Ṣaqāliba* appear to have been greatly outnumbered by other slaves, first of all, the black slaves who, according to Ibn al-Athīr, were

<sup>36</sup> Nu‘man, al-, *Iftitāh al-Da‘wa*. 266-267.; Nuwayrī, al-, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*. 152.

<sup>37</sup> Mālikī, al-, *Kitāb Riyād al-Nufūs fī Ṭabaqāt ‘Ulamā’ al-Qayrawān wa Ifrīqiyyā...*, vol. 2. 380-381.; *Biographies aghlabides. Extraits des Madarik du cadi Iyad* (1083 - 1149). 217.

<sup>38</sup> Dabbāgh, al-, *Mā’ālim al-Imān fī Ma‘rifat Ahl al-Qayrawān*. Ed. M. al-Ahmārī Abū l-Nūr and M. Ḥādiq. *Maktabat al-Khanjī bi-MiÚr*, al-Maktaba al-‘Atīqa bi-Tūnis, 1972. P.2. 171-172.

<sup>39</sup> Mālikī, al-, *Kitāb Riyād al-Nufūs fī Ṭabaqāt ‘Ulamā’ al-Qayrawān wa Ifrīqiyyā...*, vol. 2. 63.; *Biographies aghlabides. Extraits des Madarik du cadi Iyad* (1083 - 1149). 356.

<sup>40</sup> Ivanow, W., *Ismaili Tradition concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, London etc.: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942. 216-217.

the support of the dynasty. The *Saqāliba* thus were mere palace servants, and their position is similar to the Andalusian *Saqāliba* of the same period, who were present at the court but still were not powerful.

Very important for us is the fact that emir Ibrāhīm spoke to his slave B.lāgh in a Slavic language. Some decades earlier Ibn Khurdādhbih had written that the *saqlabī* slaves were interpreters for Rūs' merchants when they came to Baghdad. One can conclude that the Slavic slaves brought to the Islamic world did not lose their mother tongue. Slaves employed at the court had, of course, more possibilities to preserve their language, for they could find countrymen among many slaves serving at the court, whereas slaves owned by private individuals usually remained alone among the Muslims.

After the downfall of the Aghlabid dynasty, *saqlabī* slaves did not disappear from Africa. When Abū 'Abd Allāh the Shi'ite entered Raqqāda, one of his first orders was to gather all the slaves. The black slaves were reportedly massacred, others were probably told to stay in Raqqāda and to wait for al-Mahdī, whom Abū 'Abd Allāh the Shi'ite was planning to fetch from Sijilmassa. When 'Ubayd Allāh came to Raqqāda, the *Saqāliba*, together with other slaves, were brought before him, and he gave each of them a job. The *saqlabī* slaves wrote several interesting pages into the history of the Fātimid state, but their history is rather a separate topic.