

THE HISTORY OF THE AL-JARKHAJI INSTITUTION IN BAGHDAD

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to review the institution of Al-Jarkhaji (Al-Charkhachi), or the Night Watchman, in the heritage of Baghdad and the whole of Iraq. What was Al-Jarkhaji? The term is of Turkish (Ottoman) origin (جي جرّخه), which means a guard, a watchman. In Iraqi reality, Al-Jarkhaji appeared to us as a night watchman, whose duty was to patrol the city streets on foot and maintain order. In the 18th-19th centuries, it was a kind of police unit that operated independently of other police, Janissary, and Mamluk units. The predecessors of al-Jarkhaji appeared on the scene as early as the reign of the four righteous caliphs. The term denoting them was “al-‘asasu” (العَسَسُ), which is also found in Georgian reality in the 17th-18th centuries. The institution of “asas” is found in medieval Georgia (mainly in eastern Georgia). In addition to the semantic similarity of the term, its practical meaning is also identical.

Keywords: *Al-Jarkhaji, night watchman, Georgia, Baghdad, military equipment, security symbol*

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The equipment of al-Jarkhaji changed over time. Initially, his armament included a sword, a dagger, and a drum. The latter was used by the night watchman to scare off thieves and to signal his nearby colleague that he was patrolling nearby. The night watchmen wore khaki shirt and khaki trousers. Depending on the season, they wore a khaki jacket and light shoes. They wore a white shamag on their heads, which was replaced by a red shamag during the British rule. From the end of the 19th century until the abolition of the Al-Jarkhaji Institute, the equipment of the Night Watchman changed. The Night Watchman's sword was replaced by an Ottoman (later English) rifle, he was given a small leather box hanging from his belt, which held five bullets, and the drum was replaced by a

whistle, which the Night Watchman carried in his jacket pocket. A small dagger was also attached to his belt. Very rarely, the Al-Jarkhaji would ride a donkey on his night patrol. Until 1918, the Night Watchmen were issued with free service clothes, but later the Al-Jarkhaji had to buy his own khaki trousers, a jacket with brass buttons, and shoes. During British rule, the Night Watchmen received a distinctive five-star insignia, which was worn either on the headdress or on the chest, as well as a circular badge with a number.

The public's attitude towards Al-Jarkhaji is also noteworthy. Iraqi authors describe the night watchmen as follows: "Al-Jarkhaji was a symbol that represented security. He protected those who were tired of the burden of the day's work and its consequences, so that they could rest peacefully and sleep." Based on a number of sources and studies, we can say that the night watchmen deserved great love and respect from the population of Baghdad and other cities in Iraq. It should also be noted that during the existence of the night watchman institution, many legends and anecdotes were created about Al-Jarkhaji, which indicates a positive attitude towards the night watchmen by citizens.

In 1918, at the beginning of British rule in Iraq, the Iraqi Criminal Procedure Code was issued, where the Al-Jarkhaji institution was renamed the "General Guards", while retaining all its rights and duties, and after the formation of the Kingdom of Iraq in 1921, this institution was abolished and merged with the police units.