

The Dhimmis and their Role in the Administration of the Fatimid State

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Abstract

One of the most recurring questions today is the Islamic state's relationship with the dhimmis (Jews and Christians living under early Muslim rule) and their status in the early days of Islam and up to the late days of the Islamic Caliphate. This relationship may have been varying, swinging up and down. Perhaps the more legitimate questions are: What were the factors that affected the nature of the Dhimmis relationship with the ruling power in the Islamic state? What was the status of the Dhimmis and what roles did they play in the early Islamic states, with the Fatimid Caliphate as a model? The Fatimid Caliphate rose up and centered in Egypt, which was then home for Coptic Christians and Jews, living side by side with Muslims. That is why the author has chosen the Fatimid State, in specific. Another driver for this selection is the fact that when the Fatimid Caliphate was ruling in Egypt, the Europeans were launching their Crusades in Jerusalem, which placed such a relationship between Muslims and Christians at stake.

Keywords: The Dhimmis, Fatimid State, Islamic history, Islamic civilization.

1. Internal factors in the Dhimmis relationship with the Fatimid Caliphate

The caliphs' young age was one of the factors that contributed to strengthening the relationship between the Dhimmis and the ruling power. Some of them assumed power at the age of seven, (427-487AH / 1036-1094 AD)¹, and this had significantly contributed to the instability of the state. Throughout the period of his rule, the caliph was under the authority of the ministers, as in the case of Abu al-Qasim Ali Bin Abdullah Jerjani², whose mother controlled the affairs of the state³.

In fact, these factors had an impact on the distribution of the actual power between the Minister and the caliph. Each of them started to form a special power protected by special entourage of slaves and private security guards, in addition to keeping private safe deposits of their own. This situation affected the central military force, which eventually raised discord among the Turks, who used to form the basic element of the army, and the private militias. However, the ordinary population was to pay the price for this situation physically and financially⁴.

³ Al-Maqrizi, Ahmed bin Ali (1441). Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa. Edited by Jamal Addin Ashayal, Cairo, 2nd ed., Vol. 2, p. 187.

² Ali bin Ahmed al-Jerjara'i Is Caliph al-Thaher li-Izazidinillah's Minister. He was a double arm amputee. The claim is that Caliph Al-Hakim bi Amr Allāh amputated them in 404 H / 1013 AD. He was an Iraqi Fatimid, and became a minister in 418 AH / 1027 AD. He died in 436 AH / 1044 AD. See: Ibn al-Sairafi, Ali bin Munjeb (542 H / 1147 AD), (Bibliographies for those who won ministries), Editor: Abdullah al-Mukhles, Cairo, The French Scientific Institute, p. 78; Noueiri, Ahmed bin Abdul Wahhab (733 H / 1332 AD). Nehayato Al-Arab Fee Foonon Al-Adab, Editor: Mufid Qmeiha, Beirut, Dar Al-kutuk al'elmeyyeh, ed. 1, 2004, vol 28, p. 132.

³ Maqrizi Itti'ath Al-Honafa' , vol. 2, p. 184.

⁴) Ibid , P. 267.

On the other hand, during the era of Minister Abi Mansour Sadaqa Bin Yousef Alfalahi⁵, the conflict had strengthened the power of Najm Abi Saad Altistri, the Jewish servant of the Caliph's mother. Due to the caliph's mother pressure on her son to turn a blind eye to the servant's abuses, the minister's authority started to weaken⁶. In order to restore his executive power, the minister sparked fighting between the army forces themselves. As a result, the Caliph's authority weakened as he became unable to punish those responsible for the sedition⁷. He yielded to the pressure of his mother; yet he eventually took his vengeance and killed Altistri in 440 H / 1048 (AD).⁸

These internal conflicts produced the so-called Ashiddah Al-Mustansiruya⁹ (distress), which persisted for seven years starting from 457 H / 1064 AD, leading to the spread of diseases and deaths as a result of drought in Egypt. The Turks were forced to reconcile with Ibn Hamdan on the condition that he should live by the lake and regain his property. In return, the siege on the people of Nazareth was lifted¹⁰. However, this did not last for long; the conflict rose at its peak until Ibn Hamdan was killed in 465 H / 1073 AD¹¹. All of that drove Egypt into a state of political and security chaos. The disorder was so sweeping that the power of the Caliph was confined to the palace only. He, therefore, asked for the help of Minister Badr al-Jamali¹² in 466 H / 1074 AD, who restored order in favor of the Caliph after the integration of the Armenians in the army. He, then, became Minister of the sword and the pen¹³.

2. External factors in the relationship between the Dhimmis and the Fatimid Caliphate

During the reign of Empress Theodora, relations between the Fatimid Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire were strained because of the Empress's hostile policy towards the Fatimids. At that time, the Fatimids' power started to wane in the *Maghreb* (Northwest Africa) countries, and they faced difficulties in Egypt. This situation coerced Al-Mustansir to seize the treasures of the Holy Sepulcher Church and take the Patriarch out of it. The Caliph closed off the churches of Egypt and the Levant and asked the monks to pay the *Jizya* (money paid by non-Muslims in the Islamic State) for four years in advance. As a reaction to Empress Theodora's behavior, Al-Muntasir also increased the amount of *Jizya* imposed on the Christians. This strained the relations between the Fatimids and the Byzantines. Since then, the estrangement between the Fatimids and the Byzantines had continued until the beginning of the Crusades¹⁴.

Following Caliph Al-Ma'moun's arrest, a lot of confiscations, harms and lootings were done by a monk known as Abu Shuja' Bin Qasa. This monk used to serve Wali (governor) Aba Albarakat Bin Yahya Bin Abi Laith. Then, he contacted Al-Amir and asked him to give him a free-hand.

⁵ Sadaqa bin Yousef al-Falahi was a Jew who converted to Islam and became a Fatimid. He was brilliant in writing and rhetoric. Al-Falahi fled from Syria to Cairo where he became a minister in 436 H / 1044 AD. In 440 H, he was killed / See: Ibn al-Sairafi, p. 76; al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, 191.

⁶ Ibn Maiser, Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (Lit. News from Egypt), p. 5; Noueiri, Nehayato Al-Arab Fee Fonoon Al-Adab (Lit. Purpose of Arts), vol. 28, p. 137; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, 195.

⁷ Ibn Assairafi, (Bibliographies for those who won ministries), p. 75; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, 195.

⁸ Ibn Maiser, Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (News from Egypt), p. 5; Noueiri, Nehayato Al-Arab Fee Fonoon Al-Adab, vol. 28, p. 137; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, 196.

⁹ To be discussed later in this article.

¹⁰ Noueiri, Nehayato Al-Arab Fee Fonoon Al-Adab, vol. 28, p. 147; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar Al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 305; Ayman Sayed, The Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt, p. 203; Srour, The Fatimid Caliphate, p. 106.

¹¹ Ibn Maiser, Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (News from Egypt), 336-39; Noueiri, Nehayato Al-Arab Fee Fonoon Al-Adab, vol. 28, p. 232; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 310; Ibn Taghri Burdy, An-nojoom Az-zahi, p. 23-21; Srour, The Fatimid Caliphate, p. 107.

¹² Badr al-Jamali was an Armenian. Jamal Addawla Ben Ammar bought and raised him. He was nicknamed Ameer Al-joyoush (Prince of Forces). He ruled Damascus and the rest of the Levant. Al-Jamali died in 488 H / 1095 AD. Ibn al-Sairafi, Al-Ishara (The Bibliography), p. 56-55. Also, see Ibn Alqalansi, Hamza bin Alqalansi (555 H / 1160 AD) Thail Tareekh Dimashq, Beirut: Jesuites Press 1908, p. 128-127; Ibn Khalikan, Wafiyat Al-A'yan (Biographies of the Notables), vol. 2, p. 448; Al-Safadi, Al-wafi Bi A-lwafeyat (Selection of Biographies), vol. 10, p. 95.

¹³ Ibn Maiser, Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (News from Egypt), p. 56.

¹⁴ Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 230; Al-mawa'iz wa Al-l'tibar (Lit. Lessons), vol. 2, p. 158; Anan, Mist al-Islamiya (Muslim Egypt), p. 119.

The governor acquiesced and so Bin Qasa confiscated one hundred thousand dinars from the Christian community. This case of confiscation also extended to include all the leaders of Egypt, its judges and clerks¹⁵.

3. Positions Held by the Dhimmisi in the Fatimid Period

3.1 The Secretariat

The position of being a minister was the highest the Dhimmis could have assumed during the Fatimid rule. This indicates the flexibility of the Fatimid authority in accepting the idea of power-sharing with the Dhimmis. On the other hand, it may indicate that the Fatimid authority was in trouble as it could not trust Sunni Muslims, especially amid the Fatimid Shi'ite-Sunni dispute. Thus, the Fatimid authority was in need for loyal supporters from the People of the Book (Jews and Christians). That step can also be regarded as a kind of pleasing and satisfying the great number of Christian population in Egypt.

Of those ministers was Bahram Al-Armani, who was brought in by Prince El Hasan during the crisis with his father. So, he asked him to bring Armenians with him to strengthen his position¹⁶. By the time Bahram became very close to Cairo, Al-Hafiz had been able to end the sedition which was started by his son, Al-Hasan. On Friday 16th of *Jumada al-Akhira* (529 H / March 1035 AD), Al-Hafiz showed up at Bahram's ministry and called him "The most glorious, Commander of Forces, the Sword of Islam, Crown of the Caliphate, Protector of the Imam, Helper of the Nation, Abi al- Muthaffar Bahram Hafithi"¹⁷ As such, he was the first Christian to assume secretariat¹⁸. Because he was Christian, senior statesmen advised Al-Hafiz not to give him the secretariat of the state as it was a requirement for the secretary (the minister) to show up with the Imam during the holidays. He did not take their advice, and so he made the judge his representative when stepping onto the pulpit. In addition, he did not ascribe him with any religious matters¹⁹. During Friday prayers, Bahram used to sit alone until the prayer was over²⁰.

Bahram wanted to increase the influence of the Armenians, and thus he asked Al-Hafiz to allow him to bring his brothers and his family from the land of the Armenians, specifically from his home town, Tel Bashir. Bahram was authorized to bring about a thousand people. Though the number might have been exaggerated, it shows how much influence they had exerted at that time. From that number of Armenians, he formed troops to strengthen his position. They attacked Muslims, who later suffered a lot from the injustice of the Armenians. At the same time, those newly coming Armenians built many churches and monasteries, to the extent that every Armenian leader built his own church. The Armenians' number raised concerns among Muslims; the Egyptians were afraid that the religion of Islam might be changed. Bahram made his brother, Vasak, (or Basak) the seignior of Qus, which, at that time, was one of the greatest counties of Egypt. Vasak exploited his brother's power and went too far in oppressing Muslims and confiscating their property²¹.

Bahram's tyranny in Egypt provoked the Muslims, and so the latter asked Radwan bin Walkhashi, the ruler of al-Sharqiyah, to help them against Bahram. Radwan declared jihad against Bahram, advanced towards Cairo and was able to defeat Bahram, especially with the help of the Muslims who abandoned Bahram's army and joined Radwan's. Consequently, Bahram was forced to walk out with his Armenian friends to Aswan in order to ally with the Nuba Christian people against Radwan²². After entering Cairo, Radwan had taken over the ministry and sent an army led by his brother Nasser Eddin al-Awhed Ibrahim to chase Bahram²³. The Caliph and Bahram clinched an agreement which guaranteed security for Bahram and his relatives. However, with the help of Roger II of Sicily, Radwan's campaign was stopped. Bahram stayed in the 'white monasteries' near Ekhmim²⁴ where he remained until 533 H / 1138 AD.

¹⁵ Ibn Khallikan, *Wafiyat Al-A'yan* (Deaths of the Notables), vol. 5, p. 299-302. Athahabi, *Seyar Al-A'lam* (Lit. Biographies of the Notables), vol. 11, p. 447.

¹⁶ Ibid, Ibn Maiser, *Picked News from Egypt*, p. 121.

¹⁷ Ibid, P. 44; m. N., P. 122.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ () Ibn Maiser, *Almontaqa min akhbar Misr* (News from Egypt), p. 44; Ibid, P. 123.

²⁰ Al-Maqrizi, *Almoqaffa* (Lit. The Rhymed), vol. 2, p. 514.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa*, vol. 3, p. 161; Taqosh, Mohammed Sohail, *History of the Fatimids in North Africa, Egypt and the Levant*, p. 405-412.

²³ Ibn Al-Atheer, *Al-kamel fee Attareekh* (Lit. All about history), vol. 11, p. 48.

²⁴ Ibn Maiser, *Almontaqa min akhbar Misr* (News from Egypt), p. 126.

He told his family that they can either stay in Egypt or leave to Tel Bashir, a fortress town to the north of Aleppo²⁵. To cut Radwan's authority, the Caliph accommodated Bahram in his palace and promoted him to be his special adviser. This made Radwan flee in fear for his life. Radwan, though, was the first Sunni to be ascribed a Fatimid ministry. He played an important role in getting rid of Ahmad Bin Badr al-Jamali in 526 H / 1131 AD²⁶.

The Fatimids did not differentiate between their ministers. Some of those ministers were Dhimmis who recently converted to Islam in the hope of winning a ministerial position or any other administrative position. For example, Al-Hafiz Li-Dinillah ascribed the ministry to Bahram, the Armenian Christian, in 529 H / 1134 AD. When Bahram died, the Caliph was deeply grieved²⁷. Likewise, the ministry was ascribed to Sunni Muslims, such as Radwan Bin Walakhshi during al-Hafiz Li-Dinillah's period²⁸.

3.2 Administration of the Diwan

Many Dhimmis had run the Diwan (a high governmental body in a Caliphate), including:

3.2.1 State Diwan

This Diwan was established by Minister al-Afdal in 501 AH / 1107 AD. It was first administrated by the Crown of State Abu Albarakat John Bin Abi al-Laith. Ibn Maiser renamed that Diwan 'the Kingdom's Diwan'²⁹. Following the fall of the Fatimids, the Diwan was dissolved. In addition to State Diwan, there used to be the "Private Diwan" which catered for the expenses of both the Caliph and the palace. It used to be part of the Council's Diwan, and so they were referred to as the Private - Council Diwans³⁰. Usually, those Diwans were named after the incumbent Caliph³¹.

3.2.2 Excise Diwan

Founded at the end of Caliph Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah's reign, this Diwan was responsible for collecting taxes. That position was occupied by a Muslim official named Ibn Qirat, who was in charge of administrating and controlling the financial affairs of the state. However, during the reign of Caliph Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah, the position was given to Al-Akhram Al-Nasrani³².

3.2.3 Waqf (religious endowment) Diwan

The Waqf Diwan was responsible for the detention of specific property and money in the ownership of Waqf. Usually, the judges used to run the affairs of that Diwan. The Fatimids showed inconsistencies in the management of the Waqf funds. Sometimes, they ascribed the position of running the fund to Christians as in the case of Ibn Nastoros and Abu Ghalib al-Dubby al-Nasrani³³.

Confiscations had increased in Egypt and Cairo in 522 H / 1128 AD to reach an amount of 100,000 dinars, only from a group of Christians³⁴. Ibn Thafer referred to that unfair tax policy in his book *Akhbar al-duwal al-munqatiah* (News of Distant States) saying that no one was left unharmed: hitting, looting and confiscating money³⁵. That situation deteriorated into scourge in all the land of Egypt, and businessmen had to flee the country³⁶. When Caliph Al-Hākim bi Amr Allāh assumed power, he appointed three diwan officials in 519 H / 1125 AD to collect the Zakah and Makous (taxes).

²⁵ Al-Hamawi, Mo'jam al-boldan (Lit. Lexicon of Countries), vol. 2, p. 40.

²⁶ Al-Maqrizi, Al-khitat (Lit. The plans), vol. 2, p. 203; Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 3, p. 157.

²⁷ Ibn Maiser, News from Egypt, vol. 2, p. 56-58; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 267.

²⁸ Al-Sairafi, Al-Ishara (The Bibliography), p. 48-49.

²⁹ Ibn Maiser, Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (News from Egypt), p. 90.

³⁰ Al-Maqrizi, Al-khitat (The plans), vol. 1, p. 84; Asayyed, Addawla al-Fatimiya (The Fatimid State), p. 355.

³¹ Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 249; Asayyed, Addawla al-Fatimiya (The Fatimid State), p. 355.

³²) Ibn Maiser Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (News from Egypt), p. 140; Mahameed, Tataworat (Lit. Developments), p. 148.

³³ Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 161.

³⁴ Ibn Thafir, Al-dowal Al-monqati'a (Lit. Former Sovereign States), p. 88-89.

³⁵) Ibid.

³⁶ Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 222.

The first was a Muslim named Ja'far bin Abdul-Mun'em bin Abi Qirat; the second was a Samaritan Jew named Abu Yacoub Ibrahim³⁷; and the third was a Christian clerk named Abu Najah bin Qena³⁸. The Caliph used to call the Christian clerk the 'Holy Father, spiritual, precious, father of parents, Preacher of Christianity and the Master of the Patriarchate'. Then, Bin Qena was promoted into the chief manager of the diwans. Overweening by the new position, he confiscated 100,000 dinars from the Christian Copts. Likewise, he confiscated funds from judges, clerks and witnesses, in addition to levying new taxes and fees. This made the traders flee the country and the people started to complain. Then, Caliph Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah investigated the case and ordered Egypt's ruler to take him to the police and beat him with slippers to death. His body was thrown in the Nile and pulled into the Mediterranean Sea in 523 H / 1129 AD³⁹.

Coptic Patriarchs also protested against paying the Jizya complaining that those who abandon the world and live in the mountains should not be required to pay the Jizya⁴⁰. During the reign of Caliph Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah, the Copts had to pay the Jizya to the Estate Diwan,⁴¹ and the monks were forced to pay it on behalf of the poor in their communities⁴². The rates of the Jizya ranged between two dinars, one dinar and two-thirds of the dinar⁴³. Those in charge of collecting the Jizya would receive 15-20 dinars a month⁴⁴. In 531 H / 1137 AD, during the rule of Caliph Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah, Minister Radwan bin Walakhsi doubled the raised the rate to become two and then three dinars, levied only on lodging, today's equivalent to municipal tax⁴⁵.

Under the rule of Caliph Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah, monk Abu Najah bin Qena continued such confiscations, which then included the funds of Christians and others. The monk continued to do so until the Caliph issued an order to kill him in 543 H / 1129 AD⁴⁶.

4. Officials

The Christians were largely employed in the era of Al-Afdal⁴⁷. After the murder of Minister Al-Ma'moun al-Bata'ih, Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah was not able to manage the state alone because he had been away from the state affairs for a long time. Therefore, he had to hire two people to collect the Zakah and Makous (taxes). The first was a Muslim named Abu El Fadl Ja'far bin Abdel Mun'em bin Abi Qirat,⁴⁸ and the second was a Samaritan Jew named Abu Jacob Al-Kateb⁴⁹. Monk Najah Bin Qena used to help them in their work⁵⁰.

³⁷ Al-Maqrizi, Al-khitat (The plans), vol. 2, p. 291.

³⁸ From Ashmun Tanah near Damietta. He came to Cairo and contacted John Ben Abu Laith, the Council's clerk. Al-Maqrizi; Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 223.

³⁹ Sayyed, Addawla al-Fatimiya) The Fatimid State), p. 174-175.

⁴⁰ Cyrus, Tareekh Al-batariqa (Lit. History of the Patriarchs), vol. 1, p. 47.

⁴¹ Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 20; Cyrus, the history of the Patriarchs m 2, C 3, p. 218.

⁴² Cyrus, Tareekh Al-batariqa (Lit. History of the Patriarchs), vol. 2, p. 129.

⁴³ Majed, Nozom Al-Fatimiyeen (The Fatimid Systems), p. 119-120.

⁴⁴ Ibn At-Tuwayr, Nozhat al-moqlatain, p. 50-84.

⁴⁵ Al-Maqrizi, Al-manhaj (Lit. The Methodology), p. 35; Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 247; Sayyed, Adawla al-Fatimiya (The Fatimid State), p. 198-199.

⁴⁶ Ibn Maiser, Almontaqa min akhbar Misr (News from Egypt), p. 83- 115, Noueiri, Nehayato Al-Arab Fee Foonon Al-Adab, vol. 26, p. 86.

⁴⁷ Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 3, p 39.43, 76.126.

⁴⁸ He was better known as Ibn Abi Qrat, who worked in the Fatimid Diwans in the time of Al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah. He was arrested and dismissed from his position because of financial issues. (Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 2, p. 125).

⁴⁹ Abu Yacoub Ibrahim Assamiri was a clerk and in charge of a Diwan in the tim of Al-Amir. He was arrested and fired dismissed from his job because of money looting in 523 H. (Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 3, p. 125.

⁵⁰ Ibn Attuwair, Nozhat Almoqlatain, pp. 20-23. After the murder of Al-Ma'moun Al-Bata'ehi, the Samaritan Ibn Qena contacted Al-Amir and confiscated one hundred thousand dinars from the Christian community. Then he increased the confiscations. Al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah nicknamed him the Saint Father, President, Preacher of Christianity and master of the Patriarchate, and the thirteenth Disciple of Christ. This enabled him to increase his influence and enhance his power, and so he abused the Muslims and doubled the confiscations. Al-Maqrizi, Itti'ath Al-Honafa' biakhbar al-aimma Al-fatemiyeen Al-Kholafa, vol. 3, p. 117 .

5. Status of the Dhimmis

5.1 The Christians

The Fatimid policy toward the Christians did not take one form. Some Fatimids appointed Christians as ministries, whereas others persecuted and oppressed them severely. Under Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah rule, monk Abu Najah bin Qena was nominated to be in charge of the Diwans in 520 H / 1126 AD. Because of the considerable influence of the Christians on the military institution, Muslims started to grumble. During the reign of Caliph Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah, an Armenian Christian minister named Bahram was appointed. That situation continued to be in favor with the Christians until Radwan bin Walakhshi was given the ministry and started to restrain the Christians' power in the country⁵¹.

During the rule of Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah (544 H / 1149 AD), the status of the Armenians was at its zenith. The Christians got the highest and the elite positions in the state and their influence developed in an unprecedented way in the Diwans, administration branches, regions, army and in areas of science and medicine. Al-Hafiz gave full care to the Christians, treated all sincere Christian officials well, and he admired their administrative and scientific efforts. Only in his last days, after the rising complaints from Muslims, he revoked high positions from the Christians⁵².

During the reign of Caliph Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah (495-524 H / 1101-1130 AD), the Jacobin Copts emerged as part of state administration. Some of them were clerks, such as Sheikh Abu al-Afdal bin al-Asquf Kateb al-Afdal⁵³. Abu al-Barakat John al-Kateb Ibn Abu Laith remained in charge of the State Diwan until he was killed in 528 H / 1133 AD⁵⁴. However, both Abu Shaker al-Kateb Al-eskandarani, who converted to Islam and circumcised at the age of forty,⁵⁵ and Abu al-Yemen and his son, Abu al-Mansour, also used to work with Minister al-Afdal Shahan-shah⁵⁶.

When Caliph Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah 524 -544 H / 1130-1149 AD rose to throne, Abu al-Fakhr became the clerk of salaries in the Diwan⁵⁷. Those Coptic officials maintained their Christianity during their work in the state. Below is a brief bibliography of some of the Coptic Jacobean Patriarchs who took high positions under the reign of Caliph Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah (524-544h / 1130-1149 AD):

5.1.1 Gabriel Ben Trek, Abu al-Ala Sa'ed⁵⁸:

Ben Trek worked together with his father in the Diwans of the Fatimid Caliphate. Also, he served as a deacon in the "Abu Markoureh" Church in Egypt⁵⁹. At the age of fifty, he ascended to the Patriarchal throne in 526 H / 1131 AD⁶⁰. He had worked on the renewal of the Coptic Church, and so he put a number of ecclesiastical and civil laws, such as the inheritance law. Gabriel died in April AD⁶¹.

5.1.2 Morcos al-Dareer bin Mawhoub bin Al-qunber:

Bin Al-qunber worked in the Diwans of the Fatimid Caliphate nearly in 539 H / 1143 AD. He was one of the reformers in the era of patriarch Morcos Abi al-Faraj bin Zar'ah. He was patriarch number seventy-two of all Coptic patriarchs⁶². His reforms included the following:

- Prevention of inbreeding.
- Prohibition of drinking wine, circumcision and using incense in churches.
- Rethinking the previous interpretations of the Gospels.

⁵¹ Al- Qalqashandi, Sobh Al-A'sha, vol. 6, p. 460.

⁵² -Qalqashandi, Sobh Al-A'sha, vpl. 6, p. 461.

⁵³ Ibn Saleh Al-Armani, History, p. 44; Brockelmann, Al-sho'ob Al-islamiya (Lit. Muslim Peoples), 254.

⁵⁴ Ibn Saleh Al-Armani, History, p. 64-65; Ibn Arraheb, Bibliography of Abi Shaker, p. 84-85.

⁵⁵ Ibn Saleh Al-Armani, History, p. 50.

⁵⁶ Ibid, P. 85.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ar-Rahib , Bibliography of Abi Shaker, p. 139.

⁵⁹ Christian Church in which prayers were held on Sundays. It was built in a modern style. See: Documents of Sainte Catherine, Document No. 21.

⁶⁰ Kanawati, Christianity, p. 204.

⁶¹ Ibn Ar-Rahib , Bibliography of Abi Shaker, p. 139.

⁶² Ibid, p. 140.

He had 5000 followers from the Copts⁶³.

The Jacobean Coptic Church issued a deprivation against him.

Some of his books: *Interpretation of the Gospels*, *The Ten Heads* and *The Teacher and the Pupil*⁶⁴.

5.1.3 Michael Ben al-Daqqaq:

He was a monk in Denshawai in Egypt. He took over the Coptic Patriarchate for nine days 539 H / 1144 AD, and died on Good Friday⁶⁵. Both Al-Amir and Al-Hafiz li-Dinillah were interested in renovating the Christian monasteries in Egypt. During the reign of Caliph Al-Amir Bi Ahkam Allah (495 H / 1101 AD-524 AH / 1130)⁶⁶, such renovations included the monasteries of Tamwyah⁶⁷ Smut, al-'Asal⁶⁸, Martute, Asseluqiyeh⁶⁹, Mary Saba⁷⁰ and Abu Qaltah. Minister al-Afdal bin Badr al-Jamali considered Tamonah monastery as his own park⁷¹. Mart Mary Church was destroyed during Al-Hassan bin al-Hafiz li-Dinillah's revolution in 528 H / 1134 AD⁷². Given the good Jacobean Coptic Patriarch's relationship with Caliph al-Hafiz li-Dinillah, the Bishop of Onfeikh area was promoted to the rank of patriarch. The patriarch promised Caliph al-Hafiz to tell him about the epics and biographies of the past. The patriarch was also allowed to come to the palace on Mondays and Thursdays in order to update the caliph on the developments of every Friday. He continued to do so until the death of al-Hafiz in 544 H / 1149 AD⁷³.

On the other hand, the Syriac patriarch⁷⁴ used to regulate his denomination's relationship with the Fatimid Caliphate. The Christians of this denomination used to live in al-Khandaq in Cairo and Alexandria. Some members of the Syriac community had worked as traders in Alexandria⁷⁵.

5.2 The Jews

The Jews were the biggest winners under the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt. Most of the Jewish schools were founded and flourished in that period. Jacob bin Killis was the first Jew to assume the Fatimid secretariat in the late era of the state⁷⁶.

The intellectual movement, as well, was vibrant among the Jews during the time of Al-Amir, especially in the field of medicine. The Jew Ephraim Ben Olphan was a renowned physician who wrote hundreds of scientific and medical journals⁷⁷. In 519 H / 1125 AD, the Jewish physician Yusuf Abu Jaafar bin Hasdai, who lived in Cairo, won reputation and served as a physician during the reign of Al-Amir. In the same year, another Jew, named Ibn Abi Addam, was appointed in *Diwan alinsha'a* (composition Diwan)⁷⁸. At the beginning of his reign, Al-Hafiz patronized the Jews. However, following mounting complaints from Muslims, he stopped to nominate the Jews to high state positions, claiming that their mistakes had harmed the reputation of the Caliph and his subjects⁷⁹.

Conclusion

We would like to make the point— as the discussion has suggested— that the Fatimid Caliphate had put the Christians and Jews on equal footing with their Muslim nationals.

⁶³ Ibn Saleh Armeni, Tareekh (Lit. History), pp. 12-22.

⁶⁴ Ibid, P. 22.

⁶⁵ Ibn Ar-Rahib, Bibliography of Abi Shaker, p. 140.

⁶⁶ On scholars' different views regarding restoring monasteries and churches in Egypt, See: Documents of Saint Katrina Monastery, document No. 176; As-Sabki, Revealing conspiracies, pp. 23-49.

⁶⁷ Ibn Sakih Al-Armani, Tareekh (Lit. History), p. 85.

⁶⁸ Ibid, P. 112.

⁶⁹ Ibid, P. 57.

⁷⁰ Ibid, P. 64.

⁷¹ Ibid, P. 44.

⁷² Ibid, P. 68.

⁷³ Ibid, P. 3.

⁷⁴ Ibn Ar-rahib, Bibliography of Ibn Shaker, p. 133; The Syriac- Arabic Dictionary, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁵ Cyrus, History of the Church, p. 91, and pp. 225-226.

⁷⁶ Al-Qalqashandi, Sobh Al-A'sha, vol. 2, p. 226; Olinar Barakat, The Jews of Egypt in the Fatimid Era, Tel Aviv University, 1995, p. 62; Jacob Lev, The Jews in Egypt, Haifa, p. 198.

⁷⁷ Ibn Abi Usaibi', Oyoon Al-Anba (Lit. Selected bibliographies), p. 567.

⁷⁸ Mann, J. the Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs, 2 voll, Oxford 1969, vol.1, p 228; Al-Maqrizi, Khitat, vol. 2, p. 472.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p230.

To do so, it pursued a policy of tolerance and encouraged the Dhimmis integration in the state's institutions. Incidences of Dhimmis assuming high positions were quite numerous. That was, probably, due to both internal factors (related to the ruling dynasty) and external factors (such as the Crusades). The great number of Christians and Jews in Egypt at the time was also a main driver for that policy. The Dhimmis assumed critical positions, such as the secretariat and the administration of the diwans. Some of the Dhimmis misused those positions by causing official oppression and rent-seeking purposes or only to cater for their own denomination. That is why they were sometimes subject to collective punishment (e.g. confiscating their property by the Fatimid authority).

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