

# JEWES AND CHRISTIANS UNDER THE MUSLIM RULE

Dr. Kersey Antia, Jan 16, 2020

A shorter version of the order of the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil severely limiting freedom of all Dhimmi (non-Muslims):

“In that year (235/850), al-Mutawakkil ordered that the Christians and all the rest of the ahl-al-dhimma be made to wear honey-colored head covering and the zunnar belts.” They were to ride on saddles with wooden stirrups, and two balls were to be attached to the rear of their saddles. He required them to attach two buttons on their caps – those of them that wore this cap. And it was to be of a different color from the qalansuwa worn by Muslims. He further required them to affix two patches on the exterior of their slaves’ garments. The color of these patches had to be different from that of the garment. One of the patches was to be worn in front on the breast and the other on the back. Each of the patches should measure four fingers in diameter. They too were to be honey-colored. Whosoever of them wears a turban, its color was likewise to be honey-colored. If any of their women went out veiled, they had to be enveloped in a honey-colored izar. He further commanded that their slaves be made to wear the zunnair and be forbidden to wear the mintaqa.”

He gave orders that any of their houses of worship built after the advent of Islam were to be destroyed and that one-tenth of their homes be confiscated. If the place was spacious enough, it was to be converted into a mosque. If it was not suitable for a mosque, it was to be made an open space. He commanded that wooden images of devils be nailed to the doors of their homes to distinguish them from the homes of Muslims.

It is human nature to welcome the shift in rulers and hope the new one would turn out better. It is hard to conceive that the Jews really preferred the Arab rule over the Persian rule in view of the fact that Arabs saw themselves in conflict with the Arabs in Medina where the Arabs fought three devastating, humiliating wars with them, capturing all their properties, (al-Tabri, *Ta'rikh al-Rusual wa'l-Muluk*, vol. 3, J.J. DeGoeje et al. (Leiden, 1879), pp. 1389-90.) which was rather long before they conquered Iran. This is all the more puzzling as most scholars, including the scholars of Judaism note harmonious relations between the Sasanian and the Jews, as I have noted already. I quote below al-Jahiz’s critical perception of the Jews by the Arabs of the day, though not uncritically as al-Jahiz’s basis of judging this issue may not

be correct and ultimately the Arabs do not turn out to be so cordial to the Christians, as already noted.

### **Further Views of Al-Jahiz on the Jews:**

“One of the reasons why the masses respect them (the Christians) and the vulgar have affection for them is that among them are to be found government secretaries, attendants of kings, physicians of nobles, perfumers, and bankers; whereas, you will find a Jew only as a dyer, a tanner, a cupper, a butcher, or a tinker.

So when the masses saw the Jews and Christians in this light, they imagined that the Jews’ religion held the same place amongst the other religions as do their trades amongst the professions, and that their unbelief was the most contaminated even as they were the filthiest of peoples. The reason that the Christians are less hideous – though they certainly are ugly – is that the Israelite marries only another Israelite, and all of their deformity is brought back among them and confined within them. Foreign elements do not intermingle with them, and the virility found in other races is not crossbred into them. They have, therefore, not been distinguished either for their intelligence, their physique, or their cleverness.” *al-Jahiz, al-Radd 'ala'l-Nasara*, ed. Joshua Finkel (Cairo, 1926), pp. 17-18.