

WANING OF ARABS' ZEAL FOR FIGHTING FOR FAITH

Dr. Kersey Antia, Sep 29, 2019

As regards the claim that the Persians were so disenchanted with their rulers and religion that they readily welcomed the Arab invaders, a phenomena hardly known to history, it is noteworthy that the Arabs themselves got demoralized and lost their zeal to fight for their faith soon after accrual of power and its attendant entitlements as I have pointed out.

As G.W. Bowersock, et. al. (editors) also noted in “*Late Antiquity*” (Howard University Press, 1999, p. 225): “There was no provision for new, post-conquest converts to enter the *diwan*. As conversion gathered pace, the pressure from those outside the system increased until it became irresistible. At the same time, the hereditary militia whose names did appear on the *diwan* became increasingly militarily ineffective. Like 18th century janissaries in the Ottoman empire, they rarely took up arms except in defense of their own privileges and even then they were not especially successful. As a military force for policing and defending the empire, they were virtually useless.

Unable to rely on this cumbersome and inflexible system, the Umayyad and early Abbasid rulers tried to step outside it. The later Umayyads recruited troops from the Bedouin tribes of the Syria desert, whether or not their ancestors had fought in the original conquests, and set about finding resources to pay them. The Abbasid, unable to draw on the Syrian tribes who had supported their rivals, looked outside the Muslim world entirely and began to employ Turkish mercenaries and slaves, recruited in Central Asia.

By the reign of the aliph al-Mu'tasim (833-842), the old *diwan* system had broken down almost entirely. The hereditary Muslim militia had been replaced by a professional army paid from the land-tax *kharaj* imposed on Muslim and non-Muslim alike though, of course, non-Muslims were still obliged to pay the *jizya* or poll tax). In a curious way the raising of taxes and armies had come full circle; the Muslim rulers of the 9th century operated a system broadly similar to that of their Byzantine and Sassanian predecessors in late antiquity.

Nor was this similarity entirely unconscious. Muslim rulers and, even more, their bureaucrats knew that they were following pre-Islamic models of state-craft and they became proud of it. However the legacy they looked to was not Byzantine but Sassanian. This was partly because many of the bureaucrats were themselves of Persian origin. Thus, while

the Arabs' zeal for fighting for Islam dwindled soon, the Persians' zeal to safeguard and preserve their ancient faith lasted for millennia and even long after the Arab conquest in various forms of rebellions as I have noted in detail.