

THE FALLACY THAT PERSIANS WILLINGLY EMBRACED ARAB RULE OR EVEN WELCOMED

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The Mawalis or the Persians converted to Islam played an important role in defeating the Umayyad Arab rule in Iran. As W. M. Watt states they even joined the Shi'ite phenomena, which was until then, entirely confined to the Arabs, in 685, when they became involved in Al-mukhtar's Alid (Shi'ite movement, *The Formation Period of Islamic Thought*, University Press, Edinburgh, 1973, pp. 44-47). I see the need to quote Watt at length here to avoid any impression of partiality in order to bring out the reality of the Mawalis remaining resentful of the Arabs as they had to convert to Islam to escape death after being taken as prisoners-of-war or under some kind of duress, as otherwise they would not have done so.

Watt quotes van Vloten as maintaining that the overthrow of the Umayyad rule was due to three factors - "the inveterate hatred of the subject population for its foreign oppressors," Shi'ism and the expectation of a liberator or messiah which to me or any Iranist seems to be a quintessentially Zoroastrian theme. But "it was less a question of Persians against Arabs than of oppressed subjects (mostly Iranian) against the ruling class (mostly Arabs)." Vloten stresses the use of messianic themes and symbols and links these to a specifically "non-Arab" extremist Shi'ism, which was brewing up then in Kerfah and other Mawali centers. (p. 117).

In view of his claim to be 'defending the weak', it seems likely that from the first al-Mukhtar had considerable support from *mawali*, but the conflict of interest between Arabs and *mawali* created difficulties for him. The *mawali* accused him of favouring the Arabs, and the Arabs objected to the *mawali* receiving any share at all of the spoil. Some influential Arabs withdrew their support, and in the later stages of the revolt al-Mukhtar came to rely more on *mawali*. It is noteworthy that his followers, though sometimes called Mukhtariyya by the heresiographers, are more usually spoken of as Kaysaniyya who was almost certainly the man with the *kunya* Abu-Amra, who was the most distinguished of the *mawali* supporting al-Mukhtar and chief of his bodyguard. It "was presumably a pejorative nickname first applied by opponents in order to discredit the group."

Julius Wellhausen and many other scholars believe that an

important result (not the cause) of the al-Mukhtar's revolt was to bring the *mawali* to fuller awareness of themselves as a political force. Legally there were three classes of *mawali*; *mawla rahim*, *mawla ataqā*, *mawla l'-adh*; namely, a man became a *mawla* (sing. Of *mawali*) by kinship, by emancipation from slavery or by a covenant. The first organized matrilineally related persons into a patrilineal society; the second consisted of who were enslaved through capture in war; the third type is the man who by a covenant voluntarily accepts the position of 'client to become a patron' of an Arab. Most belonged to the third type. A non-Arab on professing Islam could be accepted as a citizen of the caliphate he needed to become a client of an Arab tribe by forming a covenant.

The *mawali*'s discontent at their status was a factor in the downfall of the Umayyads. Although some of the *mawali* of southern Iraq were of Aramaean and Christian origin and "there was also a Persian element." The father of a *mawali* is said to have been a *zindiq*, which probably implies that he was a Persian or persianized Aramaean. The persianizing tendency is indicated by the fact that part of the Arab tribe of 'Ijl had 'completely passed into the Persian nationality'. More significantly, towards the end of Umayyad period several leaders of Hashimite supporters were also from 'Ijl. Abu-Muslim, the architect of the 'Abbasid victory, was a *mawla* of 'Ijl and said to be of Persian stock. It must also be kept in mind that Persian influence had been spreading among the Arabs long before the Muslim conquest of Iraq. Evidence of his influence is to be seen in the Persian words which are found in the Qur'an and in pre-Islamic poetry. In the half-century before the break-up of the Persian empire there were pro-Persian groups in power in various little states in the Persian Gulf, while a Persian army occupied the Yeman; it is known that the latter became arabized, but some Persian influence must also have emanated from them. Mecca had trade contacts with the Persian empire, and one Meccan pagan claimed to have a knowledge of Persian stories that was comparable to the Qur'an. Among the Muslims at Badr were two or three *mawali* of Persian extraction. "However, Watt notes that even though the *mawali* self-awareness was raised by al-Mukhtar, they did not become an effective political force at the moment, though later they certainly did.