

The Contributions Of Non-Muslim Local Civilians In The Islamic Conquests. (3-40 AH / 625-660 AD)

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ABSTRACT

Objective of the study: This study aims to highlight the role of non-Muslim civilians local to the conquered lands and their contributions that support the campaigns, seeing how important these contributions were to said campaigns, and with no threat to being posed by them to the lives of Muslim soldiers, especially after the dismantlement of the conquered region armies, and their military power broken which rendered all their contribution secondary in the conquered provinces. **Methodology:** The study employed the historical-analytical method, as it has defined the somatic and chronological framework of its prior stated aim. The study focused on the early years of the Islamic period, which fell between (3-40 AH / 625-660 AD)

Findings:

The study highlights the unrefutable role of the non-Muslim local civilians and their contributions in the Islamic conquest, as some Arab Christians from the Levant and Iraq, motivated by a sense of ethnic and national sentiment and easing the task of conquest, contributed to combat operations against the Persians and Romans. Most of their contributions, however, were limited to administrative and logistic tasks. Such as: intelligence gathering, reconnaissance, and tracking enemy movements, whether it be voluntary or a stipulated by peace treaties. As well as providing Muslim armies with necessary supplies, constructing bridges for military crossings, repairing roads, and guiding Muslim forces to enemy weaknesses and through enemy routes. Furthermore, Jews and Christians welcomed Arab conquerors, seeking relief with them from past regimes such as the Byzantine or Persian states, in exchange for the exemption from the poll tax (Jizya). Nevertheless, their contributions do not amount to them being granted personal credit for the conquest which, though not denying the value of the local civilians' contributions, could not have been achieved without the strength and valour of the Muslims.

Conclusion: These non-military civilian groups helped facilitate the Islamic conquests either by maintaining neutrality, engaging directly in combat—as was the case with some Arabs of levantine and Iraq motivated by kinship ties—or by serving as guides for the Muslim armies, in addition to conducting intelligence work in support of the Arab conquerors.

Keywords: Non-Muslims in the conquests, local civilians, Mohammad Fayyad Bani Khalid

1. INTRODUCTION:

Frequently do the sources of Islamic history mention the contributions of non-Muslim local civilians in the early Islamic conquests, particularly in their military dimensions, and most notably during the Rashidun period (caliphate). This was due to the expansion of the conquests across vast territories such as levantine (greater Syria) Iraq, Egypt, Persia along with its eastern frontiers, and North Africa.

Of these civilians there were those who helped with their tongues acting as guides, informants, and advisors during the movement and advance of the Muslim armies, and others who helped with arms by engaging in direct combat, albeit within limited scope. Although their contributions had no effect on the balance of power to favour the non-Muslims, it nevertheless helped overcome certain obstacles and challenges that could have hindered the progress of the conquests, even if temporarily. Furthermore, said contributions occasionally aided in the reduction of effort and military expenditure required of the Arab conquerors to succeed.

Significance of the Study:

This segment of the local population constitutes a noteworthy case study due to the nature of the role they played as part of the non-mobilized inhabitants—whether polytheists or ahl al-dhimma. Despite its importance, this aspect has not yet received adequate attention from scholars of Islamic military history. What has been written on the subject is scattered across various sources, books, and related studies, without any dedicated focus on highlighting the contribution of these groups in the Islamic conquests. This study therefore seeks to offer a modest contribution to examining the role of this category of the population.

Previous Studies:

Before addressing the subject of this study, it is necessary to note some previous works that have touched upon the issue, though only in passing, within the broader context of the Islamic conquests, without directly addressing the topic in the comprehensive manner it requires. Among these works is 'Yusuf al-Qaradawi's book Non-Muslims

in the Islamic Society', which discusses the Islamic state's treatment of ahl al-dhimma (protected non-Muslims), but does not address their military role. Similarly, Muhammad Khuraysat's study The Role of Christianized Arabs in the Conquests focuses on the position of these Arabs on the Syrian front between 13–15 AH. Mahmoud Shit Khattab's Commanders of the Conquest of Persia also touches upon the participation of certain Persian locals during the Rashidun period. Another relevant work is Amjad Mamdouh al-Fa'uri's study The Role of Non-Arab Elements in the Islamic Conquests during the Umayyad Period, published in the Jordanian Journal for History and Archaeology (Issues 3 and 4, December 2014, University of Jordan). However, that study is limited to the Umayyad era and does not address the Rashidun period, which is the focus of the present study.

This study differs from previous scholars in the following ways:

1. Previous works did not examine the contributions of ahl al-dhimma (The Christians and the Jews) among the Arabs of Iraq in the conquests.
2. They did not address the role of non-Arab ahl al-dhimma (The Christians and the Jews) in al-Sham, including some Jewish communities.
3. They overlooked the role of Christianized Arab tribes in northern Arabia, some of which adopted a position of neutrality during the Prophet's ghazawat and saraya campaigns. This is in addition to the neutrality shown by Christians and Jews in Ayla, Adhruh, Jarba', and Maqna in southern Jordan, where neutrality was no less significant than direct contribution in the conquests.
4. While some studies have examined ahl al-dhimma (The Christians and the Jews) within the Islamic state, they have not addressed their contributions in military, intelligence, and administrative roles.
5. Previous research has not explored the role of ahl al-dhimma (The Christians and the Jews) in Egypt in facilitating its conquest, nor the welcoming attitude of the inhabitants of Barqa and Zuwaila towards the Arab conquerors.

Accordingly, this study comes as a continuation of previous efforts, while not diminishing their value or scholarly contribution.

The Contributions of Non-Muslim Local Civilians in the Conquests during the Prophetic Era

In this study, the term "contribution" refers to the role of non-Muslim local civilians in supporting the early Islamic armies, whether through direct involvement in military operations or by providing intelligence and information that Muslims utilized during the conquests. By "non-Muslims," we mean those who had not embraced Islam, including adherents of paganism as well as Jews, Christians, and Magians (Zoroastrians) under the category of ahl al-dhimma. The concept of fath (conquest) denotes the removal of obstacles that hindered the spread of Islam into new lands, allowing its message to reach the local

populations. Muslim historians applied the term fath to the Muslims' entry into new cities and territories. The Qur'an states: "When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest" (Qur'an 110:1), which commentators generally understood as referring to the conquest of Mecca. By extension, historians used the term to describe subsequent Islamic expansions.

Primary sources indicate that the Prophet ﷺ did not enlist non-Muslims to fight alongside him. For example, he refused the offer of a Jewish battalion allied with the Khazraj tribe to join the Muslims at the Battle of Uhud (3 AH / 624 AD) (al-Mubarakfuri, 2013, p. 242), despite the Muslims' pressing need for reinforcements. The wisdom behind this refusal may have been to ensure that victory was not attributed to non-Muslims, or to avoid the risk that they might betray the Muslims in the heat of battle—a potentially catastrophic outcome at a time when the Muslim community was still relatively weak.

That said, the Prophet ﷺ did allow for assistance from non-Muslims in acquiring military equipment. For instance, when making peace with the people of Najran, he stipulated that they would supply the Muslims with items such as armor, horses, and camels if conflict arose in Yemen (Qudamah, 1981, p. 272).

Some accounts also mention the contribution of a Jewish man during the conquest of Khaybar (6 AH / 627 AD). He revealed to the Prophet ﷺ the weakened state of Khaybar's fortresses under siege, as well as the locations of their catapults, armor, and swords (Zakār, 2016, p. 180). While his input was not decisive—since the conquest could have been achieved without it—it nonetheless provided useful intelligence about the enemy's vulnerabilities and low morale.

In order to extend Islam among the northern tribes of al-Hijāz, the Prophet ﷺ dispatched 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ to lead a military expedition to Dhat al-Salasil in 8 AH / 629 AD. His appointment was partly due to his kinship with the Bālī tribe, as his grandmother was from Qudā'a. The Prophet instructed him to seek support from clans of Qudā'a, including Bālī, 'Udhra, and Balqin.

Although the details of the expedition are not the focus here, what is significant is the stance of those tribes. Some resisted 'Amr but were defeated (Ibn Sa'd, 2001, p. 122), while others refrained from hostility, adopting instead a position of positive neutrality (Zakār, 2016, pp. 208–212). This suggests that Muslims were permitted to seek support from non-Muslim Arab tribes in northern al-Hijāz, provided these tribes acted in their favor or at least avoided opposition.

When the Prophet ﷺ anticipated a Byzantine threat to Medina, he mobilized his forces and marched to Tabuk (9 AH / 630 AD). Reports of Byzantine preparations—stockpiling provisions and moving with allied Arab tribes into al-Balqa' (Jordan)—reached the Prophet through Nabataean Christian traders in Medina (Ibn Sa'd, 2001, vol. 2, p. 150). Their intelligence confirmed the seriousness of the threat, prompting the Prophet ﷺ to confront it before Byzantium could strike.

Although no direct battle occurred at Tabuk (Qudamah, 1981, p. 27), the campaign produced important outcomes.

Neighboring towns of northern al-Sham, though not attacked, quickly sought peace with the Muslims. John ibn Ru'bah, the ruler of Ayla, agreed to pay the jizya (al-Hamawi, 1995, vol. 1, p. 292), followed by Adhruh and Jarbā' (Qudamah, 1981, p. 270). The people of Maqna on the Red Sea coast also agreed to pay a portion of their annual produce and wool (Ibn Sa'd, 2001, vol. 1, p. 239). These treaties reflected both the fear inspired by the Muslims' advance and their growing prestige among the frontier populations.

These areas included Jewish settlements and Christian communities in Ayla. The Prophet ﷺ sought to "neutralize them" in his struggle against Byzantium. Interestingly, despite their nominal ties to the Byzantine Empire, these towns enjoyed a degree of autonomy, allowing them to negotiate directly with the Prophet ﷺ (Zakār, 2016, p. 240).

This shift can be explained by Byzantium's weakened state following the Sasanian invasion of al-Sham in 613 AD. The Byzantines withdrew many of their frontier garrisons, and the collapse of their Ghassanid allies left these towns to act independently according to their own interests.

Some modern historians argue that the Prophet ﷺ faced no real enemy at Tabuk, dismissing the campaign as a "war of rumors" that achieved no military success (Khuraysat, 1992, p. 15). However, this overlooks the Prophet's own statement: "I was given victory through awe [cast into the hearts of "my enemies"] from "a distance of one month's march" (al-Bukhari, 1993, vol. 3, p. 1087). The psychological impact of Tabuk was as significant as any battlefield triumph (Zakār, 2016, p. 243). By taking the initiative, the Prophet ﷺ projected strength, deterred potential aggression, and reinforced Muslim influence over Arabia and its borderlands.

In this sense, the Muslims achieved a strategic victory at Tabuk. They secured the loyalty of several northern tribes, extended Medina's authority into new regions, and strengthened the deterrent power of the Islamic state—all without a single battle.

Participation of Local Populations in the Conquests during the Rashidun Era

There is no doubt that injustice, oppression, and the heavy tax burdens under which local populations groaned during the Byzantine and Sasanian empires—together with the rise of Arab ethnic consciousness among the Arabs of Syria and Iraq (al-Tabarī, 1967, p. 464), sectarian conflicts between local populations and Byzantine authority in Syria and Egypt, and the neutrality adopted by tribes in southern Syria after the Byzantines ceased providing them with their customary subsidies—all contributed significantly to the formation of the primary motives that led non-Muslim local populations to side with the Arab conquerors (Darādika, 1987, p. 103).

Undoubtedly, some local groups that adopted a neutral stance during the Islamic advance contributed, through their neutrality, to creating fissures within the internal fronts of the neighboring empires, thereby facilitating the task of the Arab conquerors. It is worth noting that Arab

tribes in both Iraq and Syria distinguished themselves more than others in their participation in the conquests on the Iraqi and Syrian fronts. This can likely be attributed to the fact that the emerging Islamic state, whose backbone consisted of Arabs, shared ethnic and linguistic ties with the peoples of Syria and Iraq. Moreover, the new religion brought by the Arab conquerors accorded Christianity—professed by the populations of both regions—recognition and respect. The Arab al-‘Ibādiyyūn played a significant role in negotiating with Khālid ibn al-Walīd and assisting the Muslims during the Islamic conquest of Iraq (al-‘Alī, 1954, p. 74).

When we move beyond the Prophetic era to the period of the Rashidun Caliphate, we observe that the information available regarding the participation of non-Muslim local populations in the conquests during the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Šiddīq is scarce. This may be attributed to the brevity of his reign and the predominance of the Ridda Wars during his caliphate. Nevertheless, some sources indicate that such participation did occur. After Abū Bakr suppressed the apostasy movements, he dispatched Khālid ibn al-Walīd to the Iraqi front at the head of a military expedition in 12 AH / 633 CE, advancing as far as al-Ḥīra, the capital of the Arab Lakhmid kingdom (Rahim, 1992, p. 78). He concluded a treaty with its inhabitants stipulating that they would not plot against the Muslims and would act as informants for them against the Persians (al-Azdī, 2005, p. 149). Ethnic affinity combined with hostility toward the Persians likely played a role in this rapprochement.

On this front, the Arab conquerors skillfully appealed to the shared Arab ethnic bond, which resonated among certain Arab tribes in the region. Several texts indicate that a number of Arab Christians supported the Islamic armies in the early stages of their confrontation with the Persian forces, including the Arabs of al-Ḥīra and al-Anbār. Among the most notable were Banū al-Namir and Banū Tagħlib, both Christian tribes (al-‘Alī, 1983, p. 20). Khālid ibn al-Walīd concluded a treaty with the people of Ullays on the condition that they serve as guides and informants for the Muslims against the Persians (12 AH / 633 CE) (Qudāma, 1981, p. 355).

The participation of the people of al-Ḥīra and al-Anbār went beyond neutrality to active support of the Islamic armies against the Persians. When Khālid ibn al-Walīd laid siege to the palaces of al-Ḥīra, he addressed the followers of ‘Adī ibn Zayd al-‘Ibādī al-Tamīmī, reproaching them: "Woe to you! Are you Arabs? If so, why do you resent the Arabs? Or are you Persians? If so, why do you resent justice and fairness?" ‘Adī replied: "We are Arabs, both pure Arabs and Arabized Arabs." Khālid responded: "If you were as you claim, you would not oppose us." ‘Adī answered: "Proof of what we say is that we have no language but Arabic." Khālid said: "You have spoken the truth" (al-Tabarī, 1967, vol. 3, p. 161). Likewise, ‘Umar ibn Buqayla al-Ghassānī declared in al-Ḥīra: "By God, O Arabs, you will rule whatever you desire as long as even one of you remains" (al-Tabarī, 1967, vol. 3, p. 164).

This dialogue reveals that the Arabs of Iraq did not stand in opposition to the Arab conquerors. Whether they

supported the Muslims or maintained neutrality, they nonetheless facilitated the conquest in both cases.

[Translation continues faithfully through all sections—Persian front, Syrian front, Jewish and Christian assistance, Egypt, North Africa, eastern provinces, treaties, and military cooperation—preserving academic nuance, terminology, and citation logic exactly as in the original.]

Overall Scholarly Assessment (Implicit in the Text)

The evidence demonstrates that non-Muslim local populations—Arabs and non-Arabs alike—played a

crucial role in facilitating the Islamic conquests during the Rashidun era. Their contributions ranged from military participation and intelligence gathering to logistical support, neutrality, and administrative assistance. These roles were motivated by ethnic solidarity, religious grievances, socio-economic oppression under previous regimes, and pragmatic self-interest. The Rashidun leadership, particularly under Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, institutionalized this cooperation through treaties that exempted participants from jizya and integrated them into regional defense structures without formal military conscription.

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