

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Social Life during the Fatimid Caliphate 1101-1149

Dr. Saleh khranbeh

Researcher, Ohalo College of Education, Israel

Amir Shibli

Lecturer, Open University of Israel, Israel

Abstract:

During the Fatimid period, had appeared unique characteristics of social life. Al-Maqrizi reported that a lack of palaces constructions and cabinets for different objects like sheets, Brushes, Drinks and Jewelry were needed before this period. The period of the two Caliphates Al-Amir be-Ahkam Allah and Al-Hafiz Li-Deen Allah was distinguished for its art construction, engineering art, Decoration, clothing and drinking, in addition to that, arranging large banquets during holidays, and taking a special care of orchard and fences were also clear. In other words, many elements that of social life were taking care of during this period.

Keywords: Social classifications, Fatimid period, ruling dynasty, diwans, Muslims, Christians, and Jews

1. Introduction

There are almost historical agreements among historical resources concerning the division of Egyptian's society during Fatimid period into two major groups, which were divided into two subgroups:

A. a group with special status, which included the ruling family, employees, swords carriers and Diwans writers, that combines with religion centers.

Public group: industry and craft workers, salesmen and merchants, religious scholars and students, Christians and Jews (Dhimmis), in addition to slaves, and women.

It is important to mention that historian's opinions concerning group's classification during the Fatimid period of social and ethnic groups had varied. In his book, Iga that Al-oma Bi-Kashf Al-gimma (help the nation uncover the hidden). Al-Maqrizi reported similar social classification. Though Al-Maqrizi had no intention to discuss Fatimid period in particular, one can realized that such division did really exist during this period.¹

These divisions as followed:

- First -The Ruling Family
- Second-Merchants and craftsmen
- Third-Salesmen and middle status people
- Fourth-Farmers and villagers
- Fifth- Poor people, which included students, and religious scholars
- Sixth -Needy people and Beggars
- The division introduced above may show that Al-Maqrizi has viewed the Egyptian society inclusively. The discretions below clarify the author points.

2. Ruling Family (Special Group)

The ruling family was located on the top of the pyramid in Fatimid society. By its control of economic resources and ruling authority, it had wide range of powers. The family had to make sure to strengthen their rule by showing the manifestation of majesty and grandeur. This made the public fear them greatly. People obeyed the ruling family because they are considered the dynasty of Prophet Mohammed (Al-AI-beit).² This makes the importance of the ruling family to be the closest to the prophet.³ In addition, this group was characterized by construction of palaces, add to that, fences, gates buildings and landscapes' development. This group had a great wealth, which allowed it to run humanistic projects. Al- Maqrizi reported that Al-Hakim Be Amr Allah's wife had a great role in taking care of poor, needy, older people and widows.⁴

This group has also included gentlefolk that had enjoyed special and respected social status. So, when there a holiday was taking place, this group were first to be entered at the caliph's place. The number of these gentlefolk is

¹Alqadi Alnoman, iftitah Alsawa, investigated by Farhat Al-dashrawi, Tunis, 1978, p.555, Al-maqrizi, Ilead, alhonfaa, vol2, p16

²Ibin Khalkan wafyat alaeen, bolak, 1892, vol2, p152

³Al-Maqrizi, I gathat Al-oma Bi-Kashf Al-gimma, pp73-74

⁴Al-maqrizi, khotat, vol2, p 454

enormous. During the period of Al-Amir be-Ahkam Allah and Al-Hafiz Li-Deen Allah, the number of members of this group exceeded ten thousands. They were very wealthy and had owned many lands and villages.⁵

3. State Employees

3.1. First Ministers

During the period of the two caliphs, of Al-Amir be-Ahkam Allah and Al-Hafiz Li-Deen Allah, ministers were considered the backbone of the Fatimid state, this was contributed by caliphs' weaknesses and relatively their young age, which combined with widespread sectarian, strives. Such situation made ministers get to the most personal details of the caliphs' life. The minister had become very wealthy, which help them enrich their own family and ensure that they receive presents and high salary (200-500 Dinars a month).⁶

3.2. Second- Diwans' Employees

This social group included highest level of state employee who works in different Diwans (institutions), therefore, these employees carried the name of people who have Diwan's Jobs. This group classification came after the group of sword's carriers, particularly, during the period of the two caliphs mentioned above. The minister had become the responsible for the sword carriers (army) and the pen (army and writers). The president of this group was responsible of the Dewan writing's (essay); the most important job of this group was receiving letters that was intended to the caliphs and shows it to him. The Essay's writers who had a great proficiency of Arabic and its rhetoric lived next to the seashore because they were considered special personas. This group had also provide great importance to teach there dynasty all aspects of Dewans.⁷

3.3. Third-Religious Jobs Employees

These groups consisted of religious people and turbans wearer. The importance of turbans that through it can help to distinguish members of this group from other groups. The most important jobs, which represent this group, was Judges, Imams, and Muezzins, justice witnesses, preachers, and accountants. This group had enjoyed all kind of money resources, social service and conditions and very expensive clothing.⁸

4. Scientists Religious Scholars

The two caliphs had paid special attention to this group because it appeared to be an important factor of Fatimid society. Its members received monthly salaries and had special living places.⁹The caliphs had increase the sizes of libraries and encouraged scientists and Calligraphers, readers, scholars of jurisprudence, grammar, language, modernity, history, astronomy, physics and chemistry scientists.¹⁰ Despite scientists' status, however, only few of them enjoyed wealth and money, one of the important names was Abu Alqasem Bin Ali Almunjeb Alsarfy who had filled the position of the president of the Dewan during the period of Al-amer be-Ahkam Allah and stayed at this position until his death in 1141, during the period of Al Hafiz le-Din Allah.¹¹A-Maqrizi had reported about a part of this group who were poor, and suffer bad economic conditions.¹²

5. Public Group

As most of Egyptian's population had no permanent salary, like craftsmen, merchants and farmers and other professions. This group is very productive however, is controlled by the rulers politically and economically. This group also has not enjoyed the expression or freedom of speech.¹³This group can be divided to subgroups as followed:

5.1. First-Craftsmen

The Fatimid was popular by crafts and industries they had introduced to the world. Most of these people were professionals in making textile, sugar, paper, porcelain etc. This group during its education period had enjoyed creating different industrial projects, and they had used the Copts' skills and workers to increase production in various ways. This group was the backbone of Egyptian's¹⁴ economy. Al-Maqrizi had reported that this group had established wide number of textile factories in order to make Sufi clothing in different area of Egypt like Dimyat, Shata and Dabic. This had help to provide many jobs in the Fatimid society.¹⁵

5.2. Second- Merchant Group

This part of the group was able to take advantage of profits and moneymaking provided by business deals. This happened due to active business movement during this period.

⁵Ibid ,vol2,544,also see Al-qalqashndi,Subih,vol3,p 496

⁶Ibn al-serfy,Aleshara man nala al-wezara,p 28:Al-Maqrizi ,Itaad Al-Honfaa,vol3,p 70

⁷Al-maqrizi, ibid,vol2,p.91,also khotat,vol1,p,469

⁸Ibn Abi Aseba,oyoun Alanbyaa,fi Tabqat ,Alatbaa,vol2,p 105

⁹Ibid,ibid

¹⁰Arif Amir Mawsoat alkholphaa alfatmyen,(The encyclopedia of Fatimid caliphs)Alhakim Bi-Amr Allah,p 15

¹¹Ibid,ibid,32

¹²Al-maqrizi,Igatha,ibid,p 75

¹³Ibn Alatheer,Alkamil,vol,11,p 103,also see Al-Maqrizi,khotat,vol 2,p103

¹⁴Ibn Al-AI-taweer,Nozhat Almoqlatyn,p141, see also Albrawy,Halat miser (Egypt situation), p123123

¹⁵Al-Maqrizi, Khotat,ibid ,p 45 ,also Zaki,ibid p,150

During the Fatimid era, business's profession on all levels had received a special social status¹⁶. Merchants had the advantages of attending public celebrations and they were part of the process of caliph's receptions. The merchant were treated with respect on the caliph side and by gentle folks.¹⁷The merchants had special dressing code. Such as round turbans and transparent clothing. In addition, agent was in charge of this groups' need. This person would be a manager and a spokesperson for them when necessary to talk to state agents.¹⁸ Some natural cases and catastrophes had affected merchants negatively. One of the stories mentioned concerning this matter was that in the year if 1110 there was black winds, which caused a total darkness. The merchants were very fearful which caused the business movement to decrease, and this continued until blackness was gone and plants could be seen so people went back to their houses and merchants went back to the markets and the merchants case were better again. However, the story did not mention how many days this catastrophe took place or its negative effects.¹⁹

Sometimes merchants had faced looting and robbery. As it was reported by Maqrizi that in 1118 Qasim Bin Abi Hashim who was then the prince of Mecca robbed one of the convoy on the red sea shore while traveling. This a step which triggered the anger of Al-Hakim Be-Amr Allah and his minister Al-Afdel Bin Badir Al-Jmaly, so, he wrote to the gentlefolk of Mecca and inform them what their prince had done, and he ordered to return the merchants belongings to them. The call was heard and all merchants had received back all their belongings.²⁰

This category has practiced its work in security, security and stability, even in times of adversity and famine. It was not easy for the state to confiscate merchants' money. The merchants of this period were famous for their raisin, honey, sweets, rice, linen, iron, clothes, dates, salt, pomegranates, sugarcane, cows, and milk products such as margarine, cheese, wool, and oil trade.²¹

There was a phenomenon, which was considered a religious taboo was exploited by vendors and traders in the Fatimid period II because of the weakness of the caliphs and the increased influence of ministers. This phenomenon was the exploitation of periods of famine yield to monopolize their goods in order to raise prices to increase their profits at the expense of poor groups. Despite the attempt of the Fatimid state to put a price on goods in order to reduce the burden on the public during the famine and economic crises.²²

Conducting business was a job of many public members. Some of them had small shops, which consisted one particular commodity, and others sold many different commodities. An active business movement appeared in Egyptian's Market. There was an additional important phenomenon: having doctors stay inside the market to treat patients who come often there when necessary. This may imply that a concern of health issues and treatment of some cases.²³

5.3. Third- Farmers

As a result of different hardships - economic hardship and lack of irrigation, this group had suffered of two problems. Some of them were lucky and rich because of irrigation of its land in the years of the dryness. Therefore, they receive enormous amounts of money because of farming so they became wealthier.²⁴. Profit or loss of money of this group had been decided according to the Niles water percentage and the percent of land they owned. Al-amer Be-Ahkam Allah and Al-Hafiz le-Din Allah respected private ownership of Egyptians. Citizens had the freedom of selling and purchasing of land that was under their hand. Even Dhimmis (Christians and Jews) during this period enjoyed ownership of land. They suffered little damage unless there were some financial mistakes, and there was no attack on the people and property this group felt safe on its own property and its properties during the era of the two caliphs: al-amer be-alhkam Allah and al-Hafez le-din Allah.²⁵The status of this group during the two caliphs had improved. This because of reforms that took place by ministers. that combined with reducing the taxes on farming. Which led to the recovery of agriculture and rehabilitation of canals and rural reconstruction, and repair of bridges.²⁶

5.4. Fourth -Slaves

Similar to other society during the Middle Ages, slavery was spread through Fatimid society. Most of the slaves were blacks and of various nationalities brought from Nuba. During the rule of the two caliphs, slaves were caught by tempting them with bread, raisins, figs and dates, without the desire of people to buy them. they lived in their own neighborhoods and a sergeant was appointed to each lane to supervise their affairs.

6. References

- i. Alqadi Alnoman, iftitah Alsawa, investigated by Farhat Al-dashrawi, Tunis, 1978 Ibn Aby Asiba, Ahmad bin Al-qasim (D.1270) Oyon Alanbaa, fi Tabaqat Alatbaa, investigated by Nizar Rida, Alhayat library, Beirut
- ii. Ibn Alatheer, Mohamad bin Akram Al-Shyban D. 1232) Alkamil fi altarik, investigated by Omar Tadmory, Dar Al-kitab Alarbi, Beirut 1997

¹⁶Al-Maqrizi, Igatha bid, p 74

¹⁷Ibid p, 28

¹⁸Al-Maqrizi, Itaed, ibid, vol 2, p 46, also see Khotat, vol1 p 383

¹⁹Al-Maqrizi, Itaed, ibid, vol 3, p46-47

²⁰Al-Maqrizi, Itaed, ibid, vol, vol3 p, 59

²¹Ibid, p 80-81

²²Al-Maqrizi, Itaed, ibid, vol2, p247

²³Al-Maqrizi, Khotat, ibid, vol2, p 100

²⁴Al-Maqrizi, Igatha bid, p 7

²⁵Al-Maqrizi, Khotat, ibid, vol4, p398

²⁶Ibn Maysar, Almontaqa min Akhbar Miser, vol2, p19-22, also Al-Maqrizi, Khotat, ibid, vol2, p 283

- iii. Ibin Kalkhan, Ahmad Bin Mohammad Bin Ibrahim(D.1282) Wafyat Alayan, investigated by Ihsan Abbas, Dar Sadir Beirut, vol 8,1994
- iv. Ibin Al-Serfy, Abu Alqasim Ali Bin Monjeb(D1148), Alqanooun fi Diwan Alrsaael wa-Aleshara ila man Nala Al-wizara,investigated by Abdallah Mokhlis, Publication of Alamhed Alfarnsi, Cairo 1924
- v. Ibin Al-Taweer, Abd Alslam Bin Hassan (D.1220) Nozhat Almoqlatyen Fi Akhbar Al-Dawlatyen, Investigated by Ayman Foad Sayyed, Beirut: publication Dar Sader, vol 1,1992
- vi. Ibin Mayser. Mohamed Bin Ali (D.1278) Almontaqa min Akhbar Miser, investigated bu Ayman Foad, published by Al-maha alfarnsy lelathar alshrqya ,1981
- vii. Al-qalqashindi, Subh Al-aasha, fi Sinaat Al-Insha, fs ted. Investigated by ousef Ali Taweel, Published by Dar Alfiker, Dimscus (vol 14)1987
- viii. Al-Maqrizi, Ahmad Bin Ali (D.1441) Itaad Al-honfaa bi-Akhbar Al-Aaema Al-fatmyeen Alkholphaa,investigated by Jamal Alshyall, cairo n. d
- ix. Al-Maqrizi, Ahmad Bin Ali (D.1441),Igathat Al-oma Bi-Kashf Al-gimma, investigated by Jamal Alshyall, cairo 1957
- x. Goitein .S.D. A Mediterranean Society of the High Middle ages New York. 1967.
- xi. Goitein. S.D. The Cairo Geniza As A Source for the History of Muslim Civilization. Studia I Slamica. V III. 1955.
- xii. Goitein .S.D.The exchange rate of gold and silver money in Fatimid and Ayyubid times. [s.n.]. S. I.: 1970
- xiii. Mann. Jacob. the Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid caliph. New York: Ktav Pub. House. 1969.
- xiv. Stern .S.M. Fatimid Decrees. Original Documents from the Fatimid chancery .London. 1964.