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## Religious Groups and Celebrations' Traditions during the Fatimid Era

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### Abstract:

*The division of the Fatimid period groups were separated into two main groups, Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslims included Sunnis and Shias, and the Non-Muslims (ḍimmī), Christians and Jews. This article will show the division of Muslims, but at the same time will discuss their religious holydays as one entity as well focusing on religious holidays of non-Muslims as a separate entity. Although the Fatimid rollers were Shia and tried to transform the Sunnis to follow their dietarians, they avoided imposing their religion on the ḍimmī. Non-Muslims filled up very high positions among state jobs –minsters, high military ranks and science and education scholars.*

**Keywords:** *Ḍimmī, Fatimid era, Shia, Religious groups, Sunni Doctrine, Jewish holidays, Muslim feasts*

### 1. Introduction

Religiously, Fatimid society included two main groups:

- Muslims: Sunnis or Shia
- Ḍimmī: Christians or Jews

#### 1.1. Muslims

Muslims had formed the majority of Egyptian's society population during the Fatimid era. These groups described as followed:

First: Sunnis

Sunnis has formed the majority of Egyptian's people, one of its most important centers was the city of Alexandria, because it became a safe refuge for those who were considered outlaws according to Fatimid rules. It is important to state that Sunni Group (Ahl Alsunna wa-al-Jamaa) had its roots in Egypt before the establishment of the Fatimid state, which tried to establish Shi'ism concepts on the Sunni believers for along time, up to the appearance of Salah Alden Ayyubi<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.2. Second: Shia

The Fatimid period had put an abundant effort into transforming Sunnis believers to Shia. The plan was connected to the existence and nonexistence of the country regulations. When the country role did not exist, a missionary of the Ismaili's shia sect spread the word secretly, however, with the existence of the country role, it was different. This meant the Ismaili's Shia belief transformed to be the primary and the formal religion of the country. <sup>2</sup>Despite the fact that the Fatimid role wanted to abolish the Sunnibeliefs, Sunni Doctrine remained strong with few Egyptianstured into the Fatimid one. <sup>3</sup>

#### 1.3. Muslims' Public Religious Celebrations

##### 1.3.1. Hijri New Year

Muslims assured themselves to celebrate the hijri new year at the beginning of month of Muharram (January), during this celebration sheep was slaughtered, and huge meals were cooked and spread to special group. After this, distributing sweets to all those in the seen.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Alnowayri, Nihayat Alaarab, chapter 26, p 90. Also see Stanley Lane – Poole, 'Salah El Din and the fall of the Kindgom Jerusalem

<sup>2</sup>Ismaili's also called the Ismaili imamates who believe in the imamates of Ismail Bin Jaffar Al-Sadiq, this group believe in the existence of the 12<sup>th</sup> imamates and the two imamates, see Khabit Tamir, Ismaili, p91

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, ibid

<sup>4</sup>Al-Maqrizi: Almaid, Vol2, pp 328-347

### 1.3.2. Celebrating the Birth of the Prophet

This celebration took place in the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Rabea Alawal(March) after the second prayer of the day. With the beginning of the celebration, a great parade consisted of state high position employees, religious scholars, and the chief of the judicial system (Qadi Al-Oudah) walked toward Al-Azhar Mosque to listen to Quran.

### 1.3.3. The four Fuel Nights (Layali Alwoqoud Al-Arbaa)

People from all kinds meet together during these nights, and during the same night's charities would be distributed to the needy.

### 1.3.4. The Month of Ramadan

Ramadan was considered the month of doing good deeds and getting closer to God, according to Muslim's believes, during this month rewards by god doubles. three days before the beginning of Ramadan, People will arrive in order to go around the mosque with the judge and be present during the big meal after.<sup>5</sup> The special event was during the Caliphate period of Al-Amir and Al-Hafiz who closed all Bars and Alcohol shops during this period.

#### *1.4. Suhor of Caliph<sup>6</sup>*

Both Caliphs El-Amir Bi-Ahkam Allah and Al-Hafiz Li-Deen Allah followed the process that formers caliphs followed. This special group meal consist of praying and calling Allah and appraising the caliph. The meal consist of most delicious kinds of food.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1.4.1. Assigning the Ending the Month of Ramadan

The date of this process was the 29<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan Month, with the presence of the caliphs El-Mamoon and his family, along with Imams, prayer callers and Quran readers, In addition to those special respected women who lived in the palaces of the caliphs. All this to receive rewards of Allah particularly, worshipers who finished reading the Quran in this short period.

#### 1.4.2. Celebration of Eid El-fiter

This Eid which continues for three days mark the end of the fasting of the thirty days of Ramadan. Both the caliphs and people receive benefits during the three days celebration. The belief was that people who have money give charity to the poor in order to raise the Caliph levels for God. The farmers also meet in their land prayed special prayers.<sup>8</sup> People during this time wore new beautiful cloths, orbited the villages with drums and lighted, and ate the best kinds of sweets. From what had been written above, one can understand that the Eid El-Fiter celebrations as special religious and social traditions that ha a positive effect on Egyptian's people.<sup>9</sup>

#### 1.4.3. Celebration of El-Adha (slaughtering sheep)

Celebration of El-Adha start usually seventy-five days after the celebration of Ramadan. Very heavy and expensive meals would open all over the place and that because of having so much meat provided by slaughtering an enormous amount of sheep. The caliphs orders distributions of the meat and provide money for the needy, orphanage, and poor people.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Dimmī: Christians and Jews**

### *2.1. Christians*

Policy toward christens had differentiated through the Fatimid period, some gave them great positions like ministers, and others had obsessed them greatly. During the authority of Alhakim Bi-Amr Allah appointed a monk named Abu Najah Bin Qina in charge of Dawawin in (520 h\1126) which led to complains among Muslims. Furthermore, Christians reached very high military ranks, which provided them with strong influence. Particularly, during the period of the caliph Al-Hafiz Bi-Amr Allah because he appointed a Christian minister named Bahram Alarmany. Christians also received man high ranks jobs like managements, areas' heads, military, and also science and medicine. This continued until a Muslim minister replaced him and this new persona eliminated the roles of Christians in the country.<sup>11</sup> Not much written about religious celebrations of Christians during the Fatimid period. But during the period of Al-hakim Be-Amr Allah (1130-1101) had the following feasts:

- The Yaqubi Christian Qubits practiced costumes like fasting for fifty days.
- 2-They did pilgrimage to the Churches of nativity in Israel
- They have their own religious celebrations like the Day of Cross.

<sup>5</sup>Al-Maqrizi: Al-khotat, Vol2, p 350

<sup>6</sup>a meal during night hours before the beginning time of fasting. Before the call of the first prayer of the Muslims' five prayers.

<sup>7</sup>Al-Maqrizi: Al-khotat, ibid vol 3, p83, also Shimon shotosfox Jews in Egypt, Ministry of education publishing, 1998, p 92

<sup>8</sup>Abd Alrahim, Alreff Almasri (Egytion Country Side), p 249

<sup>9</sup>Al-Maqrizi: Al-khotat, ibid, vol 1, p388

<sup>10</sup>Al-Maqrizi: itead vol2, p 205

<sup>11</sup>AL-Qalqashandi, Subh Alaasha, vol6, p 460, also see Yohoshowa Frankel, Haderat habedwim to Israel during the Fatimid period, (The penetration of Bedouins During the Fatimid period, Hebrew) Haifa 1978

## 2.2. Jews

One of the finest periods of Jews in Egypt was during the Fatimid one, Except the time of Al-Hakim Be-Amr Allah Rolled. The rest of time, Jewish schools were established in Egypt. Some Jews received higher rank during the second part of the Fatimid period. A good example was Jewish minister named Yaqub (Jacob) Bin Kills was appointed.<sup>12</sup> There were three groups of jews lived in Egypt: Al-Rabanion(rabbis), Qaraoon and Samarrians. One of the Rabanion, Jews lived in big cities like Alexandria and Cairo since there they lived there social and religious life normally. The president of Jews was the convector between the state and them.

### 2.2.1. Jews Celebrations

The Jews during the period of Alhakim Be-Amr Allah and Al-Hafiz Le-Din Allah lived in big cities. They enjoyed religious freedom and economic prosperity.<sup>13</sup> The two caliphs provided the Jewish community in their country to celebrate their religious festivals since the synagogue was considered religious, educational and social center for the Jews as being a place where all festivals related take place.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.2.1.1. Calculations the Dates of Holidays

Calculation of Jews holiday was done through Jewish colander. The calendar is based on three moons that indicate start of new months. In addition to suit between the lunar cycle and the solar cycle. That because each holiday takes place in connection to special image of the moon. The most important holiday in Jewish calendar:

News year day (Rosh Hashana): This day of Hebrew New Year is celebrated after the end of the Hebrew month of September. Also according to Hebrew belief, the angles informed Sara about the coming of Isaac.<sup>15</sup>

Yom Kippur: This holiday is the holiest for Jews, this day special for fasting, and is the day that completes the ten days of repentance. It is prohibited during this day to work, to travel, or to even take a shower or to wash. Fire also is not allowed to be started. According to Jewish believe God forgives sins and purify souls since Moses went down from Sini holding the Jewish religious law<sup>16</sup>

The inauguration day (Hanoka). The historic event that is connected to Hanoka was the entrance of Yehuda Hashmoni to Jerusalem and bringing back the Jewish religious rituals in the Temple. Because of this, he received its name. It is also called Lights Holiday, which continues to seven days and their nights.<sup>17</sup>

#### 2.2.1.2. Sukkots Holiday

Sukkot is the plural of the word Sukka that means umbrella or cover. This holiday received many names like, peace holiday or feast of joy, which last for seven days. The importance of this feast is commemoration of the Tent of the Tabernacle, which covered the Hebrews from the heat of Egypt. This feast originally was considered a farming one. In addition, the day included celebrating the storage of food crops for the whole year, so it is called in Hebrew "Harvest Day" or "Feast of the throne."<sup>18</sup>

Pass over holiday (Pesah). Jews are prohibited to work during the first and the last day. Celebrations take place through the whole seven days, but during the middle for days they eat special Pesah bread.<sup>19</sup>

Day of Shvoot: This one of the most important holidays in the Jewish calendar. The importance of the holiday because of the he descent of the Torah and the Ten Commandments to Moses at Sini Mountain.

## 3. Conclusion

From what has written above it is easy to see that Muslims lived side by side with non- Muslims. Despite the fact that a Muslim rules where applied, non-Muslims had filled up various higher position in military and social life.

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<sup>13</sup>Yaqub lev,Jews in Islamic society, Telaviv 2000, p 170, also see Documents of Genza , Document No. 615. 2IT, Al-Quds University, Manuscripts and Documents Section

<sup>14</sup>Genza, Documants of commission 22- document,Ts 12, see also Nahamia Livtson , (Alshamil wal Altawthik leahl aldma that al-Hokm Al-islami) Arabic.Comprehensive documentations of Christin and Jews under Islamic rule Jerusalem 1978n,p 38

<sup>15</sup>Goitein, S.D. The Cairo Geniza as Source for the History of Muslim Cavitation, Studia I Slamica, VIII, 1955, p. 82:also see Al-Maqrizi: Al-khotat,ibid vol 3,p281 see also Otra Samouel Dimis in the Fatimi period, Al-quds 1998,p 88

<sup>16</sup>Ashtor Shtrawes, Alyahod fi misr fi Dil alhokm Alfatmi walAyyobi , Al-quds ,vol2 ,1970, p 237 (Jews In Egypt under the fatimied and Ayyubi Role )

<sup>17</sup>Al-Maqrizi: Al-khotat,ibid vol 3,p281, see also: Goitein, S.D., p. 92: Cairo Geniza h, Ri42, E5

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