

DID THE EARLY ARAB CONQUERORS RESORT TO CONVERSIONS?

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 6, 2020

It is often held by various writers that the Arab conquerors did not try to convert the Iranians at first. While it may be more true of the early conquerors than the later ones for the obvious reasons such as needing time to establish themselves as they were outnumbered by the indigenous Iranian population, however, as we have already seen, they were quick to convert the very first war captives they secured who became known as Mawalis and settled in Kufeh and Basra. Even though Islam promised equality to all converts, they became quite dissatisfied as they remained practically second-class. I see their feeling of betrayal as the factors leading to the Abbassid revolution under the leadership of Abu Muslim, a Mawali himself and to other rebellions as a direct result of the perfidious murder of the Abu Muslim as well as to the early and later Shi'ite and various religious fractions. I found many instances of forced conversions in el-Tabary's "Conquest of Persia by the Arabs" alone, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 2825). He quotes Khalifeh Omar asking a general to compel the Kurds to become Muslim. (p. 220).

In another instance, when Hormuzan, the Persian king of Ahwa was captured and brought to Omar as ordered by him, Omar exclaimed "I must put you to death," then, on Hormuzan's inquiry what might save his life, he said, "Nothing but to embrace Islamism," which he did as he had no choice. (p. 472). Moreover, when Kadeskan a Persian commander of Isfahan was overcome in a duel by the Arab commander, Abdallah, the latter asked Kadeskan, "Become a Muslim or pay the tribute-tax." (p. 486). Kadeskan choosing the latter.

Similarly, after a fierce battle with the Persians in the ten villages near Basrah, the Arab commander commanded all the inhabitants to embrace Islam and "they all became Muslims." (p. 455).

Shahrzad, who ruled over a pass at the Derbends, made peace with the Arab rulers on the condition that instead of paying taxes he will guard the passes for the Arabs against the people of Haziz who were particularly hostile to the Arabs. (Sasanians had made a similar pact with the Romans who even agreed to pay them a subsidy for it. However, a deputy sent by Omar informed Shahrzad "I must come to these Derbends and make the inhabitants embrace Islamism as Omar expected news of such conversions." He then proceeded to the Derbends and having made Muslims of the inhabitants of all the towns within the

distance of a hundred parasangs he returned to the Derbends.” (p.496) and which pleased Omar well. Tabary depicts Omar as being “averse to the conquest of Khorasan,” “Because,” in Omar's estimation “the inhabitants have three times broken their compact” and much blood has already been shed and many persons have died” and I may add those Khorasanis that were converted to Islam returned to their old faith three times at least. Many more such instances of conversion can be found if one only looks for it but the succinct account here along with the other evidence submitted by me should suffice to dispel the myth that there were no forced conversions to Islam during the early period of Arab rule. Omar's complaints of the restlessness of the residents of Kufeh who were primarily Mawalis (pp. 488-7), such as “he knew not what to do with them” reveals discontent and resentment among the very first converts, even though some of them had converted later for better opportunities.