

CONDITION OF JEWS AND ZOROASTRIANS IN POST-SASANIAN IRAN

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There is so much literature depicting the dire condition of Jews under the Islamic rule in Iran (in contrast to the scanty reports available for Zoroastrians) that it is not possible to refer to them all. However, an extensive book written by an Iranian Jew, Dr. Habib Levy (*Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran*, Mazda Publishers, 1999) leaves no doubt about their pathetic condition as a rule under the Muslim Iran to this day. Levy cites innumerable incidents of persecution of the Jews and what he notes on page 169 seems to be true for the Zoroastrians also for all the periods in the Muslim Iran: “During the reign of fanatic caliphs not only the Jews but also other non-Muslims – especially the Zoroastrians – faced persecution. Levy lists various restrictions imposed upon the Dhimmis (Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians). They:

1. May not build new synagogues or churches.
2. Must show respect to Muslims and stand in their presence.
3. Must provide shelter to Muslim travelers for a period of three days.
4. May not interfere with anyone who wishes to convert to Islam.
5. May not dress or arrange their hair in a manner similar to the Muslims. Jews must wear yellow clothing and a special cap. The shoes worn by Jews must not be of the same color as those worn by the Muslims.
6. They may not choose Muslim names for themselves and their children.
7. Upon entering the public bath, the man must have a special emblem around their necks so that they may be distinguished from the Muslims. Non-Muslim women do not have the right to use the Muslim women’s public baths.
8. They do not have the right to bear arms.
9. They do not have the right to hire Muslims.
10. They may not read the Quran.
11. They may not ride horses or mules, and when riding donkeys

may not place saddles on their backs.

12. They may not live in houses which are higher than those of Muslims.

13. They may not bury their dead in cemeteries that are higher than Muslim cemeteries.

14. They may not hold public office.

15. When heirs of the deceased cannot establish their claim of inheritance according to Islamic law, the inheritance will become the property of the Islamic government.

Levy adds: The penalty for failure to comply with these laws was death. During the reign of an intolerant caliph who insisted upon strict enforcement of these laws, that synagogue would be razed.

Levy adds that these restrictions were expanded during the reign of Shah Abbas II not only for the Jews but all Dhimmis, though for Levy they pertain for the Jews as he is writing specifically about them.

More or less the same restrictions are mentioned by another Jewish writer, Lawrence D. Loeb, (*Outcast: Jewish Life in Southern Iran*, Gordon and Breach, New York, London, Paris, 1977). The title of "Outcaste" speaks for itself. It should be noted that the same restrictions apply equally to the Zoroastrians as I have explained in a paper about how the Parsis of India put pressure on the Iranian Government to remove them in the late nineteenth century though they are not all removed to this day. Various Restrictive Codes are as follows:

RESTRICTIONS OF THE SAFAVID PERIOD BEHAVIOR CODE OF ABUL HASSAN LARI (1622)

1. Houses that are too high (higher than a Muslim's) must be lowered.

2. Jews may not circulate freely among the Believers.

3. In their stores, Jews Must sit on low stools, in order that they not see the purchaser's face.

4. Jews must wear a specially constructed hat of eleven colors.

5. Around this hat they must sew a yellow ribbon, three meters long.

6. Women must tie many little bells on their sandals.

7. Jewish women must also wear a black *chador*.

8. When a Jew speaks to a Muslim, he must humbly lower his

head.

(Bacher, 1906, 52.:237)

THE *JAM ABBASI*, INSTITUTED BY ABBAS I (C. 1618) AND ADMINISTERED IN SOME MEASURE UNTIL 1925

1. Jews are not permitted to dress like Muslims.
2. A Jew must exhibit a yellow or red “bade of dishonor” on his chest.
3. A Jew is not permitted to ride on a horse.
4. When riding on an ass, he must hang both legs on one side.
5. He is not entitled to bear arms.
6. On the street and in the market, he must pass stealthily from a corner or from the side.
7. Jewish women are not permitted to cover their faces.
8. The Jew is restricted from establishing boundaries of private property.
9. A Jew who becomes a Muslim, is forbidden to return to Judaism.
10. Upon disclosure of a disagreement between Jew and Muslim, the Jew's argument has no merit.
11. In Muslim cities, the Jew is forbidden to build a synagogue.
12. A Jew is not entitled to have his house built higher than a Muslim's.

(Mizrabi, 1966:36)

RESTRICTIONS OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY QAJAR PERIOD “OPPRESSIONS” NOTED BY A JEWISH TRAVELER

1. Throughout Persia the Jews are obliged to live in a part of town separated from the other inhabitants; for they are regarded as unclean creatures, who bring contamination with their intercourse and presence.
2. They have no right to carry on trade in stuff goods.
3. Even in the streets of their own quarter on the town they are not allowed to keep any open shop – they may only sell spices and drugs, or

carry on the trade of a jeweler.

4. Under the pretext of their being unclean, they are treated with the greatest severity, and should they enter the street, inhabited by Musselmen, they are pelted by the boys and mob with stones and dirt.

5. For the same reason they are forbidden to go out when it rains; for it is said the rain would wash dirt off them, which would dirty the feel of the Musselmen.

6. If a Jew is recognized as such in the streets, he is subjected to the greatest insults. The passers-by spit in his face, and sometimes beat him so cruelly, that he falls to the ground, and is obliged to be carried home.

7. If a Persian kills a Jew, and the family of the deceased can bring forward two Mussulmen as witnesses to the fact, the murderer is punished by a fine of 12 umauns (600 piastres) but if two such witnesses cannot be produced, the crime remains unpunished, even though it has been publicly committed, and is well known.

8. The flesh of animals killed according to Hebrew custom, but as *trefe* declared, must not be sold to any Mussulmen. The slaughterers are compelled to buy the mean, for even the Christians do not dare to buy it, fearing the mockery and insult of the Persians.

9. If a Jew enters a shop to buy anything, he is forbidden to inspect the goods, but must stand at a respectful distance and ask the price. Should his hand by accident touch the goods, he must take them at any price the seller chooses to ask for them.

10. Sometimes the Persians intrude into the twellings of the Jews and take Possession of whatever pleases them. Should the owner make the least opposition in defense of his property, he runs the danger of atoning for it with his life.

11. Upon the least dispute between a Jew and a Persian, the former is immediately dragged before the Achund, and, if the complainant can bring forward two witnesses, the Jew is condemned to pay a heavy fine. If he is too poor to pay this penalty in money, he must pay it in his person. He is stripped to the waist, bound to a stake and receives forty blows with a stick. Should the sufferer utter the least cry of pain during this proceeding the flows already given are not reckoned and the punishment is begun afresh.

12. In the same manner the Jewish children, when they get into a quarrel with those of the Mussulmen, are immediately led before the Achund, and punished with blows.

13. A Jew who travels in Persia is taxed at every inn and caravan -

serai he enters.

14. If...a Jew shows himself in the street during the three days of the Katel (feast of mourning for the death of Persian founder of the religion of Ali [probably *ashura*]) he is sure to be killed.

(Benjamin, 1859:258-60)

EDICT OF PROHIBITION ISSUED TO THE JEWS OF HAMADAN IN 1892

1. It is forbidden to Jews to leave their houses when it rains or snows.

2. The Jewish woman must appear on the public streets with her face uncovered.

3. She is required to be wrapped in an *izar* (*chador*?) of two colors.

4. Men are not permitted to wear handsome clothing, the only material permitted is blue cotton.

5. It is forbidden to wear matching shoes.

6. Every Jew must wear a piece of red material on his chest.

7. A Jew must never pass a Muslim on a public street.

8. It is forbidden for him to speak loudly to a Muslim.

9. A Jewish creditor of a Muslim ought to claim his debt in a trembling and respectful tone.

10. If a Muslim insults a Jew, he (the Jew) is obliged to lower his head and remain silent.

11. A Jew who buys some meat must wrap it and conceal it carefully out of respect of Muslims.

12. It is forbidden to erect beautiful buildings.

13. One is forbidden to have a house higher than his Muslim neighbor.

14. Neither may one whitewash his rooms.

15. The entrance of his house must be low.

16. The Jew is not permitted to arrange the folds of his coat, but must be content to wear it twisted under the arm.

17. He is forbidden to have his beard cut, even to slightly trim it with scissors.

18. Jews are not permitted to leave the city, nor to take a walk in

the country.

19. Jewish doctors are not permitted to ride a horse.

20. A Jew suspected of having drunk liquor is not permitted to appear in the street; if he appears, he is immediately put to death.

21. Jewish weddings must be celebrated in great secrecy, so that what transpires is not heard outside.

22. Jews are not permitted to consume good fruit.

(Alliance, 1892:49-59)

Apparently some of these restrictions by the two authors overlap but that itself indicates the extent of the persecution all Dhimmis underwent after the Sasanian period.