

## The Age of the Imam

The study of the age that Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) lived in is no longer a kind of luxury or ornamentation for the book, rather it is a necessity that the modern scientific research requires. Studying an age has become one of the methodical studies that a researcher cannot leave aside, because it reveals the reality of the general life which that certain person lives in, and also it sheds lights on the events that takes place during that age which naturally have a great influence on the behavior of that person. Sociologists say that the social life affects and is affected by the people living in that age.

Anyhow, we objectively shall offer several sides of the general life of the age that Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) lived in.

### The Economical Life

Before we shed light on the economical life of the age of Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.), we would like to show that Islam has paid extreme attention to the developing of the economy of the nation, the growth of individual income, and the prosperity of general life. Islam has considered poverty as a destroying disaster which must be removed by all means. Islam has compared disbelief to poverty, and as disbelief must be removed due to the Islamic Shariah, poverty must be removed from society as well. Islam has ordered Muslim rulers and leaders to spare no effort to save Muslims from the dangers of poverty and wretchedness which are the reasons behind the intellectual and moral deviation among people.

of the creative methods that the Islamic economy is based on is that the Sharia has limited the authorities of rulers and officials. They are not permitted in any case to play with the treasury of the state, because it is for all Muslims and not for one person. The wealth of Muslims must be spent on Muslims, and neither the ruler nor any member of his government has the right to extort from the treasury to spend on himself or his kin, for this is treason against Allah and against Muslims.

The Abbasid rule, during all its ages, followed a special economical policy that was opposed to the true Islamic system, and it was too far from the laws Islam has legislated to control the wealth of the Islamic state. We shall discuss here in brief the general economical system in the Abbasid age.

## Incomes of The State

The majority of the state income was collected from land taxes and zakat which ranged in the millions of dinars. Historians said it was about three hundred and sixty million dirhams a year,<sup>1</sup> and it was about five hundred million dirhams in some years.<sup>2</sup> In that age a dirham had a good value. It equaled the price of a sheep, a jar of honey, or a jar of oil, whereas a dinar equaled the price of a camel.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, these abundant monies were not spent to develop the scientific, medical, and economical life as Islam wanted, but they went to the pockets of rulers who spent them on building high palaces, as al-Mutawakkil did, and on singers, dancers, drinking companions, and other fields of debauchery and pleasures.

## Violence In Collecting The Land Tax

Violence, oppression, and punishments were common methods in collecting the land taxes during most of the Abbasid ages. People suffered exhausting kinds of oppression from the publicans, who had no bit of mercy and kindness in their hearts. They imposed taxes according to their desires and greed, and whoever refused or delayed to pay the imposed taxes his fate would be either be the grave or prison.

Al-Jahshiyari said, 'The people of kharaj (who did not or could not pay the land tax) were punished severely with different kinds of torment like being thrown to beasts of prey and bees.

Muhammad bin Muslim was a close companion to al-Mahdi (the Abbasid caliph). When al-Mahdi became the caliph and found that the people of kharaj were tortured severely, he consulted with Muhammad bin Muslim who said to him, 'O Ameerul Mu'minin, this is a situation that can be changed. They are debtors of Muslims and must be treated as debtors.' Then the caliph ordered to stop punishing them.'<sup>4</sup>

During the reign of ar-Rashid, people criticized al-Fadhli bin Yahya al-Barmaki who was the wali of Khurasan. They complained a lot about him til ar-Rashid deposed him and appointed in place of him Ali bin 'Isa, who killed many notables from the people of Khurasan and farmed great monies. Once, he sent to ar-Rashid ten million dirhams in a sack made of silk.<sup>5</sup>

The people of Mosul also suffered terrible oppression because of the farming of the kharaj (land tax). The wali, appointed by ar-Rashid, on them was Yahya bin Sa'eed. He ordered them to pay him the kharaj of past years, and he whipped most of them.<sup>6</sup>

Islam has bound walis to be kind to their subjects and to improve their economical conditions. People must not meet any pressure from rulers in farming the kharaj and zakat, but most Abbasid kings paid no attention to that, and rather, they subjected the nation by violence and oppression in collecting the kharaj.

## Increasing The Kharaj

The officials of the Abbasid governments often asked people to pay more than the legal taxes and they took the extra amounts for themselves. When Abu Ubaydillah bin Yasar became the vizier of al-Mahdi, he made the kharaj on date palms and trees, and it continued so after him.<sup>7</sup>

Egypt suffered different misfortunes and distresses because of the kharaj. Its wali, Musa bin Mus'ab, doubled the kharaj on every acre, and he imposed taxes on the people of markets and on cattle. He took bribes in judgment.

People revolted against him because of his oppression.<sup>8</sup> Ibn Taghri said, 'He pressed on people in farming the kharaj. He doubled the tax on every acre unlike what had been before him. People met distresses from him. He was bad to people. He took bribes on judgments...soldiers hated him. They caused him trouble and often opposed him because he was an oppressive tyrant.'<sup>9</sup>

These doings were too far from the essence and reality of Islam. Those men were but a gang of thieves and highwaymen who went far into crimes and sins. Umar bin Ubayd said to al-Mansur ad-Dawaniqi, the Abbasid caliph, 'Behind your door there are fires flaming because of oppression. Behind your door are performed actions that are neither from the Book of Allah nor the Sunna of His messenger.'<sup>10</sup>

## Appropriating The Wealth of The State

The Abbasids misappropriated the wealth of the nation and took for themselves and for their kin, as they liked. The income of Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Abbasi a day was about one hundred thousand dirhams.<sup>11</sup> When he died, he left a great inheritance from which ar-Rashid took sixty thousand dirhams. Historians say, 'Great monies came to al-Khayzuran (the mother of Harun ar-Rashid) until her wealth became about one hundred million and sixty thousand dirhams. Some writer says that this amount equaled the half of the revenue of the state at that time and two thirds of the revenue of Rockefeller in this [20th] century.

It was found with the wife of al-Mutawakkil (an Abbasid king) one million and eight hundred thousand dinars. The mother of al-Muqtadir (an Abbasid king) was also excessively wealthy.<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-Jawzi said about her, 'She had a great wealth that was beyond counting. She got from her lands one million dinars every year.'<sup>13</sup>

The Abbasid kings gifted their relatives with great monies. Ar-Rashid distributed among his uncles and relatives monies that no caliph before him had ever distributed.<sup>14</sup> Al-Mansur ad-Dawaniqi assigned one million dirhams to each one of his uncles.<sup>15</sup> The Abbasid family grew until they were, at the reign of al-Ma'mun, about thirty-three thousand persons.<sup>16</sup> This family, that had no any preference to the rest of Muslims, misappropriated the wealth of the nation and enjoyed the great monies, while the rest of Muslim peoples were sunk into poverty, deprivation, and wretchedness.

## Great Gifts To Bondmaids

The Abbasid kings were excessive in gifting the bondmaids and songstresses. Once, ar-Rashid gave his bondmaid Dananir, at the night of an eid, a necklace of thirty thousand dinars.<sup>17</sup> Al-Muqtadir gave to one of his concubines the three weights Orphan Pearl.<sup>18</sup> Abul Faraj al-Isfahani said that Hamwayh hired for his bondmaid some jewels from some jeweler for twelve million dinars. When ar-Rashid saw the jewels, he admired them. He bought them and offered them as a present to the bondmaid.<sup>19</sup> Al-Muqtadir played with money. He effaced coins and then gave them to women and bondmaids.<sup>20</sup> Al-Mutawakkil had a bondmaid called Fadhl. She sat on a chair and argued with poets in his presence. He asked her when he bought her, 'Are you a poet?'

She said, 'So claims he who bought and sold me.'

Al-Mutawakkil laughed and asked her to recite him some verses of her poetry. She did, and he admired her poetry and ordered to give her fifty thousand dirhams.<sup>21</sup>

Al-Muqtadir had a village-like statue made of silver. It was very expensive. He donated it to one of his servants just because one of his bondmaids asked him to do that.

These are just few examples on the wasting of the Abbasid caliphs who spent the wealth of the nation on their pleasures paying no attention to the welfare of the society or to the development of the general life.

## Abundant Gifts To Poets

Poets were the only media in that age. They supported the Abbasid rule and spread fabricated virtues ascribed to the Abbasid kings. They preferred those kings to the Alawids who were the propagandists of social justice in Islam. The Abbasids endowed poets with abundant monies and made them extremely wealthy.

Once, Abul Shibl al-Barjami al-Kufi praised al-Mutawakkil with a thirty-verse-poem and al-Mutawakkil gave him thirty thousand dirhams for that.<sup>22</sup>

When al-Mutawakkil held a general meeting for people to pay homage to his three sons al-Muntasir, al-Mu'tazz, and al-Mu'ayyad as the heir apparents after him, as-Sawli recited a poem on the occasion and al-Mutawakkil gave him one hundred dirhams, and so did each one of his sons.<sup>23</sup>

Once, Ibrahim bin al-Mudbir recited a poem praising al-Mutawakkil who was pleased with the poem and gave the poet fifty thousand dirhams and asked his vizier Ubaydillah bin Yahya to find him a good job.

Marwan bin Abul Janub was one of the poets who got abundant monies from al-Mutawakkil. He was very interested in praising al-Mutawakkil. Once, he got from him fifty thousand dirhams after a poem. On

the occasion of the homage to his three sons, al-Mutawakkil gave the poet one hundred and twenty thousand dirhams, fifty garments, a mule, a horse, and a donkey.<sup>24</sup> For another poem, al-Mutawakkil gave him one hundred gold dinars.

Al-Buhturi, who was the emir of poets at that time, prepared all his talents to praise al-Mutawakkil who gave to him high titles and good epithets besides great wealth.

Al-Mutawakkil gave abundant wealth to Ali bin al-Jahm and invited him to his meetings after praising him and declared his enmity towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). He dispraised the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) bitterly and preferred over them the Abbasids who had no virtue save seizing of the rule and leading the nation towards dark abysses of oppression.

This wasteful spending on poets scattered an important part from the wealth of the nation that had to be spent on the public and to satisfy all needs of the nation.

## Palaces

The Abbasids were very excessive in building palaces. They spent incredible amounts on building their palaces and decorating them with wonderful decorations the like of which no one had ever seen in history. Al-Mutawakkil built a palace called al-Burj. It was the most beautiful building of al-Mutawakkil. He constructed in it large statues of gold and silver, and a wide pool with plates of gold and silver. Beside the pool there was a tree of gold with birds that whistled. It was adorned with jewels. A big throne of gold, with two big lions and a drawer having statues of beasts and eagles, was made for him there with other things as the throne of Prophet Solomon (a.s.) had been described. The walls were covered from inside and outside with mosaic and gilded marble. He spent on the building and decorating of this palace about one million and seven hundred thousand dinars. He ordered that no one should enter this palace except in clothes of embroidered silk. He brought dancers, singers, musicians, and drinking companions into the palace. When he sat in this paradise, his vizier Yahya bin Khaqan said to him, 'O Ameerul Mu'minin, I hope that Allah will thank you for building this palace and reward you with the Paradise.' Al-Mutawakkil asked, 'What for?' Yahya said, 'You have filled people with desire of the Paradise by this palace, for this will lead them to do good deeds in order to be in Paradise.' Al-Mutawakkil became delighted at hearing that.<sup>25</sup>

From the other palaces that al-Mutawakkil had built was al-Ja'fari. The cost of building and decorating this palace was more than two million dinars. When the palace was completed, he brought singers, dancers, and clowns and gave each of them two thousand dirhams.<sup>26</sup>

Anyhow, we have mentioned the great expenses that al-Mutawakkil had spent on all his palaces in our book "the Life of Imam al-Hadi" which showed the economical imbalance in that time where the Abbasid family appropriated the revenue of the state and spent it on their pleasures and lusts.

## The Luxury of The Abbasid Women

The greater part of the state revenue was spent on the ladies of the Abbasid palace. They lived in absolute luxury and bliss. Lady Zubayda (Harun ar-Rashid's wife) was interested in expensive embroidered clothes that one dress of hers cost fifty thousand dinars.<sup>27</sup> This luxury was not limited to the Abbasid ladies only, but it also included the ladies of viziers. Utabah, the mother of Ja'far al-Barmaki had one hundred bondmaids and each one of them put on jewelry and ornaments different from the other.<sup>28</sup>

## The Wretchedness of The Public

It was natural that the majority of the Muslim peoples suffered poverty and wretchedness after they had been deprived from the state treasury, since that was spent on the pleasures of the kings, viziers, and the media, whereas poverty spread among most of people.

Once, al-Asma'iyy saw a poet cling to the curtains of the Kaaba while reciting,

*"O my Lord, I am asking as You see,*

*wearing two (ragged) cloaks as You see,*

*and my old wife is sitting there as You see,*

*and my stomach is hungry as You see,*

*so what do You see about what You see?"<sup>29</sup>*

Many other poets described in their poetry the miserable life of sufferings they lived. It was very difficult for them (and for most of people) to find a bit of food and a piece of cloth for their hungry, naked children.

The miserable life that some poets, who had no relation with the Abbasid palace, lived, led them to beg through their poetry viziers, judges and other officials, and made their poetry as a means for gaining. Abu Fir'own as-Sasi was in utmost need, and when he was unable to bear any more, he went to al-Hasan bin Sahl the vizier of al-Ma'mun and praised him in a poem. In the same poem he expressed his bad condition and the wretchedness of his children.

Poverty stung Abu Fir'own severely and this time he went to one of the judges of Basra begging his help. It was shame to those kings who had the treasures of the world in their hands but left their peoples suffering neediness and deprivation.

From the poets, who suffered poverty, was Abush Shamaqmaq who went to the king begging him after he saw his children writhe with hunger and pain.

These poets represented the lives of their peoples and their sufferings of hunger, pain, and loss. The economical life was not sound and right, but it was confused and paralyzed. The Abbasid governments did not achieve ease for people, and did not provide a good life for them. The revenue of the state was spent on the Abbasid family, the viziers, and the prominent statesmen, whereas the majority of people lived in poverty and wretchedness and could not obtain even the least necessities of living.

## The Imam's Condition

Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) represented the front of opposition to the Abbasid rule. He often criticized the rulers for appropriating the wealth of the nation and extorting the livelihood of people.

From the notable forms of the opposition that Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) followed was that he prohibited himself from communicating or cooperating with those kings who took the wealth of Allah as theirs and the people of Allah as their slaves. They spared no effort to join the imam (a.s.) to their retinues but they could not, and then they treated him with absolute severity. They fought him in the means of his living and caused him to be in pressing neediness. They prevented monies to come to him from his Shi'a followers, but one of the Shi'a sent jars of oil to the imam (a.s.) and he put money inside them<sup>30</sup> which decreased the pressure of that blockade.

Anyhow, Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) sided with the poor and the deprived who were the victims of those kings who robbed the wealth of the nation and left the state in economical imbalance.

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1. Tareekh at-Tamaddun al-Islami (the history of the Islamic civilization), vol.5 p.79.
  2. Al-Wuzara' wel Kuttab (viziers and clerks), p.288.
  3. The life of Imam Musa bin Ja'far.
  4. Al-Wuzara' wel Kuttab, p.142.
  5. Ibid., p.268.
  6. Al-Kamil fit-Tareekh, vol.6 p.268.
  7. Al-Fakhri, p.164.
  8. Al-Wulat wel Qudhat (walis and judges), p.125-126.
  9. An-Nujoom az-Zahirah, vol.2 p.54, al-Khutut by al-Maqrizi, vol.2 p.94.
  10. Al-Akhbar at-Tuwal, p.384.
  11. Al-Wuzara' wel Kuttab, p.250.
  12. Nashwar al-Muhadharah, vol.1 p.293.
  13. Al-Muntadham, vol.6 p.253.
  14. An-Nujoom az-Zahira, vol.2 p.65.
  15. Al-Kamil fit-Tareekh, vol.6 p.319.
  16. Ibid.
  17. Al-Mustadhraf min Akhbar al-Jawari by Salahuddeen, p.28.
  18. Tareekh al-Khulafa' by as-Sayouti, p.384.
  19. Al-Aghani, vol.16 p.226.
  20. Samt an-Nujoom al-Awali, vol.3 p.354.
  21. Nisa' al-Khulafa' (the caliph's women) by ibn as-Sa'iy, p.86.

22. Al-Aghani, vol. 14 p. 193.
23. Al-Aghani, vol. 14 p. 193.
24. Al-aghani.
25. Uyoon at-Tawareekh, vol.6 p. 170.
26. Mir'at az-Zaman, vol.6 p. 158.
27. Murooj ath-Thahab, vol.2 p.366.
28. Al-Wuzara' wel Kuttab, p. 192.
29. Al-Mahasin wel Masawi', p.585.
30. Safeenat al-Bihar, vol.2 p. 158.

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