



From Ibn Yusuf's Al-Kharaj

Persian economic measures' Corruption in Abbasid state era

The Persians enjoyed wide power and control over the administration in the first era of the Abbasid state, which enabled them to supervise the vital pillars of the state. Economic institutions are the key pillar on which they relied, similar to the Barmakids, which supported their authority. Given the circumstances the Abbasid state went through during Al-Hadi era, a financial leakage occurred and impacted its budget. Persians' financial policy was based on a fundamental principle of recognizing the situation as it was, pending coming up with new regulations that would change economic life in a way that matches their policy. This is what Al-Tabari mentioned about the Barmakids; that they were extremely active in building palaces and constructing houses without a specific goal, confirming that their families were fond of glamor, extravagance and love of appearances in order to win over the seniors and impose respect on the public. On the other hand, they worked to help their workers masterfully build, beautify and decorate their homes, even if their expenses were covered from the state budget.

Persians' goal was not to encourage the movement of urbanization and construction as much as it was an extravagant waste to prepare for the gatherings of amusement, as mentioned by Al-Jahshiri in his book, The Ministers, and other historians who elaborated on the colors and shapes of the Persians' gatherings of amusement in the Abbasid state era. This is surprising and call for exclamation marks as their companions (in drinking) used to wear special clothes made of silk, with bright colors, and unique perfumes, as was the custom of the ancient Persians. This entailed extravagance and expensive gifts to those followers, not to mention that such gathering may have deviate from the legal frame. Frequent historical narratives about the Barmakids indicate their love for pretense and vanity; for example, their attempt to spread sophistication and embroidery in clothes in the Abbasid society, which had a great impact on the state budget. It was common about them that they do not hesitate to buy their clothes for any financial value, no matter how expensive they are.

The Persians also sought to influence the financial economy and control the minting of gold coins in the state, to the extent that they minted gold dinars that differed from the then-current coining technique in the Abbasid state, on which the following poetic verse was engraved:

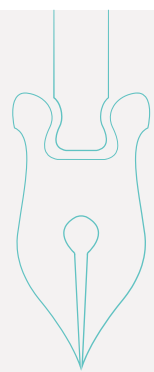
Yellow coin of the house of kings, with Ja'far's face thereon

It is worth noting that their economic policy had negatively impacted the economy of the Abbasid state, including the imposition of arbitrary taxes and collection of land. Among the procedures that they introduced was (the land system), which prompted the Abbasid caliph to consider it and entrusted the famous judge, Abu Yusuf, in Al-Rashid era, to examine that system and submit an adequate report thereon, clarifying the organization of lands' ownership and the extent of their conformity with the offices of his ministers. That report was issued in the form of the famous Kitab al-Kharaj.

“They re-applied the ancient Persian economic systems with all their details, negative aspects and their contradiction with the teachings of Islam”

Among the tax systems that were commonly used during the period of Persian domination was the Tax Collectors “Al-Qebala” System; i.e., a person undertakes to collect some taxes from taxpayers in some areas and then takes them for himself, in exchange for his commitment to pay a specific amount, agreed-upon in advance, to the treasury. That system was similar to what is the “Commitment System” of the Ottoman era, which involved exploitation and domination over the people and their rights. Judge Abu Yusuf ordered to stop working with that system, saying: “I saw that you see only darkness in the state. The Collector, in collecting al-kharaj, would oppress the people, force them to what they cannot bear and tyrannize them. In this, and in similar acts, is the destruction of the state and its people. The collector does not care about that, nor he cares about the legality of what he collects. He cares only about the benefit he gets from what he collects, so he resorts to tormenting the people to take what they have, including setting them tied under the sum or hanging stones in their necks, which is a great torment and corruption that Allah forbids. Allah Almighty ordered to take their forgiveness in collecting Al-Kharaj and not to shoulder them beyond their capacity. I resent that collection system because the people are not safe with the collectors, who treat them as aforementioned, harming them and their property. Allah forbids corruption, saying: (And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration) [Al-Araf, 58/56] and (And if he were to wield authority, he would try to cause corruption in the land, and to ruin the crop and the stock, and Allah does not like corruption.) [Al-Baqara, 205]. Several nations were destroyed because of injustice to people. Burdening the people with Al-Kharaj and obligating them to what they are not supposed to pay is prohibited and not permitted”.

Abu Yusuf al-Qadi wrote in his book about tax collectors selected by the Persians saying that they were ignorant of details of the tasks assigned thereto and that among the conditions of employing them was to choose those with competence. However, for the Persians, the only condition was loyalty and devotion to them. That is why he was of the opinion that such collectors should be monitored continuously and strictly to prevent them from oppressing the peasants and landowners.



References:

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