

Islam and *Dhimmitude*

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Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide, by Bat Ye'or. Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press/Associated University Presses, 2002, 528 pp., \$60.00 (hardcover); \$19.95 (paper).

With its subtitle somewhat reminiscent of Samuel P. Huntington's foreboding essay on the remaking of the world order, Bat Ye'or's new book has a partially prophetic ring. Indeed, having written for the last quarter of a century under the pseudonym of Bat Ye'or — "Daughter of the Nile," a reference to her Egyptian-Jewish origins — on the plight of Jews and Christians under Islam, she has been widely acclaimed as a pioneer, if not a prophetess. The post-September 11 quest for understanding the equation Islamic/non-Islamic throws the present book into ominous relief. After her breakthrough study *The Dhimmi* (1985), followed by *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam* (1996), this, her third major work on the hapless history of the "protected peoples" (*dhimmis*) in the shadow of the Crescent, is now available to the English reader.

As the author makes clear in her "Introduction," the present study is in no way a repetition of her previous books. It aims at establishing a distinction between the *dhimmi* status, which is essentially definable in legal terms, and that of "*dhimmitude*," which, she argues, is a distinct condition "embracing the social, political, and religious relations of different human groups." The latter requires to be studied per se in its historical development by dint of factual evidence and sociological analysis, as the author cogently demonstrates. In order to forestall any allegations that the notion "*dhimmitude*," appearing in the title, is a Western provocation, it is

worthwhile recalling that the term was first coined by Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel. In the speech preceding his assassination by a Syrian-backed killer, in August 1982, he used this word to describe Christian existence in the Muslim context.

Through the ten panels that form the successive chapters of the book, Bat Ye'or reveals a detailed fresco spanning three continents in space and a millennium in time, in order to make clear how a "protected subject" lived under Muslim sovereignty.

Though the introductory chapter "The Orient on the Eve of Islam" is brief, it lays bare the dogmatic keystone of the Islamic conquest and empire — *jihad*, or Holy War. *Dhimmi* status was primarily conditioned by submission, which is what the word *islam* actually signifies. Nothing expresses more clearly this notion than the Qu'ranic linkage of *jihad* to *jizya*, the conquest followed by the burdensome taxes imposed upon the conquered *dhimmis*.

Chapter 2 enlarges upon the political and economic aspects of *dhimmitude*. Rather through economic necessity than religious tolerance, Jews and Christians were allowed to retain their ancestral faiths in return for the annual payment of the poll-tax, collected in the course of a degrading ceremony signifying total submission to the superiority of the conqueror. This relationship reflected a protection-ransom equation, whereby the *dhimmi's* precarious legal provisions could be withdrawn if it could be shown that he had overstepped the bounds of his subjugation, thus forfeiting his right to protection. Muslim social history is fraught with random executions of *dhimmis* accused of this "felony." The author also explains how the internal rivalries of antagonistic Christian factions first facilitated the Muslim conquest before collaborating in its consolidation.

A discussion of the religious and social aspects of *dhimmitude* (Chapter 3) demonstrates how the obligation of degra-

ation and humiliation also constituted the guiding principles in limiting the vital freedoms of both Jews and Christians. A low-profile lifestyle was demanded of them, requiring that their places of worship — as indeed their ceremonies and prayers — be denuded of all display so as to avoid offense to Muslim religious sensitivity. Disobedience incurred the destruction of religious edifices or bodily assault on *dhimmis*, both the living and the dead, as exemplified by the horrific accounts of the not uncommon attacks on their "ostentatious" funeral processions. In the social arena, the urge to humiliate found expression in the imposing of discriminatory attire and means of transportation, demeaning patterns of social behavior, and trade restrictions. The author also shows that the Muslim authorities insidiously helped to envenom relations between *dhimmi* groups that, although united in a common fate, were often in conflict. Such rivalry spawned forms of Christian anti-Judaism.

The dawning of the modern era, with its emancipatory slogans, fueled hope for religious liberalization. However, as is explained in Chapter 4 ("Modernity: a Time of Hope and a Time of Ashes"), reactionary upsurges were unleashed in this period, producing one of the most tragic eras of *dhimmi* history, drenched in the blood of massacred Christians and Jews.

The author suggestively links this outburst of hatred with the beginnings of anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist literature in the Arab world, posing an interesting theory on the Oriental background and possible origins of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. At the same time, she puts into a new perspective the causes of the 1840 Damascus Affair, as the outcome of French intrigues.

A fresh gleam of hope returned with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the colonial period (Chapter 5: "The Mandate Period"). However, European politics aroused intense opposition in conservative Arab-Muslim circles, and the long-awaited vision of multi-religious and cultural coexistence in the Middle East was shattered by the emergence of rival forms of Arab Muslim and Christian nationalisms. These united only to dash the nascent dream of a Jewish homeland, promised by the Mandate.

Chapter 6 ("From the Jewish Exodus to the Christian exodus"), describes the increase in anti-Jewish agitation subse-

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quent to World War II and the establishment of the Jewish state, and analyzes the Christian campaign for emancipation. It is here that Bat Ye'or's effort to show the common denominators in the behavioral patterns of Christians and Jews emerges with supreme forcefulness. Historical amnesia, the struggle for secularization, and political disarray, paradoxically misled *dhimmi*s to support Islamic fundamentalism.

The return of Islam in the post-colonial aftermath is the subject of Chapter 7, ("Jihad and *Dhimma*: Modern Formulations"). A synopsis is presented of Muslim political thought and the ideological foundation of Muslim regimes by modern theologians such as Iqbal, Mawdudi, and Turabi, whose overall tendencies were to impose or restore rule according to the dictates of *shari'a*. The implementation of *shari'a* inevitably spelled doom for non-Muslim populations, many of which had "to choose between a suitcase, a coffin, or *dhimmitude*." (p. 203)

Their plight under various regimes is given a lengthy description in Chapter 8 ("The Return of *Dhimmitude*").

One of the most original aspects of her book is Bat Ye'or's contribution to the study of "Inter-*Dhimmi* Conflicts in the Modern Period," presented in Chapter 9, where the tactics of Eastern Christian Judeophobia and its ideological basis are analyzed. Indeed, in the entangled mesh of religious and nationalistic turmoil, not only are Muslim and Jewish elements at play but also the multifarious tendencies of Christian rivalry and enmity. Bat Ye'or masterfully points out how the unlikely allies of church and mosque collaborated in the effort to isolate Israel both theologically and politically.

As a sequence to the preceding study, Chapter 10 examines the "Politics of *Dhimmitude* in Europe," summarizing the extent of "*dhimmitization*" of Western pro-Arab policy, in which are to

be found some of the keys for decoding the current anti-Zionist stance of the Western media.

Of singular significance is the author's conclusion (Chapter 11), which is not merely a recapitulation of themes already dealt with. It broaches a number of outstanding issues in a string of brief epilogues. After crossing swords with certain opposing views from academics, Bat Ye'or goes on to show how European policy had often in the past carried favor with Islamic regimes — at the expense of their *dhimmi* subjects — where this proved propitious to the furtherance of European colonial interests. Furthermore, she forcefully points out that although Christians had shared the same baneful fate as the Jews under the Muslim yoke, the 20th century had surprisingly witnessed an active commitment to the Islamic cause on the part of many Eastern churches. Although this can be perceived as a continuation of the Eastern Christian antisemitic tradition travestied in the garb of anti-Zionism, Bat Ye'or here detects the symptoms of the "*dhimmi* syndrome," whereby the victim identifies with the contentions of his oppressor.

The appendices include a number of historical documents that shed light on some of the book's arguments. These include, *inter alia*, an account of Arab feuds in 19th-century Palestine, the destruction of the Jewish Quarter in Shiraz in the early 20th century, and the recent religious outbursts against Christians in Indonesia.

The value of this already substantial volume is further enhanced by a useful list of Muslim and non-Muslim historians and theologians, as well as a glossary of Arabic and Turkish technical terms, the whole being completed with a full bibliography and a general index.

Though not a work of formal history, Bat Ye'or's innovative 500-page study is

undoubtedly a historic work. It teems with a host of factual information, as well as containing much novel food for thought that will deeply enlighten the reader to the reality of the fate of Jews and Christians in Muslim lands. Indeed, unfettered by the academic preoccupation with Islamically correct language, the author hammers out some Islamic truths unsparingly, truths rarely exposed in conventional manuals. Taking us beyond the mythical rose garden of pacific coexistence, which now-obsolete textbooks have tended to perpetuate, we are confronted with the horrendous spectacle of centuries of continuous *jihad* warfare, fiscal oppression, persecution, enslavement, and deportation that have crushed, eroded, and often obliterated entire indigenous *dhimmi* populations.

However, the criticism heaped upon Islam is not intended by Bat Ye'or as an incitement to vindictiveness. One of the epilogues of her "Conclusion" calls for an all-embracing assessment of *jihad* and *dhimmitude* in the name of ecumenic rapprochement. She maintains that no reconciliation between the Star, the Cross, and the Crescent can take place as long as Islam fails to recognize the principle of historical self-criticism, refuses to relinquish its debilitating sense of superiority toward other faiths, and evades its duty to right its countless past wrongs. Only when Islam has attained sufficient spiritual maturity to overcome its chronic obsession with the past can it advance toward the future, which may one day witness the convening of an International Islamic Conference, parallel to Vatican II.

In short, *Islam and Dhimmitude* is essential and sobering reading for anyone eager to understand the Islamic past, which the Islamist present plans for the global Islamist future, and where — the prophetic message of this book predicts — we will bid farewell to today's free Western world. •