

The Most Important Islamic Sources and Historians That Speak of the Art of Islamic Warfare

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

A Chronological Introduction And Description Of The Most Important Sources

Despite the fact that the wars of the Prophet (S) were fought over a relatively short period (10 years), his method and style of command and military leadership lasted for a long time; because Muslims and others, within the military and without, have discussed, studied and analyzed this subject from the beginning of the first century A.H. up to this day and have not neglected it.

The Glorious Qur'an is the most important source that speaks of these wars and battles, and we find a lot about this subject in its commentaries. The most important of these commentaries are: Tabari's Commentary, Nayshaburi's *Aṣbāb al-Nuzul*, Qurtubi's *al-Jāmi li Ahkām al-Qur'an*, Baydhawi's *Anwār al-Tanzil wa Asrār al-Ta'wil* and Suyuti's *al-Itqān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*. Among these, Tabari's commentary, which describes the details of what takes place in the battles and also Nayshaburi's commentary, which records the occasion of revelation of specific verses in relation to the battles, are especially important.

Material about these issues can [also] be found in various books of history and biography, the most important among which include: Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri's *al-Maghāzi al-Nabawiyya*, Ibn Is'hāq's *al-Siyar wa al-Maghāzi*, al-Wāqidi's *al-Maghāzi al-Nabawiyya*, Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi's *Jawāmi' al-Sirah*, al-Kalā'i's *al-Iḥtifā'* and Ibn Sayyid al-Nās' *Uyun al-Athar*. Wāqidi was more precise in his historical recordings of all the wars than the others, and by describing the affairs of war and its management, he has been able to tackle the subject better. We cannot find complete references to the organization of the military except in his treatise. After him, Ibn Sa'd continues his work in the book *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* and presents a picture of that which Wāqidi had not recorded.

However, the most important books of history about this subject are: *Tārikh Ibn Khayyāt*, *Bukhāri's Tārikh al-Kabir*, *Tārikh Tabari*, *Tārikh Ibn 'Asākir*, Ibn Athir's *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh*, Ibn Katheer's *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, and also some biographical commentaries like Suhayli's *Rawdh al-Unf* have also set out to give details of such issues. Books of Hadith and Jurisprudence have also devoted specific chapters and sections for these matters. The primary ones among these are: *Sahih Bukhāri* (Chapter 9 - The Book of Battles), *Sahih Muslim* (Chapter 3 - The Book of Jihād and Expeditions), *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Chapter 2 -

The Book of Jihād), Sunan Ibn Dāwud (Chapter 2 - The Book of Jihād and Expeditions), Sunan al-Nasā'i (Chapter 6 - The Book of Jihād), Sunan al-Dārimi (Chapter 2 - The Book of Jihād and Expeditions), Sunan al-Dārquṭni (The Book of Expeditions), Musannaf San'āni (Chapter 5), Ibn Hanifa's al-Maghāzi wa al-Musnad (The book of Jihād and Expeditions), Shāfi'i's al-Umm (Chapter 6 - The Book of Willful Injury), Humaidi's al-Musnad (The Book of Battles and Jihād),

Abi Sulaymān al-Khitābi's Ma'ālim al-Sunan and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzi's al-Tahdhib.

In this context, Sahih Bukhāri is important both historically and militarily as the author has narrated the accounts chronologically and recounts the battles in the order in which they took place, starting from the Battle of al-'Ashirah to the Battle of Tabuk. Similarly, when he explains the battles, he takes all the angles into account, mentioning numerous narratives about it, such

that the reader is able to come to a complete and correct understanding of these battles.

Aside from the books that discuss this subject separately, there are various books of history and annals of nations that have also been beneficial in this research. The most important among these are: Arzaqi's Akhbāru Makkah, Qutb al-Din's Tārikh Makkah al-Musharrafah,

Fāsi's al-'Aqd al-Tamin, Bakri's Mu'jam Mastu'jam and Yāqut al-Hamawi's Mu'jam al-Buldān.

The most important feature of these histories and chronicles is that they mention the economic situation [at the time], military resources and battle expeditions and similarly give a clear representation of the economic life, which in this age was considered one of the more important issues, and for every discussion on the military it is a necessary factor that needs to

be taken into account.

Books about the character of the Prophet (S) also consist of many points about his 'military management' and 'qualities of leadership' the most important among which include: Ibn Sa'd's Tabaqāt al-Kubrā (vol. 1 Chapter 2), Tirmidhi's Shamāil, Faryabi's Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah, Abu 'Ali Ansāri's Sifāt al-Nabi (S), Qādhi 'Ayyādh's Shifā, Suyuti's al-Khasā'is al-Kubrā, Ibn Hajar 'Asqalāni's al-Mawāhib al-Daniyya, al-Dhahabi's Tārikh al-Islām (vol. 1), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzi's Zād al-Ma'ād fi Hudā Khayril 'Ibād (vol. 1 & 2) and his Furusiyyat al-Muhammadiyyah.

Books of biography are also not empty of material on this subject, rather, in many instances provide detailed accounts about the commanders of battles and wars and about the companions who had the responsibility of commanding the armies. Some of these (books) are: Ibn Habib's al-Muhbir, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's al-Isti'āb fi Ma'rifat al-Ashāb, Ibn Atheer al-Jazari's Usd al-Ghāba fi Ma'rifat al-Sahābah and Ibn Hajar 'Asqalāni's al-Isāba fi Tamyiz al-Sahābah.

The Islāmic conquests at the time of the Prophet (S) and the companions were studied by those who came later and the various aspects and details were presented in a well organized fashion by them. Books of geography and history expound on the conquests within and without

the Arabian subcontinent and also talk of the events after the spread of Islām from Madina al-Munawwarah to Damascus, Baghdād, Madā'in, and on the east to India and to Alexandria, Constantinople, Tarablus and Tunis. It could be said that the most important of these works are Ibn Khādābā's *al-Masālik wal-Mamālik* [vols. 3, 4, 5 and 6], Ibn Rustā's *al-A'lāq al-Nafsiyya*

[Chapter 8] which talks about Madina, Makkah, Haramayn and the southern lands of Arabia. Ibn Faqīh's *al-Buldān* [Chapter 10 and 11] talks of Makkah and Alexandria while Ya'qūbī's *al-Buldān* [Chapter 17 and 18] mentions the Maghreb, Baghdad and their historical importance. Balkhī's *Suwar al-Aqāleem* is the first book on geography written in Islām and Istakhri's *al-*

Masālik wal-Mamālik is also the first book that describes the 'Islāmic World'.

In Ibn Hawqal's *al-Masālik wal-Mamālik* [Chapter 3, 4 and 24] the maps of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula have been drawn and the economical and social situation of Libya has also been portrayed. Muqaddasī has also given a description of Palestine and Syria in his

Ahsanu al-Taqāseem fi Ma'rifatil Aqāleem [Chapter 32 and 34].

Mas'udi's *al-Tanbih wal-Ashrāf* [Chapter 37] speaks of the life of the Prophet (S), battles and expeditions in which he was the commander, military units, horses and mounts, and all that is related to the military transport. Mas'udi's recording of the 'Historical Geography of Battles', is considered an original source whose narrations can be relied upon, however, unfortunately

most of his writings are lost.

Another source is Qazwīnī's *Athār al-Bilād wa Akhbār al-'Ibād* which discusses geographical history and related issues including the situations and conditions of different lands and their inhabitants. After this, we must mention the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn and Qalashqāndī's *Subh al-A'shā*. These two books record geographical and historical information about different kingdoms, especially Egypt and Syria.

It is noteworthy that more recently books and research works, in both Arabic and English, have been written about the life of the Prophet (S) and his battles with the disbelievers. The most important works in Arabic include: *al-Rasul al-Qā'id* (S. Khattāb), *al-Rasul al-'Arabi wa Fann al-Harb* (General Mustafa Talās), *al-'Abqariyya al-Askariyya fi Ghazawāt al-Rasul*, 'Ali Hāmish al-Sirah (Tāhā Hussain), *Hayātu Muhammād* (Muhammād Hasanain Haykal), *al-'Abqariyyāt al- Islāmiyya* ('Aqqād) and *al-Anwār al-Muhammadiyya* (Nabhānī).

The foreign books that have been translated into Arabic and discuss the same subject, we can mention: *Muhammād* in Makkah and Madina (Montgomery Watt), *Muhammād, the Prophet of*

Allah (Dianna), *The Heroes* (Thomas Carlyle), *The First Hundred* (Michael Hart) and others. Many of these works are only limited to military, institutional or ethical issues that form part of the seerah. Because 'military management' encompasses all these issues, it is necessary that

we discuss all these matters together, taking into consideration their correlation with each other. It is through this that the importance of this subject and its role in revealing the secret of the success of the Holy Prophet (S) and those whom he chose as army commanders, becomes evident.

Now we will take a look at the most important authors and researchers in history who have written on this subject and have left behind important works on the battles and expeditions, and since their importance in relation to this subject varies, we will first study the oldest writings that are relevant and have practical implications and thereafter we will mention others according to their chronology and relevance; in this order: Wāqidi, Ibn Is'hāq, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri, Kalā'i and Ibn Sayyid al-Nās

The Most Important Historians

1. Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Muslim Bin 'Ubaydallah Bin Shihāb al-Zuhri (51-124 A.H.)

There is a difference of opinion about his date of birth and death. He was a learned scholar, a memorizer of the Qur'an and an author who knew how to use the various expressions and idioms and he would use these in his works. He was a poet and a genealogist who would look for the chains of narrators in the traditions. He would strive in the quest for knowledge and would guard it. He kept aloof from the events and turmoil of his time. He believed in the dissemination of knowledge among the people and used to say: 'In the spread of knowledge there is the strengthening of religion and worldly life and in the path of knowledge all this

comes together.'

He studied about the seerah from Sa'eed bin al-Musayyab, 'Urwa bin Zubayr and 'Ubaydallah bin 'Abdullah bin Utbah, and in his attitude towards his teachers, he displayed exemplary ethics and morals. He would accompany them, serve them and show the utmost reverence to them. Zuhri made efforts to author some works. He would write down what he heard. When his

works became known, people turned to him and benefitted greatly from his knowledge.

Zuhri started with Hadith, History and Expeditions. He wrote so much that his writings had to be carried on the backs of animals. When he died, he was in such a position that there was none more learned than him in history. His knowledge was disseminated through his narrators. The most famous of them who lived in Haramayn and Hijāz included: 'Umar bin Dinar, Yahya bin Sa'eed al-Ansāri, Musa bin 'Uqba and others. From those who lived in Iraq, the most important ones included: 'Abdullah bin 'Umayr, Ismā'il bin Abi Khālid, 'Atā ibn Sā'ib; and from the other places like Syria and Egypt, there were Mansur bin Sādhan, 'Abd al-Karim Jazari, Thawr bin Yazid and others.

The merits of Zuhri's accounts of the expeditions over other works are as follows: They were written with sincerity, honesty, clarity and eloquence. Zuhri had met some of the companions who participated in battles with the Prophet (S) and he has narrated from them about the wars and the strategies of the Holy Prophet (S). The most important of them are: Abdullah bin 'Umar, Anas bin Mālik, Suhayl bin Sa'd and others. Similarly, in al-Musannaf (vol. 5, the chapter on expeditions), we find numerous traditions that Zuhri has narrated from 'Umar ibn Rāshid. He too, was truthful in narration and reliable in transmission. Many of the scholars have praised and criticized the narrators of expedition accounts like Ibn Is'hāq and Wāqidi, however Zuhri has been praised by all and has been hailed as the most truthful and highly learned of his time. Therefore, we can rely upon what he has recorded or narrated about the battles of the Prophet (S). Zuhri had a longstanding experience in recording expeditions. He is the oldest writer to formulate a systematic and clear method in this field, therefore his recordings are well-grounded, clear and reliable and have been systematically categorized and are far off from the politics of authorship and other various discrepancies.

Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Is'hāq Bin Yasār al-Mutallabi (85-151 A.H.) .2

Ibn Is'hāq was born in Madina and was buried in Baghdað after his demise. There is a difference of opinion regarding the date of his death. His most important works include: Kitāb al-Khulafā and al-Siyar wal-Maghāzi wal- Mubtadā. He was trustworthy and knowledgeable about expeditions and history and was also a memorizer of prophetic traditions. Great scholars have narrated from him and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri, Ibn Hanbal and others have praised him. Mālik called him a Dajjāl and accused him of following the Qādiriyya sect and also deemed him to be one who narrates ahādīth with improper and incomplete chains.

The Seera of Ibn Is'hāq has only come down to us through the recorders of seera, the most important of whom were: Ibn Hishām, Tabari, Kalā'i, Ibn Sa'd and Ibn Atheer. All of these [people] have not presented the seera of Ibn Is'hāq in the same manner as the original, rather they have mentioned a summary of his statements and recordings. Ibn Hishām has himself acknowledged this in the introduction of his al-Seera al-Nabawiyya, so it would be correct to say that this work is actually a summary and a selection of Ibn Is'hāq's narrations.

He is one of the leaders of those who were involved in recording the seerah [of the Holy Prophet] and is the first person to collect the accounts of the expeditions and record them. His works are a source of reference for researchers today. The great recorders of expeditions like 'Aāsim bin Umar Qatāda who wrote al-Siyar wal-Maghāzi gave the following testimony about

him: 'The knowledge that Ibn Is'hāq placed at the disposal of the people through his narrations will never disappear.' When Zuhri was asked about Ibn Is'hāq's accounts of expeditions, he said 'he is the most learned of all people about the expeditions'.

Today, the narrations of Ibn Is'hāq that have been passed on by many reliable recorders of the seera like 'Aāsim and Zuhri have reached us. It can be said that Ibn Is'hāq is from those scholars who recorded the accounts of the expeditions based on old methods. One day this point was raised in front of him, he said: 'I am only a safe keeper and recorder of the knowledge of expeditions.'

The Merits of Ibn Is'hāq's Seera:

He is the only person who has narrated the expeditions of the Holy Prophet (S) in its totality, because the other Seera recorders have narrated the expeditions in an incomplete and disjointed fashion. Maybe their lifetimes were not enough for them to complete the work and their students did not expound on the details of their expedition accounts and sufficed with mentioning only a number of battles and wars.

The Seera of Ibn Is'hāq is detailed and contains numerous long narrations and includes mention of dates. Shāfi'i says: 'Anyone who wishes to gain expertise about the expeditions needs (to study) Ibn Is'hāq.' Through lengthy odes, he has highlighted the narratives of what transpired on the battlefields. All this points to the vastness of the Seera of Ibn Is'hāq. These odes have immortalized the victories and give important information about works, situations and personalities. Even though it is not possible to give exact details about what takes place on the battlefield, all the military strategies and skills employed, some of the particulars about the battles of the Prophet (S) have been directly reported

Abu Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Umar al-Wāqidi (130-207 A.H.) .3

Wāqidi was born in Madina and died in Baghādād. He is buried in the Khayzarān graveyard. He was an author and used to pay special attention in writing [about] the seerah and expeditions (of the Prophet (S)), to such an extent that he became one of the foremost authorities in this field. His most important works are: al-Maghāzi al-Nabawiyya, Fath Afriqiyya, al-Radda, Fath al-'Ajām, Fath Misr wa Iskandariyya, Akhbār Makkah, Tabaqāt, Futuh al-Iraq, Seerat Abi Bakr, The Battle between the Aus and Khazraj and others. The merits of Wāqidi's works can be outlined as follows:

Precise Information: He has given detailed and precise information about those who participated in the battles, the route taken by the armies, the weapons and modes of transport used, provisions, descriptions of battlefields, the factors that helped in gaining victory or led to

them facing difficulties in battle, the location of the martyrdom of soldiers, and anything related to warfare.

Extensive Information: He wrote and recorded everything that was related to the battles, such that through his narrations, we learn many of the specifics regarding the military, because he has reported all the different aspects of issues pertaining to warfare and leadership. In this way, the information provided by Wāqidi in the areas of the circumstances of war, its location, the type of ground on which it was fought etc. is of great importance. If his writings about the battles were collected together, it would in itself have been a source for the principles of war and battle at the time of the Prophet (S).

Recording of Exact Times: In military management, for a commander, time and its determination is of the essence and can make all the difference in the result of the battle; whether it be victory or loss.

Recording of Exact Locations: Wāqidi also recorded the exact locations of the battles and through this he gave value to the battlefields where the Prophet (S) fought. Many like Ibn Sa'd, Tabari and Ibn Katheer have narrated from Wāqidi about the birth and Prophethood of the Holy Prophet (S) and also his battles and conquests.

Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* stands out in its military reporting because it has been written according to Wāqidi's style, meaning he has similarly paid a great deal of attention to the recording of exact times and locations and sometimes describes the locations in which the battles took place and adds on to the narrations of Wāqidi and then, in another place, he discusses the principles of warfare. From his writings it can be deduced that he is truthful and his narrations are authentic. Many of the important aspects of Wāqidi's narrations and works .were revealed and expounded by his student Ibn Sa'd

Abu al-Rabi' Sulaymān Bin Musā Ibn Sālim al-Kalā'i al-Himyari .4

Kalā'i was born in Balans and grew up there and he died in enemy territory (in battle). He has narrated from Ibn Qāsim Hubaysh, Ibn Zarqum, Ibn al-Waleed bin Abi al-Qāsim and others. He was famous for his eloquent oratory and writings and gave great importance to recording and narrating ahadith. His most well known works are: *al-Iktifā bimā Tadhammanhu 'an Maghāzi al-Rasul* (S), *Maghāzi al-Khulafā* (4 volumes), *al-Musalsalāt 'an al-Ahādīth* and *al-Athār wal-Ishārāt*.

When his works were published and his message was spread, people came towards him and sought to benefit from him and many attended his teaching sessions. The most famous of these was Abdullah ibn al-Abārid who has eulogized him after his martyrdom. With regards to

the importance of his writing 'al-Iktifā' it must be said that its chain of transmission is strong and it describes the battles and their various aspects in detail, because Kalā'i himself was a military person and had tasted the hardships of war. So if he has recorded something in the seera, he has done so truthfully and with total regard of his responsibility and questionability. Furthermore, in his books one senses an enlightening spirituality that none of the previous writers displayed.

Kalā'i al-Balansi was a leader and a courageous commander who was steadfast in battle and in one of the battles he is said to have addressed one of the fleeing soldiers thus: 'Do you flee from Paradise?' He was martyred while he still held the standard in his hand and was encouraging and urging the soldiers to go forth against the enemy. Aside from this, Kalā'i was a great poet who would compose epics and rouse the emotions of the people

Abu al-Fath Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn 'Abdillah Ibn Sayyid al-Nās 152 .5

He was popularly known as Ibn Sayyid al-Nās. There is a difference of opinion regarding his date of birth and death. He died in Cairo. He studied under his father and a group of scholars, the most famous of whom was Ibn Daqiq al-'Eid. This scholar tutored him in religion, Arabic grammar and poetry. He gained precedence over his contemporaries in the fields of Seera and history. His most important works include: 'Uyun al-Athar fi Funun al-Maghāzi wa al-Shamā'il wa al-Siyar, Nur al-'Uyun, Bushrā al-Labib fi Dhikrā al-Habib and Tahsil al-Isāba fi Tafsīl al-Sahāba.

Many scholars like Qādhi 'Izz al-Deen Sharif, who has mentioned him in his *Wafayāt* and Ibn Katheer, Ibn Nāsir al-Deen, Suyuti and others have testified to his great knowledge. He compiled the seera in two volumes by narrating what the recorders of the seera before him had

written. That which makes his accounts of the expeditions stand out includes: Precision and Depth: He would select authentic narrations and leave aside the weak ones. He would take this matter very seriously and would do it very well. An example of this precision of his can be seen when he summarized his own book 'Uyun al-Athār and named it Nur al-'Uyun. In this way it became easy for him to refer to previous works and to present his writings on the seera in a well-documented manner. One of the great scholars has said: "Ibn Sayyid wrote, compiled and corrected a lot in his beautiful handwriting and he created principles for this [also]."

Following the Method of Zuhri: Ibn Sayyid al-Nās in his book *al-Siyar wal-Tārikh*, has followed Zuhri's method and has compiled all that which relates to the military. His 'Uyun al-Athār is an example of the *Maghāzi* of Ibn Is'hāq which has shadowed the *Seera* of Ibn Hishām and is

formed of a selection from the *Maghāzi* of *Wāqidi* and a selection from scholars of history such as *Tabari* and *Ibn Khayyāt*. That which assisted him in this was his great knowledge of the sources of the *seera*. *Ibn Sayyid al-Nās* was also a specialist in jurisprudence and would benefit from the scholars of his time and gain knowledge from them. *Ibn Zubayr* says: "He gained the permission [to narrate traditions] from four-hundred scholars or more."

Organization, Sequence and Reference: *Ibn Katheer* has described him thus: "He occupied himself in the pursuit of knowledge and was better in this than everyone else. After he learnt the *seera* and history, he compiled them in two volumes... grand poetry, well written prose, complete eloquence and proper writing is what he had and he was attributed with kindness and good morals. He was loyal to the principles and practices of the previous scholars that relied ".(on the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S

Note

To study the book "Military Management in the Battles of the Prophet (s)", please click here:

<http://alhassanain.org/english/?com=book&id=1281>