Fadak In its Real and Symbolic Meaning

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Yes, Fadak was in our hands out of all what was under the sky but some people felt greedy for it and others withheld themselves from it.

(Fatima's husband) Amirul Mu'mineen[1]

The location

Fadak was a village in Hijaz. Between Fadak and Medina there was a distance of two days and it was said three days. It was a Jewish land in the beginning of its history.[2] It was inhabited by some Jews until the seventh year of hijra when Allah cast terror into their hearts and they made peace with the Prophet by giving him a half of Fadak. Also it was mentioned that they gave him the entire Fadak.[3]

Fadak in its first stages

The Islamic history of Fadak started from that when it became a property of the Prophet (s) because it was not possessed by war.[4] Then the Prophet donated it to Fatima.[5] It remained in Fatima's possession until her father died. Then the first caliph (Abu Bakr) snatched it from her according to the author of as-Sawa'iqul Muhriqa[6] and became as part of the general finance and source of the state's income. When Omar became the caliph, he gave Fadak back to the heirs[7] of the Prophet (s). It remained in the Prophet's heirs' hands until Othman became the caliph. He took it from its real possessors and gifted it to Marwan bin al-Hakam.[8] Then history ignored the matter of Fadak after Othman without mentioning anything about it. But the true fact was that Imam Ali recovered it from Marwan among all the other things that the Umayyads had plundered during the reign of their caliph Othman.

During the rule of Imam Ali

Some of those, who defended Abu Bakr concerning the matter of Fadak, mentioned that Imam Ali did not recover Fadak and he left it for the Muslims following the same way of Abu Bakr, so if Imam Ali knew that Fatima's allegation (of Fadak) was true, he would not do that!

I do not want to wide-open, in this answer, the door of taqiyya[9] and to try to find an excuse for Imam Ali's doing, but I never believe that Imam Ali had followed the way of Abu Bakr. History did not show anything of that, but in fact it showed that Imam Ali thought that Fadak was the Prophet's heirs'. Imam Ali recorded this clearly in his letter to Othman bin Hunayf[10]

as you will see in a next chapter.

Perhaps Imam Ali intended that the yields of Fadak concerned Fatima and her heirs, who were her children and husband, and so the news did not need to be spread because Fadak was in its legal possessors' hands, who were him and his children. And probably that he spent its yields in the interest of the Muslims out of his and his children's content[11] or they might dedicate it and made it as charity.

During the reign of the Umayyads

When Mu'awiya bin Abu Sufyan became the caliph, he went too far in sarcasm and slighting relating to the wronged right (Fadak). He gifted one third of Fadak to Marwan bin al-Hakam, one third to Omar bin Othman and the last third to his son Yazeed. It was still circulated[12] among them until it was totally possessed by Marwan during his rule. Finally it came to Omar bin Abdul Aziz bin Marwan. When Omar became the caliph, he paid it back to the Fatimites. He wrote to his wali of Medina Abu Bakr bin Amr bin Hazm ordering him to give Fadak back to the Fatimites. Abu Bakr bin Amr wrote to the caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz: "Fatima has sons (grandsons) from the family of Othman and so and so. To whom would I give it?" The caliph wrote to him: "If I ordered you to slay a cow, you would ask about its color! If my letter reached you, divide Fadak among Fatima's Sons (grandsons) from Ali."[13]

The Umayyads became angry with Omar bin Abdul Aziz and blamed him for that. They said to him: "You distorted the rulings of the two sheikhs (Abu Bakr and Omar)". It was mentioned that Omar bin Qayss came to the caliph with a group of the people of Kufa and blamed him for that. He said to them: "You ignored while I perceived, you forgot but I remembered. Abu Bakr bin Muhammad bin Amr bin Hazm told me from his father from his grandfather that the Prophet (s) had said: "Fatima is a part of me. Whatever displeases her displeases me and whatever pleases her pleases me."[14] Fadak was in Abu Bakr and Omar's possession during their reigns until it reached Marwan, who gifted it to my father Abdul Aziz. I and my brothers inherited it. I asked them to sell me their shares. Some of them sold me and some gifted me their shares. When I had it all, I decided to give it back to the Fatimites." He (Omar bin Qayss) said to him: "If you ought to do that, then keep it but divide its yields" and he did so.[15]

Then Yazeed bin Abdul Melik seized it again from the Fatimites and it remained in the family of Marwan's hands until their state (the Umayyad state) declined.[16]

During the Abbasid reign

Abul Abbas as-Saffah, the first Abbasid caliph, gave Fadak back to Abdullah bin al-Hassan bin al-Hussayn bin Ali bin Abu Talib. Then Abu Ja'far al-Mansour seized it during his reign from al-Hassan's family. Al-Mahd bin al-Mansour gave it back again to the Fatimites, whereas Musa bin al-Mahdi seized it again from them.[17]

It remained in the Abbasids' hands until al-Ma'moon came to the caliphate in 210 AH and gave it back to the Fatimites. He wrote to his wali of Medina Qathm bin Ja'far: "Amirul mu'mineen (al-Ma'moon) in his position to the religion of Allah and the caliphate of the Prophet and his kinship with him is worthier to obey the Prophet's Sunna and to carry out his orders. He has to submit to those, whom the Prophet had donated or gifted with gifts or charities. Amirul mu'mineen looks forward to the blessing of Allah and His safeguard and to be able to do what may bring him closer to Allah. The Prophet had given Fadak to Fatima and that was a very well-known matter without any doubt about it among the Prophet's family. She kept on claiming that Fadak was hers and she was the worthiest to be believed. Amirul mu'mineen thinks that he has to give it back to Fatima's heirs approaching to Allah by achieving His justice and to the Prophet by carrying out his order and donation. So he (al-Ma'moon) ordered this matter to be fixed in his books and to be sent in letters to his walis. If it was announced in every season (of hajj) after the death of the Prophet (s) that whoever had a charity, a gift or he was promised of that, he was to mention that and to be granted what he was promised of, so Fatima was worthier to be believed in her claim about what the Prophet had granted her. Hence amirul mu'mineen writes to al-Mubarak at-Tabari ordering him to give Fadak back to the heirs of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, with all of its limits, rights, slaves, yields and others relating to it. It is to be given to Muhammad bin Yahya bin al-Hussayn bin Zeid bin Ali bin al-Hussayn bin Ali bin Abu Talib and Muhammad bin Abdullah bin al-Hassan bin Ali bin al-Hussayn bin Ali bin Abu Talib, whom amirul mu'mineen entrusts with to be responsible of it and to hand it over to its possessors. Know well that this is the opinion of amirul mu'mineen and this is what Allah has inspired him with obeying Him and to be closer to Him and to His messenger (s). Try to inform of it and treat Muhammad bin Yahya and Muhammad bin Abdullah as you treated al-Mubarak at-Tabari before. Help them to repair it and to improve its yields inshallah. With my salaam."[18]

When al-Mutawakkil became the caliph, he seized Fadak from the Fatimites and gave it to Abdullah bin Omar al-Baziyar. It had eleven date-palms planted by the holy hands of the Prophet himself. Abdullah bin Omar al-Baziyar sent a man called Bishran bin Abu Umayya ath-Thaqafı to Medina. He cut off those date-palms. When he came back to Basra, he was afflicted with hemiplegia.[19]

The relation between the Fatimites and Fadak ended in the days of al-Mutawakkil when he donated it to Abdullah bin Omar al-Baziyar.[20]

This was a summary account about the confused history of Fadak, which was woven by the inclinations and formed by the fancies according to what was required by the covetousness and the temporary policies. In spite of that, history did not miss moderation and fairness in some different times and circumstances where Fadak was given back to its real possessors. It was noticeable that the problem of Fadak took a great importance in the Islamic society and the rulers' attention. Hence you see that its solution differed according to the different policy of the state and submitted to the mainstream of the caliph towards the Prophet's family directly. If the caliph had a fair look and a moderate thought, he would give Fadak back to the Fatimites but if he was not so, seizing Fadak was on the top of the caliph's list of priorities.

The symbolic and material value of Fadak

One of many things that led us to know the symbolic value Fadak had in the Islamic account was a poem said by the famous poet Di'bil al-Khuza'iy, which he composed when al-Ma'moon (the Abbasid caliph) gave Fadak back to the Fatimites. Here is its opening verse:

The face of the time smiled,

When Ma'moon gave back Fadak to the Hashimites.[21]

In the end, a point worth noting; Fadak was not a little piece of land or a small field as some people thought. What I am certain of is that Fadak yielded a great sum generating important wealth to the possessors. I do not have to quantify its outcome although it was mentioned in the historians' books that it was very great sums.

Here is some of what confirmed the high material value of Fadak:

First: Omar (as you will see later) prevented[22] Abu Bakr from leaving Fadak to Fatima (s) because of the failure in the finance of the state, which was in need of support because of the wars against the apostates and the revolts of the mutinous polytheists.

It is clear that such a land, which was considered so important to assist the finances of the state in the difficult circumstances like wars and revolts, must be of a great production.

Second: the saying of Abu Bakr to Fatima in a dialogue between them: "This property was not the Prophet's but it was for the Muslims, with which the Prophet equipped the soldiers and spent for the sake of Allah."[23] Equipping the soldiers would not be possible except with great sums of money required to be expended on the army.

Third: once Mu'awiya divided Fadak into three thirds[24] and gave a third to each of Yazeed, Marwan and Amr bin Othman. It showed clearly the great production of this land. It must be

great wealth to be divided among three emirs, who were very rich and wealthy people. Fourth: considering it as village[25] and estimating some of its date-palms as much as the date-palms of Kufa in the sixth century of hijra.[26]

References

[1] Nahjul Balagha; Arranged by Subhi as-Salih, p.416

[2] Mu'jamul Buldan by Yaqout al-Hamawi, vol.4 p.238-239.

[3] Refer to Futoohul Buldan by al-Balatheri p.42-46 to see that the people of Fadak had made peace with the Prophet for the half of Fadak and that it was a pure property of the Prophet because he did not get it by war to be considered as booty for the Muslims. In page 46 the author said: "In two hundred and ten of hijra the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'moon bin Haroon ar-Rasheed paid it back to the Fatimites. He wrote to his wali of Medina Qathm bin Ja'far ordering him to do that…"

[4]According to the holy Quran: (And whatever Allah restored to His Apostle from them you did not press forward against it any horse or a riding camel) 59:6.

[5] Futoohul Buldan, p.44.

[6] Refer to page 38.

[7] Sharh Nahjul Balagha by ibn Abul Hadeed, vol.16 p.213.

[8] Futoohul Buldan p.44 and Sharh Nahjul Balagha, vol.16 p.216.

[9] To hide one's true beliefs when life is in danger.

[10] Sharh Nahjul Balagha by ibn Abul Hadeed, vol. 16 p.208.

[11] This was the most acceptable possibility because the first was rejected by the letter of Imam Ali to Othman bin Hunayf when he said: "and others withheld themselves from it…" and the third was rejected by the acceptance of Fadak by the Fatimites.

[12] Sharh Nahjul Balagha, vol.16 p.216 and Futoohul Buldan p.46.

[13] Sarh Nahjul Balagha, vol.16 p.278.

[14] At-Taj aj-Jami' lil Ossool, by Mansour Ali Nassif, vol.3 p.353.

[15] Futoohul Buldan p.46 and Sharh Nahjul Blagha vol. 16 p.278.

[16] Sharh Nahjul Balagha vol.16 p.216.

[17] Sharh Nahjul Balagha, vol.16 p.216-217.

[18] Futoohul Buldan p.46-47.

[19] Sharh Nahjul Balagha vol.16 p.217.

[20] ibid.

[21] The descendents of Hashim, Prophet Muhammad's grandfather. For the poem refer to

Sharh Nahjul Balagha vol.16 p.217

[22] As-Seera al-Halabiya vol.3 p.391 and Sharh Nahjul Balagha vol.16 p.234.

[23] Sharh Nahjul Balagha vol.16 p.214.

[24] Sharh Nahjul Balagha, p.216.

[25] Mu'jamul Buldan by al-Hamawi vol.4 p.238 and Futoohul Buldan p.45 that Surayj bin Yunus said: Isma'eel bin Ibrahim told from Ayyoub from az-Zuhri about the saying of Allah: (..you did not press forward against it any horse or a riding camel) he said: they were some Arabic villages for the Prophet (s); Fadak and so and so…

.[26] Sharh Nahjul Balagha vol.16 p.236