

Battle of Camel and Hermeneutics Reading of Orientalists & Muslim Commentators Views

M.D.Kamruzzaman

PhD Student at Faculty of Quranic & Sunnah Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
71800, Nilai Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Email: kmshecu@gmail.com Tel: +8801916457570

Dr. Abdulrahman Obeid

Associate Professor at Faculty of Quranic & Sunnah Studies, Universiti Sains Islam
Malaysia

Abstract

Saida Aisha as the daughter of Abu Bakr, the earliest and strongest friend and follower to the Prophet and first caliph, then as the third and youngest wife of the prophet Himself lived in political environment. She had freedom to speak openly even in front of the prophet Himself, refuse some opinion of His companions and played role in some political matters. Aisha become enraged and spoke out in public and found her way into high politics in the reign of Uthman the third caliph and after his assassination. Orientalists' assumptions about Aisha and her role in Battle of Camel are based on historical analysis and critical reading of the battle regardless the Islamic values and theological consideration that guide us as Muslims to have fair assessment for this complicated issue. Their analysis for the civil war between Ali Ibnu Abi Talib and Saida Aisha, between him and Mu'awiyah Ibnu Abi Sufian is referring all causes and effects to personal disagreements. Psychological and social analysis is extremely important to our overall assessment of the Battle of the Camel. Ibn al-Jawzi believes that the biggest strife that afflicted religious thought is hermeneutics, for instance, the cause of many civil wars and the deviation of many Muslim sectarianists from the right path is interpretation. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah tended to point out that the verse of Surat al-An'am demonstrates his doctrine which means Allah is examining believers. This paper is adapting descriptive and critical methods in order to reach results based on historical evidence by referring to oriental sources and authentic interpretations of Muslim scholars.

Keywords: Battle of Camel. Saida Aisha. Hermeneutics. Ibn al-Jawzi. Orientalists.

Introduction

During our analysis of the Battle of the Camel, we come across a problem of relying on human memory, as there are no accurate records on the history of the movements of the army of Talha and Al-Zubayr, as well as the military troops of the army of Imam Ali, just as there are no statistics - Agreed upon by historians - on the numbers of casualties, dead and wounded. The phrase "Khalqun Katheer/A great number of people" is frequently repeated in Prophetic biographies and history books, which does not have a clear and decisive significance!

For example, Ibn Kathir describes the battle of Mu'tah and refers to the number of dead with the expression "Khalq Kathir"! This is Ibn Kathir describing the battle and giving some exaggerated numbers that cannot be accepted easily:

"وهذا عظيم جدا، أن يتقاتل جيشان متعاديان في الدين، أحدهما وهو الفئة التي تقاتل في سبيل الله عدتها ثلاثة آلاف، وأخرى كافرة وعدتها مائتا ألف مقاتل، من الروم مائة ألف، ومن نصارى العرب مائة ألف، يتبارزون ويتصاولون ثم مع هذا كله لا يقتل من المسلمين الا اثنا عشر رجلا، وقد قتل من المشركين خلق كثير! هذا خالد وحده يقول: لقد اندقت في يدي يومئذ تسعة أسياف وما صبرت في يدي إلا صفيحة بمانية، فماذا ترى قد قتل بهذه الاسياف كلها¹²⁷⁰"

Centuries after Ibn Kathir some historians have quoted such phrases, with all its exaggerations, without comment or criticism¹²⁷¹. Like the phrase "Khalqun Kathir", the phrase "Maqatalatun Azimah/A great assault" is repeated and carries with it the meanings of amplification, which is not hidden from the scrutinizing reader. The phrase "Khalqun Katheer/A great number of people" was repeated in the historical book of Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani 41 times, although it does not indicate a specific number¹²⁷². Ibn Kathir repeated this phrase in his discourse on the battle of the camel:

"وجعل حكيم يقتحم عليهم فاقتتلوا على فم السكة، وأمرت عائشة أصحابها فتيامنوا حتى انتهوا إلى مقبرة بني مازن، وحجز الليل بينهم، فلما كان اليوم الثاني قصدوا للقتال، فاقتتلوا قتالا شديدا، إلى أن زال النهار، وقتل خلق كثير من أصحاب ابن حنيف، وكثرت الجراح في الفريقين، فلما عضت الحرب تداعوا إلى الصلح¹²⁷³"

Orientalists' Arguments About Battle of Camel & Role of Saida Aisha

Orientalists' assumptions are based on historical analysis and critical reading of battle of Jamal regardless the Islamic values and theological consideration that guide us as Muslims to have fair assessment for this complicated issue. Their analysis for the civil war between Ali Ibnu Abi Talib and Saida Aisha, between him and Mu'awiyah Ibnu Abi Sufian is referring all causes and effects to personal disagreements. For instance, Saida Aisha hated Imam Ali due to his attitude in the issue of Ifk when he suggested to the Prophet to divorce Aisha after being accused of committing adultery by the hypocrites of Madinah. French orientalist Henri Massé (1886-1969) claimed that Aisha declared war against Ali alongside with Talha and al-Zubair

¹²⁷⁰ Ibn Kathir, Abul Fida' Isma'il. 1976. *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah (from al-Bidayah wal Nihayah)*. Edited by Mustapha Abdulwahid. Cairo: Isal al-Babi al-Halabi. 3/489.

¹²⁷¹ Al-Shami, Mihammad bin Yusuff al-Salihi. 1997. *Subul al-Huda wal Rashad fi Sirati Khairil Ibad, wa Zikiri Fadha'ilihi wa A'lami Nubuwwatihi wa Af'alihi wa Ahwalihi fil Mabda'I wal Ma'ad*. Cairo: Al-Majlis al-'Ala lil Shu'un al-Islamiyyah. 6/155.

¹²⁷² Al-Asqalani, Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Ali Ibn Hajar. 1986. *Iba' al-Ghamr bi Abna' al-Umr fi al-Tarikh*. Edited by Muhammad Abdulmu'id Khan. Beirut: Darul Kutub al-Ilmiyyah. 2nd Edition. 9/223, 8/305, 7/461, 6/209, 5/37, 4/98, 3/160, 2/221, 1/154. (for instance)

¹²⁷³ Ibn Kathir, Abul Fida' Isma'il. 1990. *Al-Bidayah wal Nihayah*. Beirut: Maktabatul Ma'arif. 7/268.

as avenge from his nonchalant attitude and hurtful advice!!¹²⁷⁴ Gibbon thought the jealousy between Aisha and Fatimah daughter of the Prophet was main factor for Aisha's decision to declare war against Ali!¹²⁷⁵ German orientalist Wilferd Madelung (1930-) believed that the roots of struggle for power started with Omar when he elected Abu Bakr to be caliph and true successor of the Prophet peace be upon Him and to the splitted nation to many groups after assassination of Uthman Ibn Affan.¹²⁷⁶

One of the biggest mistakes that the Orientalists made in their analysis of the events of the Battle of the Camel was selecting records, from the history of Tabari, that fit their preconceived views on this complex subject. They did not pay attention to the systematic points of methodology that Imam al-Tabari developed for his historical approach in his encyclopedic history of Islam. One of these points clearly confirms Imam al-Tabari's keenness to include all the narrations, even if they contradict each other in the details!

If we accept that the rebels wrote many letters in the name of Saida Ayesha that incite people to revolt, why we don't accept that many statements attributed to her were also fabricated by the same rebels? Those statements were recorded by al-Tabari and considered facts taken for granted by many orientalists! Indeed, those statements are not facts just because al-Tabari included them in his historical works. Al-Tabari, in the second section of his book (*Tarikh al-Umam wal Muluk*), adapted the annals method in the sequence of historical events from the prophetic period until year 302 of Hijri calendar¹²⁷⁷. His method was to record all narrations whether they are valid or fabricated and seldom he criticized the chain of transmitters.

Gibbon, in one of his selective texts about the camel battle, he quoted a conversation between Saida Aisha and Abul Aswad Addu'ali who was blaming her and asking for what reason she came to Basra city leading an army? Her expected answer was to seek vengeance for the innocent caliph Uthman and bring the murderers to justice! Abul Aswad confirmed to her that the assassins of Uthman are not in Basra, but Aisha's justification was to get the support of Basra people against the rebels. Abul Aswad reminded her of Quranic verse from chapter al-Ahzab commanding all Mothers of believers to stay at home not to involve in politics and fight Muslims! Her answer was like a thunderbolt: Will any believer dare to fight the army I lead?!!¹²⁷⁸

The last statement from Saida Aisha was not recorded in any reliable books of Islamic history, however, if she was really convinced that no Muslim dare to fight her why she was gathering an army? It was enough to march to Madinah with a small troop of warriors and punish the

¹²⁷⁴ Henri Massé. 1960. *Islam*. Translated from French to Arabic by Bahij Sha'ban. Beirut. 1st Edition. P.64.

¹²⁷⁵ Gibbon, Edward. 2001. *The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London: Penguin Classic. 1st Edition. 1/267.

¹²⁷⁶ Madelung, Wilferd. 1997. *The succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. UK:Cambridge University Press. P.219.

¹²⁷⁷ Khidr, Abdul Aleem Abdul Rahman. 1995. *Al-Muslimon wa Kitabatul Tarikh, Dirasah fil Ta'sil al-Islami li Ilm al-Tarikh..* P. 191.

¹²⁷⁸ Gibbon, Edward. 2001. *The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 1/272.

assassins. Gibbon was searching for any possible demonstration to confirm the validity of his claim about Aisha thirsty of revenge from Imam Ali.

Gibbon wrote his encyclopedic history before more than 200 years and he was famous for his criticism of Christianity, but his treatment of Islam is showing his consistent in his attitude towards all religions. Although Gibbon criticized Islam in general, Quran and prophet's characteristics he believed that the jurisprudence system of Islam perpetuate harmony in Islamic state by building civil law¹²⁷⁹ but in his analysis of battle of camel he is drawing the image of the Islamic society as a tribal state governed by destructive tribal tendencies more than the political law established by the Prophet and his companions. His encyclopedia was about the decline and fall of Roman Empire, but he settled in this book a private account with Christianity and other religions including Islam!

Another orientalist, John Glubb, denied any role by Abdullah Saba in the conflict and civil war between Ali and Aisha because his existence and role were invented by some researchers for pragmatic necessity. For instance, it was not Ibn Saba who broke the treaty with Uthman Ibn Hunaif and tried to kill him then banished him from city of Basra? Who killed Abdullah Ibn Muslim the man sent by Imam Ali with a copy of Quran to bring peace? Who was fighting the army of Ali killing then with swords and spears? Who killed 20 Muslims from the party of Ali even before the battle started?¹²⁸⁰

Many questions raised by Blubb as a criticism of Ibn Saba' role, however, the last question is leading to an answer for the whole role of Ibn Saba'. It is not necessary for president of an international power to plunge into battle himself as example, it is enough for him to give the command only. Ibn Saba' was managing sedition from far and using media disinformation, stir up a strife and falsification of statements between the belligerence parties.

Reading of Muslim Commentators Views

Ibn al-Jawzi believes that the biggest strife that afflicted religious thought is hermeneutics, for instance, the cause of many civil wars and the deviation of many Muslim sectarianists from the right path is interpretation:

"وبالجملة فافتراق أهل الكتابين وافتراق هذه الأمة على ثلاث وسبعين فرقة إنما أوجبه التأويل وإنما أريق دم المسلم يوم الجمل وصفين والحرّة وفتنة ابن الزبير وهلم جرا بالتأويل وإنما دخل أعداء الإسلام من المتفلسفة والقرامطة والباطنية والإسماعيلية والنصيرية من باب التأويل فما امتحن الإسلام بمحنة قط إلا وسببها التأويل"¹²⁸¹

All civil wars between Muslims were caused by interpretation, the war of Abdullah bin Al-Zubayr with Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan, the war of Muawiyah against Ali bin Abi Talib, and

¹²⁷⁹ Gibbon, Edward. 2001. *The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 3/380.

¹²⁸⁰ Glubb, John Bagot. 1995, *The great Arab Conquests*. USA: Barnes and Noble. 1st Edition.

¹²⁸¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ayyub al-Zar'i. 1973. *I'lam al-Muaqqi'in an Rabbil 'Alamin*. Beirut: darul Jeil. Edited by Taha Abdulra'uf Sa'd. 4/251.

the war of Talha and Al-Zubayr against Ali! Some may think that such justification is an evasion of historical facts, the first of which is the struggle for power, but this analysis, which is not without risk, involves a truth closely related to theology and its implications. The emergence of esoteric sects was linked to philosophical hermeneutics whether these sectarianisms belong to Judaism, Christianity or Islam but ibn al-Qayyim, However, Ibn al-Qayyim rejected some interpretations and considered them invalid:

"فأهل الجمل وصفين إنما اقتتلوا على تأويل القرآن وهؤلاء يحتجون به وهؤلاء يحتجون به نعم التأويل الباطل تأويل أهل الشام قوله لعمار تقتلك الفئة الباغية فقالوا نحن لم نقتله إنما قتله من جاء به حتى أوقعه بين رماحنا فهذا هو التأويل الباطل المخالف لحقيقة اللفظ وظاهره"¹²⁸²

When Ammar bin Yasir joined the army of Ali bin Abi Talib and the knights of al-Sham killed him, a hadith spread that was not in favor of Muawiyah's army, because in that hadith, it was stated that Ammar would be killed by the transgressors. Muawiya and his supporters deliberately interpreted the hadith by saying that it was Ali's army that killed Ammar bin Yasir because Ali forced Ammar bin Yasir to fight with him even though he was an old man.

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah tended to point out that the verse of Surat al-An'am demonstrates his doctrine:

{ وَكَذَلِكَ فَتَنَّا بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ [الأنعام: 53]

Which means Allah is examining believers:

"وفتنه المؤمن في ماله وولده وجاره لون آخر، والفتنة التي يوقعها بين أهل الإسلام، كالفتنة التي أوقعها بين أصحاب عليٍّ ومعاوية، وبين أهل الجمل وصفين، وبين المسلمين، حتى يتقاتلوا ويتهاجروا لون آخر"¹²⁸³

The belligerents in the Battle of the Camel were subjected to great trials and tribulations, as a result of that trial, thousands of lives were lost, the entire political system changed from shura to monarchy, the tribal tendency returned to control the political and social equations and political corruption became inherent in all subsequent governments.

This psychological and social analysis is extremely important to our overall assessment of the Battle of the Camel. However, the details of the battles, killings and bloodshed cannot be separated from their social contexts and the emotional relations between the members of the same tribe and cannot be separated from the look of respect and appreciation that the enemy

¹²⁸² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ayyub al-Zar'i. 1998. *Al-Swa'iq al-Mursalah ala al-Jahmiyyah wal Mu'attilah*. Edited by Ali bin Muhammad al-Dakhilellah. Riyadh: Darul 'Asimah. 3rd Edition. 1/184.

¹²⁸³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ayyub al-Zar'i. 1994. *Zadul ma'ad fi Hadi Khiril Ibad*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah. 27th Edition. 3/169.

holds for his enemy before relations between them deteriorate and turn dramatically into a relationship of war and revenge.

The Battle of the Camel and its harsh consequences were a source of deep grief for Saida Ayesha and Imam Ali as well, and for Muslim historians who tried to justify this civil war. May be the great Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah was the most scholar who shed tears and pray for the victims of that battle while writing his book *al-sawai'q al-Mursalah*. He was severely affected by the sorrow details of that battle to the extent that he launched a harsh campaign against anyone who criticized the warring parties, and the same judgment applies to those who criticized the warring parties in the Battle of Siffin between Imam Ali and Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan.

The rigorous statements of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah reflect the viewpoint of many Muslims, whether scholars or students. Therefore, his book received great importance and wide public acceptance, in the past and in the modern times. Whoever has not read the events of the Battle of the Camel, the debates that took place between the warring parties, and the poems that were recited in it, will not know the value of Ibn al-Qayyim's book *Al-Sawa'iq*. And because Ibn al-Qayyim is the loyal student of Ibn Taymiyyah, who arranged his writings, revised his ideas, and elaborated on explaining his doctrinal and jurisprudential opinions, the contemporary Salafi school spent effort and money to direct attention to this book.

Conclusion

The orientalist's political assumption against the mother of the believers, Ayesha, may God be pleased with her, could be confined to these substantial points:

- 1- Saida Ayesha was exploited by Al-Zubayr bin Al-Awam and Talha bin Ubaidullah. They operated her religious status to find legal justifications for war declaration against Ali bin Abi Talib and grab legitimacy from his nomination as a caliph to pave the way for Al-Zubayr or Talha to declare himself the fourth caliph.
2. Saida Ayesha was misled for her insensibility of political tricks.
3. Saida Ayesha was emotionally lured into war against Ali bin Abi Talib by lifting Uthman's bloody shirt on swords demanding retaliation from the murderers using her deep respect for the murdered caliph, Uthman, may God be pleased with him.

All civil wars between Muslims were caused by interpretation, the war of Abdullah bin Al-Zubayr with Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan, the war of Muawiyah against Ali bin Abi Talib, and the war of Talha and Al-Zubayr against Ali! Some may think that such justification is an evasion of historical facts, the first of which is the struggle for power, but this analysis, which is not without risk, involves a truth closely related to theology and its implications. The emergence of esoteric sects was linked to philosophical hermeneutics whether these sectarianisms belong to Judaism, Christianity or Islam but Ibn al-Qayyim, However, Ibn al-Qayyim rejected some interpretations and considered them invalid:

References:

- Al-Asqalani, Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Ali Ibn Hajar. 1986. *Iba' al-Ghamr bi Abna' al-Umr fi al-Tarikh*. Edited by Muhammad Abdulmu'id Khan. Beirut: Darul Kutub al-Ilmiyyah. 2nd Edition.
- Al-Shami, Mihammad bin Yusuff al-Salihi. 1997. *Subul al-Huda wal Rashad fi Sirati Khairil Ibad, wa Zikiri Fadha'ilihi wa A'lami Nubuwwatihi wa Af;alihi wa Ahwalihi fil Mabda'I wal Ma;ad*. Cairo: Al-Majlis al-'Ala lil Shu'un al-Islamiyyah.
- Gibbon, Edward. 2001. *The decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London: Penguin Classic. 1st Edition
- Glubb, John Bagot. 1995, *The great Arab Conquests*. USA: Barnes and Noble. 1st Edition.
- Henri Massé. 1960. Islam. Translated from French to Arabic by Bahij Sha'ban. Beirut. 1st Edition.
- Ibn Kathir, Abul Fida' Isma'il. 1976. *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah (from al-Bidayah wal Nihayah)*. Edited by Mustapha Abdulwahid. Cairo: Isal al-Babi al-Halabi.
- Ibn Kathir, Abul Fida' Isma'il. 1990. *Al-Bidayah wal Nihayah*. Beirut: Maktabatul Ma'arif. 7/268.
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ayyub al-Zar'i. 1994. *Zadul ma'ad fi Hadi Khiril Ibad*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah. 27th Edition.
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ayyub al-Zar'i. 1998. *Al-Swa'iq al-Mursalah ala al-Jahmiyyah wal Mu;attilah*. Edited by Ali bin Muhammad al-Dakhilellah. Riyadh: Darul 'Asimah. 3rd Edition.
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ayyub al-Zar'i. 1973. *I'lam al-Muaqqi'in an Rabbil 'Alamin*. Beirut: darul Jeil. Edited by Taha Abdulra'uf Sa'd.
- Khidr, Abdul Aleem Abdul Rahman. 1995. *Al-Muslimon wa Kitabatul Tarikh, Dirasah fil Ta'sil al-Islami li Ilm al-Tarikh*.
- Madelung, Wilferd. 1997. *The succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. UK:Cambridge University Press.