

al-Baladhuri

Other fragments of the `Uthmaniyya version of events survive in the *Ansab al-Ashraf* of al-Baladhuri. In the first, Wahb b. Jarir describes briefly the coming of Ibn Ziyad to Kufa and his demanding Hani b. `Urwa to hand over Muslim. When he refuses, he has him executed and then seizes Muslim. He takes Muslim out on the balcony and demands that Muslim say: 'I am Muslim b. `Aqil, the leader of rebels.' Muslim says it and then Ibn Ziyad executes him¹.

This isolated report manages again to undermine the bravery of such men as Muslim, and by implication the *ahl al-bayt*, by making Muslim repeat such words. Such a story is not to be found elsewhere in the sources.

Another report, again from Wahb b. Jarir, concerns the Imam al-Husayn addressing the army of `Umar b. Sa`d before the battle. It is not surprising that even this tries to undermine the Imam al-Husayn. He is reported to have asked the Kufans: 'Shall I submit to the rule of Yazid?' To which the reply came: 'You must submit to the rule of Ibn Ziyad.' This the Imam al-Husayn refused to do, and the battle took place. The implication of the report is that the Imam al-Husayn was prepared to submit to Yazid. This seems to attempt to undermine his stature and to make an unfavourable comparison with Ibn al-Zubayr, the hero of the later `Uthmaniyya resistance to Yazid².

Al-Baladhuri's account, which is split up into sections in his life of Muslim, his life of Yazid, and his life of the Imam al-Husayn, gives the impression of being the most historically balanced, in the sense of presenting all possible versions.

The kernel of the account is presented with a collective *qalu* (= they said) but if the earlier surmise is correct, it is probably based on al-Mada'inis monograph, which, in turn, was based on Abu Mikhnaf. However, al-Baladhuri also gives the more hostile reports of Wahb b. Jarir, as well as other sources. As already noted, he gives some reports from `Awana, but not through Ibn al-Kalbi. He also uses a brief account from Husayn b. `Abd al-Rahman³.

This account is also used by al-Tabari. This account is brief and adds nothing to our knowledge of the historical tradition. It does present the view that the Imam al-Husayn was prepared to submit to Yazid

but refused to submit to Ibn Ziyad. It also reports that Yazid wept when the head of the dead Imam was brought to him.

From the point of view of historiography, al-Baladhuri's version is very useful. It is, however, questionable whether al-Baladhuri was just being an unbiased historian reporting all the accounts available to him. On occasions al-Baladhuri is known to mention two accounts and say which one is correct. Nowhere in his presentation of the martyrdom of the Imam al-Husayn does he do this.

The use of the collective *qalu* makes much of the account sound very unverifiable, whereas the alternatives to the general account are given with full chains of authority. This makes them look more authentic. Thus accounts which undermine the stature of the Shi'i Imam are included in a way that seems to be intended as a correction of the general account.

This in no way means that he is not sympathetic to the plight of the Imam. He clearly is, but he is concerned to undermine the Shi'i conception of the Imamate, and this will be the case if he brings forward accounts which in some way undermine the stature of the man. A particularly good example of that is his report of the three options the Imam al-Husayn is said to have offered `Umar b. Sa'd and the Kufans. He reports that fully, but ignores Abu Mikhnaf's earlier report that no one knew what `Umar b. Sa'd and the Imam al-Husayn talked about.

He merely adds a paragraph of the third account, without giving it the authority of `Uqba b. Sim'an, the Imam's servant. In fact, he reports that 'it is said' that Ibn Ziyad only asked the Imam to return to Medina. The very use of the words 'it is said' implies that this should not be accepted as a truthful report, but rather should be considered as an unidentified and unlikely claim.

At the end of his account al-Baladhuri includes some of the reports of the sky raining down blood, but these reports would suggest that the tragedy of the death of the Imam al-Husayn was such because of his blood relation with the Prophet rather than because of his status as an Imam⁴.

1. Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, (Beirut, 1974), II, 86.

2. Al-Baladhuri, *op. cit.*, III, 227.

3. Al-Baladhuri, *op. cit.*, III, 173.

4. Al-Baladhuri, *op. cit.*, III, 182.

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