

The Martyrdom of Banu Hashim in Karbala as described by Ibn Nama' Al-Hilli

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Introducing the book and its author, this article offers a description on the martyrdom of several members of the Banu Hashim; moreover, the description portrays some inaccuracies available in several accounts on the Battle of Karbala.

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The Martyrdom of Banu Hashim in Karbala as described by Ibn Nama' Al-Hilli

Morteza Karimi

Abstract

Ibn Nama' Al-Hilli, a great Shi'i scholar of the 6th and 7th centuries, composed his Muthir Al-Ahzan on the description of the events before and after the events of Karbala. As a reliable maqal, Muthir al-Ahzan offers a detailed account of the martyrdom of nine members of Banu Hashim. Introducing the book and its author, this article offers a description on the martyrdom of the following members of the Banu Hashim: the brothers of Abbas, Ali al-Akbar, Qasim, Abdillah ibn al-Husayn, Abdillah ibn al-Hasan, Abbas, and Imam Husayn. Moreover, the description portrays some inaccuracies available in several accounts on the Battle of Karbala.

An Introduction to the Book

Muthir al-Ahzan (literally meaning 'sorrow-provoking') is considered to be a maqal, which is a title given to books describing the events related to wars in general and specifically regarding the event of Karbala that led to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Written by Ja'far ibn 'Abi Ibrahim, most commonly known as Ibn Nama' Al-Hilli, this book is about

- a) the lifetime of Imam Husayn, the third Shi'a Imam,
- b) the events before the event of Karbala,
- c) a relatively detailed description of the day of 'Ashura¹, and
- d) the subsequent incidents.

Due to the significance of the event of Karbala in the Islamic world in general and the Shi'a world in particular, special attention has been given to the compilations of the maqtals as early as the first years after this event, to the extent that many of the companions of the infallible Imams and prominent Shi'a scholars have written on this subject. Asbagh ibn Nubata al-Mujashi'i², a close companion of Imam Ali, is generally considered as the first one who compiled a book in this regard called Maqal Abi Abdillah. After him, others such as Jabir Al-Ju'fi, Abu Mikhnaf Al-Azdi³ and Ibn Wadi⁴ compiled independent books on the same subject. The number of the books on the maqal in subsequent centuries amounts to hundreds of volumes.

About the Author

Najm al-Din Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Hibat Allah ibn Nama' al-Hilli was born to a well-known Shi'a family in 567 AH in Hilla, Iraq. His father, Muhammad ibn Ja'far⁵, a teacher of Muhaqqiq Hilli, was among the great scholars of that region. His brother, Ahmad ibn Muhammad, and his nephew Hasan ibn Ahmad, were among the renowned scholars as well. According to some, Hasan ibn Ahmad was one of the mentors of the First Martyr.⁶

Little is known about Ibn Nama's teachers. However, among them one may refer to three people: his father Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Nama', Muhammad ibn Idris Al-Hilli, and Shaykh Muhammad ibn Mashhadi. Unfortunately, the same is true about the names of his students of whom 'Allamah Hilli and Ali ibn Husayn ibn Hammad are the only ones known. Besides Muthir al-Ahzan, only two of his works have survived, both of which are regarding the uprising of Mukhtar al-Thaqafi⁷:

- Akhdh al-Thar fi 'Ahwal al-Mukhtar (Taking Revenge: a Description of Mukhtar);
- Dhawb al-Nuddar fi Sharh Akhdh al-Thar, known as Sharh al-Thar (A Commentary on Taking Revenge). It is to be noted that this book has been quoted completely by Allamah Majlisi in the 45th volume of his Bihar al-Anwar from the page 346 onwards.

Ibn Nama' Hilli finally passed away in 645 AH at the age of 78.

Author's Motivation

In his introduction to Muthir Al-Ahzan Ibn Nama' Al-Hilli refers to his incentive to compile this book:

I found some of the books on the maqatal very detailed and lengthy and others too short. Thus, I wrote this book as a moderate one: neither too long to exhaust the readers nor too short so that some historically important points may be neglected.

Author's Style

This book uses a historical-narrative style; Ibn Nama' al-Hilli did not analyse the content, a common style among early Muslim historians. He also does not include the entire chain of narrators since his primary goal was to compile information on the maqatal.

The work includes in an introduction and three parts:

- The introduction includes the merits of the Ahlul Bayt. It also refers to the importance of mentioning the events leading to their martyrdom and the rewards gained for shedding tears when hearing them.
- The first part is a biography of Imam Husayn. It then narrates the course of events, including his

journey from Medina to Mecca and then towards Karbala, which led to the sorrowful event of Karbala.

- The second part is about the events of the very day of 'Ashura until the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and the captivity of his family. At the end of this chapter, Ibn Nama' quotes narrations that revealed predictions of the event of Karbala and the Imam's martyrdom.
- The third and final part is about the events after the captivity of the family of Imam Husayn until their return to Medina. Various sermons of Imam Sajjad, Lady Zaynab, and others in Kufa, Damascus and elsewhere have also been quoted.

The martyrdom of the Banu Hashim

1. The brothers of 'Abbas ibn Abi Talib

Based on historical evidence, the companions of Imam Husayn were martyred before the members of his family. Most historical works on the maqal mentioned the Imam's eldest son, 'Ali al-Akbar, to be first one from Imam's family – the Banu Hashim – who went to the battlefield. Ibn Nama', however, refers to the martyrdom of the brothers of 'Abbas⁸ before that of 'Ali al-Akbar. According to him, 'Abbas told his brothers, "Go to the battlefield so that I may see your sincerity in the way of Allah and His Apostle as you have no child." They gladly responded and became martyred.⁹

2. 'Ali al-Akbar

Ibn Nama' does not refer to his exact age and only mentions that he was more than 10 years old. A very handsome youth, 'Ali al-Akbar asked his father's permission to go toward the battlefield. Imam Husayn, looking at him with tears in his eyes, gave him the permission, and said, "O Allah! Bear witness that the youth going to the battlefield is the one whose physical features, behaviour, and speech are similar to those of the Holy Prophet." 'Ali al-Akbar fought bravely and killed many soldiers of the enemy.

Returning to his father, he complained of the thirst and the heavy armour. Hearing this, Imam Husayn cried saying: "Go and continue fighting since you will soon meet your grandfather Muhammad who will quench your thirst". 'Ali al-Akbar returned and fought many others. Finally, struck by Murrat ibn Munqidh Al-'Abdi, he was thrown to the ground and was surrounded by a group who cut him into pieces. Then Imam Husayn approached his son and cursed those who killed him. Following her brother, Lady Zaynab came out of the tent; while crying, she was taken back to the tent by Imam Husayn.¹⁰

3. Qasim, son of Imam Hasan

Like many other historians, Ibn Nama' narrates the story of the martyrdom of Qasim ibn Al-Hasan from Humayd ibn Muslim, who states: "A teenager came towards us whose face was as beautiful as the moon."¹¹

'Amr ibn Sa'id Nufayl Al-Azdi told me that I will fight him. Then he went toward him and struck him with his sword, the result of which the boy fell flat on his face and then called out, "O my uncle!" Hearing this, [Imam] Husayn rushed toward him like a hawk and struck 'Amr by his sword though 'Amr used his hand as a shield and subsequently his arm was cut off. He cried out loud, so much so that entire army heard him.

A group of Kufans riding their horses went to save him but contrary to their intention, he was killed under the feet of their horses. I saw [Imam] Husayn standing beside the adolescent who was breathing his last. [Imam] Husayn, addressing him, called out, 'Cursed be those who killed you. Their enemy on the Day of Judgment is your grandfather. By Allah, it is so difficult for your uncle to feel helpless to your call.' Then he hugged his nephew and took him toward the tents and put his body among the other martyrs."

Humayd ibn Muslim continues: "I asked about the name of that adolescent and I was told that he was Qasim ibn Al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib." Then, Imam Husayn, while discovering a few members of his family and companions remained, stood up and caused many to weep considerably when he called out, "Is there anybody to support the family of the Messenger of Allah? Are there any monotheists? Is there any helper?"¹²

4. 'Abdillah, the suckling infant

Based on Muthir al-Ahzan, Imam Husayn then approached the tent and asked for 'Abdillah, his suckling baby, to bid farewell. When he was taken to him, a man from the tribe of Banu Asad shot the baby with an arrow which cut through his throat and killed him. Imam Husayn filled his both hands with his son's blood, threw the blood towards the sky, and said, "O Allah, if you have deprived us of the heavenly help, put that help in what is better for us and take our revenge from these oppressors." According to a narration from Imam Baqir, not one drop of that blood fell to the ground. Then Imam Husayn placed 'Abdillah's body next to the martyrs of his family.

5. Abbas ibn Abi Talib

This part of Muthir al-Ahzan is more significant as it is not, as in other sources, in accordance with what is commonly narrated about the martyrdom of Abbas ibn Abi Talib. The following is regarding what is generally related in mourning ceremonies: Upon hearing the request of the children for water, Abbas ibn Abi Talib asked for Imam Husayn's permission to move toward the Euphrates. On his way, he killed a large number of the enemies, and eventually reached the river.

Remembering the thirst of Imam Husayn and his family, he filled the water-skin, held it with his right hand, and moved toward the tents where thirsty children were waiting for him. Confronted with a group from the enemy, he was compelled to fight with them. Suddenly, Nawfal Al-Azraq struck him and cut off his right hand. He then took the water-skin with his left hand, and that, too, was cut off by another blow by al-Azraq.

Having no other choice, Abbas held the water-skin with his teeth. An arrow then hit the water-skin and the water poured out. Then another arrow hit his chest and caused him fall flat on his face whereupon he called out his brother. This emotional and sorrowful version of the martyrdom of Abbas ibn Abi Talib has been narrated by Allamah Majlisi. 13

Some researchers, however, reject this version as they believe it to lack an authenticated chain of narrators and have some problems with regard to its contents. 14 What has been mentioned by Ibn Nama' is in accordance with the other version. According to him, when Imam Husayn and his companions became extremely thirsty, he decided to move toward the Euphrates while Abbas ibn Abi Talib was in front of him. Meanwhile, a letter from 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad reached 'Umar ibn Sa'd according to which 'Umar was commissioned to prevent Husayn and his companions from reaching the water.

Thus, he sent 'Amr ibn Hajjaj together with 500 soldiers to fulfil this military command. A man among them named 'Abdillah ibn Husayn Al-Azdi called out, "O Husayn! By Allah, you would not drink even a drop of water until you and your companions will die out of thirst." Then Zar'a ibn 'Aban asked the soldiers to prevent Husayn from reaching the water and shot an arrow at Imam Husayn's throat.

Imam Husayn cursed him thus: "O Allah! Kill him while thirsty and do not forgive him at all!" However, the blood gushing out from his throat did not let him drink any water. (Ibn Nama' then relates how the curse of Imam Husayn against Zar'a came true). The enemy then made a distance between Imam Husayn and Abbas, surrounding Abbas from each side and eventually killing him, whereupon Imam Husayn bitterly wept. 15

It should be noted, however, that the description of Ibn Nama' here is very concise. He suffices to say that Abbas was killed while surrounded by a group of the enemy. The details of his martyrdom according to the second version (with which Ibn Nama's description is in accordance) have been mentioned in other sources as follows: When the enemy surrounded Abbas to distance him from Imam Husayn, Abbas began to fight with them.

Meanwhile, Zayd ibn Warqa' al-Juhani¹⁶ lurked behind a palm tree. Supported by Hukaym ibn Tufayl Sinbisi, Zayd struck the right hand of Abbas with his sword. Taking the sword by his left hand, Abbas continued fighting while shouting, "By Allah! Although you have cut off my right hand, I will continue to defend my religion and the trustworthy Imam who is the grandson of the Holy Prophet." He continued to fight until he felt exhausted. Waiting in ambush for him, Hukaym ibn Tufayl Al-Ta'i struck his left hand whereupon Abbas called out, "They have cut off my left hand. O Allah, make them the dwellers of the Hellfire." Then the same Hukaym moved forward and killed him with an iron spear. 17

The fact that both hands of Abbas were cut off in the battle has been confirmed by Imam Sajjad in a narration where he is quoted to have said, "May Allah's mercy and blessings be upon Abbas ibn Ali who sacrificed his life for his brother so much so that his hands were cut off." 18

However, there are different views regarding whoever finally killed Abbas:

- Zayd ibn Ruqad Al-Janbi and Hukaym ibn Tufayl Sinbisi;¹⁹
- Harmala ibn Kahil Al-Asadi;²⁰
- Yazd ibn Ziyad al-Hanafi²¹ and
- Hukaym ibn Tufayl.²²

6. Imam Husayn

According to Ibn Nama', after the martyrdom of Abbas, Imam Husayn fought the enemy harshly and killed many of them. Observing the war circumstances, Shimr ibn dhi al-Jawshan ordered his troops to attack the tents, the inhabitants of whom were women and children. At this time, Imam Husayn declared his famous statement: "If you do not believe in any religion [at least] be noble and magnanimous in this world" and asked the enemy to leave the women and children and fight him only.

The enemy surrounded him, and each person either shot an arrow or struck him with their swords to the extent that they inflicted 72 wounds and injuries on his holy body. Weak and exhausted, he stood up while a stone hit him, bloodying his face. Then a poisoned three-cornered arrow hit his heart. Imam Husayn then said, "In the Name of Allah and following the creed of the Messenger of Allah" and then raised his face toward the sky and said, "O my Lord! You are well-aware that they are killing the son of the daughter of their Prophet." He took out the arrow from his back, and weak from losing blood, fell to the ground²³. Here, Ibn Nama' narrates the story of Abdillah ibn al- Hasan.

7. Abdillah ibn al-Hasan, Imam Husayn's nephew

Observing the attacks on his uncle, the adolescent Abdillah, the son of Imam Hasan, who was with the women, came out and stood next to Imam Husayn, although Lady Zaynab did her best to prevent him. Abdillah, however, resisted strongly and insisted that he would not leave his uncle alone.

At this moment, when Bahr ibn Ka'b²⁴ attacked Imam Husayn with his sword, Abdillah was enraged by this scene, and he shouted, "Woe to you. Do you want to kill my uncle?" The enemy, however, inflicted his sword toward Imam Husayn whereupon Abdillah used his hand to block the strike from injuring his uncle's hand. Subsequently, Abdillah's hand was cut off, and he cried out, "O my uncle!" Imam Husayn hugged him and said, "O my nephew! Be patient with what is happening and expect goodness from Allah as He will join you to your righteous forefathers." Then Harmala shot an arrow at 'Abdillah, killing him. Imam Husayn cursed him: "O Allah! If you have provided them with blessings for a while, cause them to quarrel among themselves, divide them, and never be pleased with them!"²⁵

Ibn Nama' then narrates the last moments of Imam Husayn's life: Shimr ordered his army to shoot their arrows and 'Umar ibn Sa'd wondered why nobody was finishing the job. Finally, he ordered Sinan ibn

Anas to behead the Imam. Sinan walked towards Imam Husayn while, strange enough, he was repeating these words: "I'm walking toward you while I am well-aware that you are the master of the people and your father and mother are the best ones among all." At last, he beheaded Imam Husayn and gave the head to 'Umar ibn Sa'd.²⁶

The next section of the book concerns the enemy's looting and plundering. Accordingly, several parts of the Imam's clothes were taken by the following people:

- His towel by Qays ibn al-Ash'ath;
- His turban by Jabir ibn Yazid²⁷ who became insane as soon as he put on the turban,;
- His shirt by 'Ishaq ibn Hawyah who thereafter became leprosy;
- His ring by Bajdal ibn Sulaym who, in order to take the ring, cut off the Imam's finger;²⁸
- His sword by Qalafis Al-Nahshali

Then the shameless enemy began plundering the women and children²⁹. Afterwards, 'Umar ibn Sa'd asked the volunteers to ride their horses on the body of Imam Husayn. Ten horsemen volunteered and did as they were ordered. These ten vicious men, based on the book, were 'Usayd ibn Malik, Hani ibn Thabt Al-Hadrami, Wakhit ibn Na'im, Salih ibn Wahb Al-Ju'fi, Salim ibn Khuthayma Al-Ju'fi, Raja' ibn Munqidh Al-'Abdi, 'Umar ibn Subayh Al-Saydawi, Hukaym ibn Al-Tufayl Al-Sinbisi, 'Akhnas ibn Mirthad, and 'Ishaq ibn Hawyah.³⁰

Finally, it is to be noted that the list of the martyrs among the Banu Hashim as mentioned in Muthir Al-Ahzan is incomplete. The number of them varies in various references. All in all, we come across 25 names:

1. Abu Bakr ibn Hasan ibn Ali bin Abi Talib;
2. Abu Bakr ibn Ali bin Abi Talib;
3. Ja'far ibn 'Aqil ibn Abi Talib;
4. Ja'far ibn Ali bin Abi Talib;
5. Abbas ibn Ali bin Abi Talib;
6. 'Abd Al-Rahman ibn 'Aqil bin Abi Talib;
7. 'Abdillah ibn Hasan ibn Ali;
8. 'Abdillah ibn Husain ibn Ali;

9. 'Abdillah ibn 'Aqil ibn Abi Talib;
10. 'Abdillah ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib;
11. 'Abdillah ibn Muslim ibn 'Aqil;
12. 'Ubayd Allah ibn Abdillah ibn Ja'far;
13. 'Uthman ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib;
14. Ali ibn Husain ibn Ali; 15. 'Umar ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib;
16. 'Awn ibn Abdillah ibn Ja'far; 17. Qasim ibn Hasan ibn Ali; 18. Qasim ibn Husayn ibn Ali; 19. Qasim ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib;
20. Muhammad ibn Sa'id Al-'Ahwal ibn 'Aqil;
21. Muhammad ibn Abdillah ibn Ja'far;
22. Muhammad ibn 'Aqil ibn Abi Talib;
23. Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn 'Aqil;
24. the suckling baby and
25. The adolescent child.

Conclusion

As history shows, unfortunately the narration and description of the event of Karbala have not been free of various kinds of changes and distortions. Undoubtedly, relying on orally narrated events and putting trust in weak sources help such distortions to remain in use. Thus, in narrating the events of Karbala, the preeminent value must be given to authentic and reliable sources, especially those exclusively regarding this event, generally known as maqtals.

A quick review of such genuine works may undermine some of the events of Karbala which have been considered as incontestable facts. As one of these trustworthy maqtals, Muthir Al-'Ahzan by Ibn Nama' Al-Hilli, helps its readers to acquire a factual picture of the entire event of Karbala.

1. The 10th day of Muharram when Imam Husayn together with his 72 companions were martyred by the army of Yazid ibn Mu'awiya

2. d. after 100 AH

3. A companion of Imam Sadiq in 2nd century AH

4. The author of Tarikh Ya'qubi, d. 294 AH

5. 5 d. 636 AH
6. Muhammad ibn Makki Al-'Amili
7. The man who revolted against the Umayyad Caliphs in revenge for those who killed Imam Husayn and his companions
8. namely, 'Abd Allah, Ja'far and 'Uthman, all the sons of Umm Al-Banin, Imam Ali's wife
9. Ibn Nama', Muthir Al-'Ahzan, p. 68.
10. Ibid. pp. 68 f.
11. The moon is used as a comparison of beauty in the Arab world.
12. Ibid, pp. 69 f.
13. Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 45, pp. 41 f.
14. See. Tarikhe Qiyam va Maqtale Jami' Sayyid Al-Shohada' (in Persian), by a group of researchers, under the supervision of Mahdi Pishwa'i, vol. 1, pp. 844 f.
15. Ibn Nama', ibid., pp. 70 f.
16. var. Zayd ibn Ruqad Al-Janbi or Yazid ibn Ziyad Al-Hanafi
17. See Ibn Shah Ashoub, Mana'iq 'Al 'Abi Talib, vol. 4, p. 117; Shaykh Mufid, Al-'Ishad, vol. 2, pp. 109 f.; Sayyid ibn Tawous, Al-Malhuf, p. 190; Khwarazmi, Maqtal al-Husain, vol. 2 p. 30.
18. Shaykh Saduq, Al-Khisal, p. 68; Allama Majlisi, Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 22, p. 274; vol. 44, p. 298.
19. Tabari, Tarikh al-'Umam wa al-Mulkuk, vol. 5 p. 468; Shaykh Mufid, Al-'Irshad, vol. 2, p. 110.
20. Baladhuri, 'Ansab al-'Ashraf, vol. 3, p. 406; vol. 11, p. 175.
21. Tamimi Maghribi, Sharh al-Akhbar, vol. 3, p. 191.
22. Shaykh Tusi, Ridjal, p. 102; Allama Hilli, Khulasa al-'Aqawal fi Ma'rifa al-Rijal, p. 210.
23. Ibid., pp. 72 f.
24. var. Harmala ibn Kahil
25. Ibid., pp. 73 f.
26. Ibid., pp. 74 f.
27. (var. 'Akhnas ibn Mirthad)
28. (var. Jami' ibn Al-Halq 'Awdi).
29. Ibid., pp. 76 f.
30. Ibid., p. 78.

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