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Historiography Of The Arab Muslim's Barricade Of Constantinople: A Critical Appraisal

Abstract

Early Muslims conquest of both empires of Eastern Romans and Persians brought lots of slaves, wealth and sources in the form of materials, and knowledge in Arabia, which initiated cultural diffusion in Arabia and Muslims became familiar with the Greek and Romans tradition of historical knowledge. Muslim historians amalgamated the external and internal world views of knowledge into a new paradigm and developed new forms of historical work such as the geographical histories and universal histories. Muslim historians described the formation of Roman Empire and development of Constantinople and its relations with Arabs and Islamic empire. Muslim sources narrated the wars of Arab Muslims towards Constantinople under the religio-political paradigm. Muslims historiographical work explained less about the Arab Muslims siege and attack on Constantinople but emphasized the reasons which forced them to fight against the Romans. For example, Tabari described seasonal raids of Arab Muslims on the lands of Romans at the end of each annual year. Two major Arab Muslims sieges and attacks were made on Constantinople in the seventh and the eighth centuries, first, in the time of Caliph Muawiya (R.A) and second in the time of Caliph Sulayman bin Abdul Malik. Despite the conquests on all fronts, Arab Muslim armies failed in their attempts to conquer Constantinople, because of internal political crises, environmental hindrance and fortification of Constantinople.

Keywords: History, Historiography, Constantinople, Greek, Romans, Sulayman, Greek, Roman

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2.1 History and Historiography of Muslims

Before the rise of Islam, most of the Arabs excelled in poetry and the genealogies. There was no concept of written history. All their stories mainly about the battles were based on the oral traditions, mainly transmitted from generation to generation. The element of ancient Arabic historiography can be traced back to the description of the days such as the battle between the tribes, stories of the Ma'rib Dam, Abraha and digging of *Zamzam* Well.¹

Arab historiography is considered as a branch of Islamic literature. There are three sources of Arabian history, first pre-Islamic stories, traditions related to the life and campaigns of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) and his companions and the third is the genealogical list and poetical compositions. Therefore, the earlier books are found in the form of *Sirah* (biography), *Maghazi* (books of campaigns) and *Ansab wa Tabaqat* (books of genealogy and classes).

In the early Muslim literature, theology, law and history are not separated from each other. In the Arab world, it was noticeable to study anecdotes, transmitting traditions and remembering stories and deeds of heroes, orators and poets. A famous saying of Arabs world have been mentioned in the work of *al- Iqd al- Farid*, “For Kings the study of genealogy and histories, for warriors the study of battles and biography, and for merchants the study of writing and arithmetic.”²

The main sources of Muslim history have been derived from *Hadith* and traditions of the Last Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W). They reported the traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) (*Hadith*) to others with reference to the chain of the transmitters. The authenticity of the news depends, first on the continuity of the chain and second on the confidence in each report. Many Muslim historians like Ibn Ishaq and al-Baladhuri started the work with reference to *Hadith* literature while describing the events in their historical accounts. This form of historical composition is exclusive in the Arab world, but it meets the basic requirement of modern historiography such as referring back to the source and tracing the line of authority. But early Muslim historians applied the very limited power of analysis, criticism and comparisons.³

The early forms of Muslim history were categorised as the biography, genealogies and description of campaigns. Such as the first biography of the *Sirat Rasul Allah* was written by Ibn Ishaq (d.151/767). It cannot be found in original form but only in the writing of Ibn Hisham. The genealogical books were written in the times of Umayyads. The study of *Hadith* emphasized the study of reporter's life and character for authenticity of his reports about the traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.W). Thus, the reporters were classified into classes (*Tabaqat*) such as works of the *Tabaqat ibn Saad*.

The battles, wars and campaigns played important role in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) and the Caliphs. When Arab Muslim rulers imposed the land tax on newly conquered lands, it was their custom to categorise the land, for example, land taken by peace, capitulation and by force. For this purpose, many historians wrote books about conquest or *Maghazi*. An example of it is the works of al-Waqidi and al-Baladhuri.

The development of Arab Muslims historiography started with the expansion of Muslim empire. Eventually, they started to write history on new patterns, namely geographical and universal history. On the geographical pattern, Muslim historians are divided into two categories. In the first type are Al-Madinah signified by Muhammad ibn Ishaq and al Waqidi. While the second type comprises of Al-Iraq and Al-Masudi. Masudi introduces a new system of history writing. Instead of grouping the events around years as a central part, he clusters them around kings, dynasties and races.⁴

Before the Abbasid Empire, no work had been done on general history. It was under the golden era of Abbasid Empire that the art of history writing blossomed. Therefore, many Muslim historians compiled their work on the pattern of universal history, such as the works of al-Yaqubi and Tabari. The most important historian and historiographer on universal history writing was Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun utilised all the collective disciplines in the service of historiography.

Muslims historians especially focused and wrote detailed accounts of campaigns in Syria and their relations and wars with Romans undertaken by the Prophet (S.A.W.W) and all the four Caliphs. History of Rome and wars of Arab Muslims with Eastern Roman Empire have generally been discoursed by ibn Ishaq, al-Baladhuri, al Waqidi, al- Masudi, Tabari and Ibn Khaldun.

2.2 Early Expeditions of Muslims Towards Roman Frontier

It has been documented by many Muslims sources, that in the life of Prophet (S.A.W.W), Arab Muslims started Syrian campaigns. Prophet (S.A.W.W) gave them vision and glad tidings of the conquest of Syria, Rome and city of Caesar (Constantinople). Apart from the religious encouragement, they also had some economic and political intentions in the campaign of Syria and Eastern Rome. As stated by Waqidi, there were four main centres of Christianity in ancient Eastern Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch and Constantinople.⁵ Syria was the main province of Eastern Roman Empire on the northern border of Arabia.

Tabari and al Waqidi, have narrated the events of Syrian Campaign of Abu Bakr. Caliph Abu Bakr (R.A), sent Arab Muslim armies at the start of 634A.D/13 A.H. by the different directions towards Syria. One under the command of Amir bin Al-As went to Palestine, another led by Abu Ubaydah bin Jarrah and Yazid b. Abi Sufyan went to Syria. He appointed Yazid b. Abi Sufyan as their first Amir (leader). They had a total of 7000 Arab Muslim fighters. This small number of forces unable to achieve major victories against Eastern Romans. They asked for more reinforcements. Then Abu Bakr (R.A) sent new forces under the command of Hazrat Khalid bin Walid.⁶ During the time of Hazrat Umar (R.A) and Hazrat Uthman (R.A), Arab Muslim armies conquered Syria, Egypt, Jerusalem, Antioch and including all the major areas along the eastern border of Eastern Roman Empire. The conquest of Syria, Egypt, Palestine and Antioch gave a major setback to Eastern Roman Empire. After the defeat by Arab Muslims, Roman Emperor Hercules went back to Constantinople.

2.3 Eastern Roman Empire in Muslim History

When Arab Muslims started expansion policies, from that time Eastern Romans were in a state of confrontation with Arab Muslims. During the era of Pious

Caliphates, Islamic Empire extended to east, north and west. After the fall of the Persian Empire to Muslim armies, the land of Eastern Rome became the focus of Arab Muslims expeditions. The frontier of Eastern Rome increased interaction between Arab Muslims and Romans. The frontier regions also created military as well as ideological threat to Arab Muslims.⁷ Therefore, Arab Muslims started series of expeditions towards Eastern Roman Empire with an aim of the conquest of Constantinople. These expeditions became sources of inventiveness for Muslim historians, to capture the best of the images about the kings, lands, and wars of Arabs with Romans, in their accounts. The writings about Rome in the Arab world gradually became the concern of Arab Muslim geographers, travellers and historians. As per the early histories of Arab Muslims, the information about Romans is the acquaintance of the land, the leading routes, passes, landscape and the cities.⁸

Masudi was an Arab geographer, who wrote *Muruja dh- Dahhab wa Ma'adin al-Jawahir*. He made use of geographical pattern to write the history of the world.⁹ In relation to it, he divided Rome into fourteen provinces called “*Bund*”. He enlisted nine provinces of Rome on Asian side and five on the European.¹⁰ With the passage of time, the pattern of universal history generally followed the pattern set by Muslims historians. What's more, Arab Muslim historians and their sources presented narrative accounts concerning only eastern part of the Roman Empire.

Tabari was a Muslim historian who wrote a chronological account on the theme of universal history. He listed all the expeditions of Arab Muslims towards Eastern Rome at the end of each year. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun in his work of *Kitab al-Ibar* introduced a new pattern of rise and fall of civilizations to write about the universal History. Under this theme, he tried to describe Roman Empire. He mentioned the origin of Rome and the Roman Empire, its foundation and division into two parts. He described the emperors of Rome and narrates the sequence of events of Arab world in comparison to Eastern Rome. He also enlisted the Arab Muslims expeditions towards Eastern Rome and siege of its capital city of Constantinople.¹¹

2.4 Constantinople in Muslim Sources

While writing about Eastern Rome, Muslim sources mentioned its few main cities as al Waqdi described only four main Christian centres in eastern Rome, while others Muslim historians have not reported much on the rural areas of Eastern Roman Empire in their works. Their curiosity persisted in the capital city, Constantinople. This city alone captivated the attention of Arab Muslims geographers, travellers, historians and rulers. This exhibited the importance of Constantinople in Arab Muslims world and their perception about Rome. Muslim historians wrote partially legendary narrative accounts about the Rome and their emperors.

The Arab Muslims historian called Constantinople as *al- Qustantiniyya*. Masudi also describe its meaning in his book *Ajnadin*. “The Rum call it *bolin* and when they wish to express its greatness they said *Estinbolin*, While the east Roman called their capital *Konstantinopolis*.”¹² Masudi, Tabari and Ibn Khaldun also reported the events about the transfer of the capital of Rome to Constantinople.¹³ Its foundation symbolized the beginning of new era of Roman Christian Empire. It was also

described as the political and administrative centre. The best military troops stayed there.¹⁴ With the passage of time, they developed their strong defence system by building a great wall around the city. To some extent; Constantinople becomes the focal place in the historical writings of both the Muslims and the Romans. Overall Romans gave high prestige to Constantinople just as Arab Muslims gave to Makkah and Madinah.

Masudi described the location of the city by illustrating its boundaries. "That *al-Qustantiniyya* was a part of the continent that extends from Rome to France. To the East, it was linked to the land of Turks. It was surrounded by canal from both east and north while on the southern and western side it touches the land, on the mainland side there was numerous gate."¹⁵ The Golden gate was more important because it was the official entrance of the Roman emperor after returning from their expeditions. It was also used for the entrance and departure of Roman armies. When Constantine founded the city, he extended its fortification, buttressing and buildings.¹⁶ The western side of the city was surrounded by the wall that extended from Syrian Sea to the Sea of *Khazaras*. This wall was known as *macron tichos*.¹⁷ Its length extended to a four-day march. It had three iron gates known as Gate of Hippodrome, Mankrana and Sea gate. Most of the land between city and wall was considered as the land of emperor and patricians. This land was used for cultivation and pastures for the animals. Masudi also described the strategic location of the city, which helped the Romans to stay in safe position for centuries against foreign invasions. Most of the Arab Muslim historians and their sources described Constantinople as the hub of economic activities. They praised the wealth and beauty of the city while its inhabitants stayed unfocused in their writings.¹⁸

2.5 Reasons for Arab Muslim Attack and Siege of Constantinople

Arab Muslim sources have reported the Arab Muslims expeditions towards Eastern Rome in their books. They have mentioned yearly raids on biladal-Rum (land of Rome). Tabari was one of those who mentioned their seasonal campaigns against the Rome in his chronicles. There are numerous factors in terms of religious, political, economic and rulers' interest, that lead Arab Muslims attacks and the siege of Constantinople. Muslim sources of Tabari, Ibn Khaldun and others have reported these reasons in their works, which led to two major attacks and sieges of Constantinople in the times of Umayyads.

2.5.1 Hadith Literature

Hadith is the records of sayings and traditions of the Last Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W). All the authentic *Hadith* were written down by the Prophet Muhammad's (S.A.W.W) companions either during his lifetime or shortly thereafter during the time of Umayyads. It was during the eighth century A.D. that the collection of *Hadith* literature was written down by Muslim theologians and jurists and scholars. Among them, Imam Muslim and Imam Bukhari reported the saying of the Prophet's (S.A.W.W) and his predictions about the conquest of Constantinople in the books of *Hadith*. This influenced the historian to construct their narrative account regarding the conquest of Constantinople especially upon according to Imam Bukhari's narrations.¹⁹ These traditions and predictions of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) about the conquest of Constantinople is considered as one of

the main reasons behind the Arab Muslims attacks on Constantinople. Therefore, Muslim rulers from time to time launched military expeditions towards the city of Caesar, Constantinople.

2.5.2 Economic and Political Motives

Before and after the Islam in Arabia, the clan of Banu Umayyad participated in trade activities and directed trade caravans towards Syria and Constantinople. They had lot of information about the land of Eastern Roman Empire. Leading tribesmen from them were familiar with the strategic location of Constantinople and its leading trade routes. Therefore, most of the leaders of Syrian campaigns were from among them. Besides the religious obligation, some economic and political motives were involved in Arab Muslims raids on Constantinople. These motives were illustrated in the times of Umayyad Caliphate by Muslim historians. Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) was the first Umayyad Caliph, who wanted political and commercial dominance over Romans. Arab Muslim historians described the wealth and beauty of Constantinople. Therefore, major military expeditions on Roman's land were planned by Umayyad rulers.

2.5.3 Interests and Policies of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A)

Hazrat Muawiya ibn. Sufyan (R.A) was the companion of the Last Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) and first Caliph of Umayyad dynasty. He had taken part in trade activities as well as in the early Muslim expeditions towards Eastern Rome. Hence, he had great interest in conquering the land of Rome and bringing it under Arab Muslims Empire. Tabari has mentioned the interest of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) in his book; Muawiya (R.A) was interested to prepare a naval fleet for the military expedition to Eastern Rome. During the Caliphate of Hazrat Umar (R.A), he asked permission from the Caliph. Hazrat Umar (R.A) did not give him the approval for the sake of the safety of the Muslims army at sea.²⁰ He got the permission for the preparation of naval fleet during the Caliphate of Hazrat Uthman (R.A) under condition, that soldier for the expedition will not be taken by force and the option to join the expedition will be left open to soldiers, who willingly wanted to join the naval expedition, such soldiers will be recruited and given training.²¹ Thus the interest and policies of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) and later of Sulayman ibn Abdul Malik became the reasons behind the two major military attacks and sieges of Constantinople by Arab Muslims armies. Soon after, Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) set up the naval fleet for the military expedition towards Eastern Rome.

Tabari claimed that, during the year 647A.D/25A.H in the caliphate of Hazrat Uthman (R.A), Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) raided on the Roman territory, including the Island of Cyprus and made a peace treaty with them.²² Ibn Khaldun has also reported further, that he also imposed *Jizya* on them.²³ Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) has been recorded to be the first person, who launched an attack on the land of Eastern Roman Empire through the sea by utilizing naval warfare techniques.

At the end of Pious Caliphate, civil war broke out within the Arab world. The era of Pious Caliphate ended with the *Shahadat* of Hazrat Ali (R.A) in 661 A.D. Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) became the first Caliph of Umayyad dynasty in the Arab world. He shifted the capital of the new empire to Damascus, which has been the

cultural hub of various civilizations. From the new capital, he easily directed the policies of expeditions to Eastern Rome. Moreover, he started series of campaigns towards Eastern Rome annually that involved winter and summer expedition.²⁴

Tabari on behalf of Waqidi reported that during the year of 653 A.D/32 A.H /. Hazrat Muawiya (R.A), attacked the strait of al- Qustantiniyya (Constantinople) and with him was his wife Ataka bint Karaza.²⁵ Waqidi reported that in year of 664A.D/43 A.H Basar ibn Arta fought war on the land of Romans, he spent winter there and until he reached al- Qustantiniyya, but Tabari denied this event on behalf of some authorities of historians, that Busr did not spend winter in Roman territory at all.²⁶

According to the report of Ibn Khaldun, about the exchange of letters between Roman emperor and Hazrat Muawiya (R.A), this became the immediate reason behind the first Arab Muslims military expedition and the siege of Constantinople. Ibn Khaldun in his book describes, that during governorship of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) in Syria, he had established a contact with the Roman emperor. They exchanged letters with each other, in one of these letter East Roman emperor predicted the *Shahadat* of Hazrat Uthman (R.A) and the rule of Muawiya.²⁷ At the time when Muawiya (R.A) went to the battle of Safin, the Roman emperor planned an attack on the lands of Arabs. Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) got the news, he wrote a letter to Roman emperor. In his letter, he warned him and threatened in return an attack on Eastern Rome. After becoming the new Caliph of Arab Muslims world, he sent a military expedition towards Constantinople. It was known as the first siege of Constantinople by Arab Muslims. Most of the narrative account of this attack can be found in the work of Muslim historians as a very short description of an actual event.

2.6 First Attack and Siege of Constantinople

Tabari and Ibn Khaldun have reported that this event of Arab Muslims siege of Constantinople happened around 49 or 50 A.H. (669-771A.D). Tabari claimed that the event took place in the year of 669A.D/49 A.H. According to Tabari description of the event, Caliph Muawiya (R.A) sent an expedition towards Roman land and Constantinople.²⁸ According to the report of Ibn Khaldun: Caliph Muawiya (R.A) sent huge military expedition towards Bilad al-Rum in 670A.D/50 A.H under the command of Sufyan ibn Auf.²⁹ He asked his son Yazid ibn Muawiya to join them. Yazid was disinclined to do so and made excuses and Muawiya (R.A) did not send him. During the fight with Romans, the Arab Muslims armies faced a harsh situation in terms of shortage of food and grievous diseases. Many of them died. When this news reached to Yazid, he expressed his contentment in a poem because he was happy that he had not joined the first expedition towards Constantinople. When Muawiya (R.A) heard his verses, he forced him to join the expedition. Yazid went to Constantinople with a large number of soldiers, whom his father sent with him. In this military expedition ibn Abbas, ibn Umar, ibn al Zubair and Abu Ayub Ansari also participated.³⁰

According to Muslims sources, they advanced into the land of Eastern Rome and fought until they reached al- Qustantiniyya. Arab Muslims and Romans fought a war under the walls of Constantinople for some days.³¹

During the fight Abu Ayub Ansari (R.A), a companion of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) died there, Muslims buried him under the wall of Constantinople. According to Ibn Khaldun, Roman emperor agreed to ensure the sanctity of the grave of Abu Ayub Ansari on the condition that Christian churches would be allowed to remain open on the land of Eastern Rome conquered by Arab Muslims. On this agreement, they did not destroy the grave of the companion of the Prophet (S.A.W.W).³²

Muslim historians narrate that Yazid ibn Muawiya and Syrian Army returned back to Al-Sham (Syria).³³ They had failed to capture Constantinople, but Arab Muslims' siege of the leading route to Constantinople continued till the death of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A).

Tabari reported that during next coming years from 670-674A.D/51-54A.H many Arab Muslims commanders attacked the Roman territories by land and sea, during the summer and winter expeditions. According to the Tabari report, in the year of 53 A.H (672-73A.D), Abd al -Rehman b. Umm al-Hakim al-Thaqafi led the winter military campaign to the land of Eastern Rome.³⁴ During this year, Junadah b. Abul Umayyah al-Azidi conquered the Island of Rhodes in the sea. Tabari further reported on behalf of Muhammad b. Umar that the Muslim settled there and cultivated it. The cattle used to graze and when evening came these were back into a fortress. They had a gardener, who informed them about the activities of Romans on the sea. So, they remained aware of the enemies. They created stronghold over Romans on the sea. They blocked them by sea and cut off their ships. Caliph Muawiya (R.A) supplied them lots of provisions and stipends and enemies were afraid of them. After the death of Muawiya, Yazid also called them back.³⁵ In 674A.D/54 A.H Junadah b. Abi Umayya conquered an Island called Arwad near Constantinople. Muslims stayed there for a short time, all their stay on conquered land was over with the death of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) in 680A.D/60 A.H, and when Yazid became the next Caliph in 680 A.D, he ordered them to come back.³⁶

After the death of Caliph Muawiya (R.A), Arab Muslims faced several challenges in terms of political crises and civil war. Tabari reported that in 689-690A.D/70 A.H Roman armies planned and attacked the settled Muslims in Syria. Caliph Abdul Malik, due to the fear of the loss of Muslims live in war, signs a peace agreement with Roman Caesar under the condition that Muslims give them one thousand *dirhams* on each Friday.³⁷ To some extent, their summer and winter campaigns continued. Son of Abdul Malik fought battles with Romans during the winter and summer expeditions. Al Walid b. Abdul Malik conquered three fortresses namely Tulas, Al Marzbain and Harqala in 714-715A.D/96 A.H.³⁸ Their military expedition continues till the second major attack on Constantinople by Muslimah. This event has been extensively reported by both the Muslim and Roman historians as the second siege of Constantinople by Arab Muslims.

2.7 Second Blockade of Constantinople

When Sulayman b. Abdul Malik became caliph of Umayyads in 714-715 A.D/ 96 A.H³⁹ he took an oath with himself that he would conquer Constantinople. He himself led raid on Eastern Roman territory and set up his camp in Dabiq. Further, from there, he planned the military expedition towards Constantinople and Eastern Rome under the command of his brother Muslimah.⁴⁰

According to Tabari, in 715-716 A.D/ 97 A.H, another major attack was planned by Sulayman b. Abd al Malik. He sent forces to conquer the city of Constantinople. He appointed his son Dawud b. Sulayam in charge of this summer expedition. Dawud captures the fort of Al- Marah. Waqdi also reported that in this year Muslamah b. Abdul Malik also attacked Constantinople. Umar b. Hubayrah al Farazi also undertook naval expedition towards Eastern Rome; he fought them on these a and spent winter there.⁴¹

In 716-717A.D/98 A.H according to the sources of Tabari and Ibn Khaldun, major events took place regarding the conquest of Constantinople; Sulayman b. Abdul Malik sent his brother Muslamah b. Abdul Malik towards Constantinople. Muslamah had a lot of eminent commanders of Syrian army as Khalid b. Ma'dan, Abduallah b. Abi Zakariyyaal Khuzii and Mujahid b. Jabar in his troops.⁴²

Sulayman ordered him to stay there until he either conquered Constantinople or received his order to return. Therefore, he spent winter and summer there. When Muslamah reached near Constantinople, he ordered every horseman to load two bags of food on the back of his horse. When they reached Constantinople, he ordered them to bring all bags of food at one place and the food was heaped as high as a mountain. Then he ordered them, "Do not eat anything from this food, attack on the land of enemies and start cultivation on it".⁴³ He built wooden houses for them and they passed winter there.

People cultivated their own food, but the food they brought for themselves remained on land totally exposed. First of all, soldier ate what they obtained during raids and later what they cultivated. Arab Muslims besieged the whole city of Constantinople. Muslamah stayed there by besieging the city and oppressing its inhabitants. Romans were now afraid of them.⁴⁴ They tried to settle down the issue through negotiations with the commander of the Arab Muslims army.⁴⁵

Tabari has reported the talks between Arab Muslims and Romans in his work, that, Leo was the heir prince of Eastern Rome who came from Armenia, and said to Muslamah, "Send someone from your people to negotiate with me". Muslamah sent Ibn Hubayrah, who asked Leo, "What do you consider to be the height of stupidity?" He replied, "Stupid man who fills his stomach with everything he finds". Ibn Hubayrah said, "we are the followers of Islam, and our religion calls for the obedience to our leaders." Leo said, "You are right. In past, we used to fight with one another for the sake of religion, today; however, our fight is for the sake of the conquest and sovereignty. We will give you one dinar for each man."⁴⁶ Ibn Hubayrah returned to Romans the next day and said, "I informed your proposal to Muslamah, but he did not accept your terms of money". When I approached him after he had eaten the day meal, filled his stomach and taken a nap, when he woke up he was groggy and did not understand what I told.⁴⁷

Tabari also reported that the commander of Roman army fascinated Leo by such statements, "if you rid us of Muslamah, we will make you our emperor". They bound themselves to him by taking the oath. Then Leo came to Muslamah and said, "Romans know that you will not advance against them in a direct attack and you intend to prolong the siege as long as you have food but if you burn the food they would surrender."⁴⁸

Ibn Khaldun has also reported the talk between them as Leo came to Muslamah and said, “if you burn down the food deposit, Roman would believe, that you are going to fight with them, and would come outside of the city, then you can easily take them as a prisoner.” Under the influence of Leo, Muslamah burnt the food deposit.⁴⁹

According to the Muslim sources, that during this situation, Roman Caesar died. Leo met Muslamah and informed him about the death of Caesar and made a promise with him that he would handover the Eastern Rome to the hand of Muslamah. He went with Leo.⁵⁰ Muslamah besieged Constantinople and gathered all the food of nearby areas and shutdown the food supply of the city. While Leo went to the city and Romans made him their emperor.⁵¹ He provoked Muslamah in a letter to burn down the food deposit, he also wrote to Muslamah, asking him to allow enough food to enter the city to feed the people: in this way people would believe that his words and Muslamah’s words were same and they were safe from being captured and expelled from their land; he also asked for the permission of one night to gather food.⁵² Muslamah gave them permission Leo had already prepared ships and men. In one night Romans carried large quantities of food with them, nothing remained on the Muslims side.⁵³

Tabari and Ibn Khaldun both have claimed that by next morning Leo turned his face from Arab Muslims and became totally hostile. Leo now started the battle with Muslims. At that time Muslamah became the victim of his deceptive plans. Arab Muslims armies suffered what no Muslim armies had suffered previously. Even they were afraid to leave the camps. There was a shortage of food, and they ate animals, their skins, tree roots, leaves, indeed, everything except mud.⁵⁴

Tabari and Ibn Khaldun explained that Sulayman at that time was residing in Dabiq. He was unable to send more enforcement and food supply due to the arrival of the winter season.⁵⁵ In these circumstances, Caliph Sulayman also died in 717 A.D/ 99 A.H. After the death of Sulayman, the situation was that the Arab Muslims armies were getting weaker and weaker while Romans gained more strength.

Tabari has narrated that according to Muhammad b. Umar, in 716/717 A.D/98 A.H Burjan attacked the army of Muslamah, who had much smaller number of the army at that time. Sulayman b. Abdul Malik sent either Masadah or Amr b. Qiyas with reinforcements, but the Slavs tricked them and murdered Sharahil b. Abdah, then Allah gave them punishment.⁵⁶ Meanwhile Ibn Khaldun, present different picture about this event. He reported that after the death of Sulayman, Muslim forces felt in trouble and in the meantime, Burjan attacked the army of Muslamah. Muslims were less in number, but they fought the war with courage, even defeated the army of Burjan and occupied their city of Slavs.⁵⁷ This event might have happen either at the start of the expedition towards Constantinople or their return from Constantinople. Because at the end of Sulayman’s life, he was unable to help the Arab Muslims forces. Perhaps the descriptions of Arab Muslims historians about this event were insufficient to clearly illustrate the true situation about Arab Muslims siege of Constantinople. While the accounts of Romans describe their war techniques and policies, as compared to Muslim sources which did not

offer-in-depth knowledge about the war techniques and compositions of Arab Muslims army in these expeditions.

2.8 Reasons for the Failure

The first and second attacks and sieges of Arab Muslims of Constantinople failed as compared to other expeditions of Muslims towards north, east and west. There are numerous reasons behind the failure of Arab Muslims advancement towards Constantinople in term of the selection of the leaders for campaigns of Constantinople, internal political rivalry, transition of policies, apocalyptic attitude towards the traditions of the Last Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) and last but not the least the rise of Abbasid Empire and the foundation of the Baghdad.

2.8.1 Choice of Military Commanders / Leaders

Choice of military leader for war is of much importance for its success. Attempts of Arab Muslims failed to capture the capital of Eastern Roman Empire, perhaps due to the nomination of unsuitable military leaders for the campaigns. First, when Caliph Muawiya (R.A), appointed his son Yazid for leading the attack on Constantinople he refused to join the expedition. After hearing of the loss of Muslim army, he felt happy for himself for not participating in the expedition.⁵⁸ Later, on the strict orders of his father he went there along with many notable military persons, but as a leader, he remained unsuccessful to capture the city and after the severe defeat at the hands of Romans, he returned to Al-Sham (Syria).

The second time, when Sulayman sent second largest Arab Muslims expedition for the conquest of Constantinople he appointed his brother Muslamah as commander. During the siege Muslamah easily trapped in the deceptions of Roman Emperor Leo. He burnt all the food deposits by the fool promises of Romans.⁵⁹ As a leader, he had the responsibility for the lives of Arab Muslims armies. Consequently, by the lack of strategic policies of their commander, Arab Muslims faced grave failure such as no previous army had seen it. Perhaps, the selection and choice of the military leader became one of the main factors behind the unsuccessful attempts of Arab Muslims for the conquest of Constantinople.

2.8.2. Policies of Umayyads Caliphs

During their rule, the Umayyads tried to introduce a new form of political system, under the cultural diffusion of newly conquered areas. This system was influenced by the style of Roman kingship. They were focused on the presentation and use of power, force and wealth. Under this system, Umayyad caliphs exercised great political power. Caliph Muawiya (R.A) shifted the capital to Damascus. In the early time of his rule, he wanted to take hold all of the Roman's lands. Moreover, he started offensive policies towards Eastern Rome by starting series of annual campaigns both during summers and winters to pave the way for final attack on Constantinople by land and sea. When he became the caliph, he wants to fulfil his dream of conquering Constantinople. After the failure in the first such attempt and internal political crises within the Muslim society a transition in his policies was seen. Later, Yazid focused on the consolidation of newly conquered lands of Arab Muslims against the attacks of Romans. He brought back all the Arab Muslim

armies from the lands of Eastern Rome.⁶⁰ The transition in the policies of leading ruler of Umayyads regarding the conquest of Constantinople, to some extent, would be considered a factor in the failure of Arab Muslims attack on Constantinople. After the death of Hazrat Muawiya (R.A) till the rule of Sulayman, internal political crises prevented further Arab Muslims attacks on Constantinople.

Sulayman, after becoming caliph, took the oath for the conquest of Constantinople. For this purpose, he stayed in Dabiq.⁶¹ Due to the internal political situation and arrival of winter, he could not send reinforcements to the Muslims armies around Constantinople. After this situation, he also proposed new policies of consolidation of previously conquered areas rather than to carry on with more conquests. During these circumstances, he died and his policy of consolidation was practically imposed by the Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz. He sent excellent steady forces for the help of Muslamah's army to bring them back. Therefore, the shift in the policies from conquest to the consolidation of Arab Muslim rulers became the cause of the failure of Arab Muslims siege and the conquest of Constantinople.

2.8.3 Environmental Hindrance

One of the biggest reasons behind the failure of Arab Muslims attempts for the conquest of Constantinople was the environmental and climate factors. The Arabs were used to live in hot temperature zone, while Constantinople was geographically situated in cold temperature zone surrounded by seas and land. The environmental factor caused hurdle in way of communication of Arab Muslims forces with their caliphs, and latter's inability to send timely food supplies and more military forces during the expeditions of Constantinople. Due to strategic location, along with environment factor, Arab Muslims were unable to compete with the defence system of Romans.

2.8.4 Apocalyptic Perception

The city of the Caesar, Constantinople and Rome had a special place in the *Hadith* literature of the Muslims. Muslim historians tried to explain the motives behind the Arab Muslims siege and conquest of Constantinople with the reference to this *Hadith* literature, found in the book of *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih al-Muslim*.

In earlier advances towards Roman lands, Arab Muslims were inspired by the true spirit of Islam. They were motivated by the prediction of the Last Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) about the rewards for the conquest of Constantinople.⁶² Another *Hadith* is also found in *Sahih al-Muslim*, about the conquest of Constantinople. Imam Muslim noted down the *Hadith* of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) under chapter nine relating the conquest of Constantinople, the emergence of Ad-Dajjal and the descent of Isa bin Maryam.⁶³ After the defeat and unsuccessful attempts of Arab Muslims to conquer Constantinople, these predictions and traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) extensively spread in the Muslim world, particularly in the time of Abbasids. To some extent, major attack and the siege of Constantinople was undertaken by Umayyads. Only one expedition reached the Bosphorus during the time of Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rasheed.⁶⁴

Hadith literature is also a source of Islamic apocalyptic literature. When Arab Muslims adopted this idea of apocalyptic tradition, they tried to adopt the realistic and practical attitude towards the conquest of Constantinople by justifying failure as Constantinople would be conquered only near the last hour.⁶⁵ To some extent, the Muslims *Hadith* literature also become a source of inspiration for Muslim rulers from time to time to plan military expeditions and attack or not to attack Constantinople.

2.8.5 Foundation of Baghdad

During the earlier time of Umayyad rulers, they were inspired by the cultural, political prestige and the wealth of the capital of Eastern Roman Empire. The seventh and the eighth century and the first century of Islam were marked by the ambitions of Arab Muslims to establish their power in Constantinople.⁶⁶ Though, Arab Muslims focused on the conquest of the city until they built their own new capital at Baghdad in Abbasid Empire.⁶⁷ The city of Baghdad became more a point of focus for all kinds of activities in terms of political, educational, commercial, religious as well as economic. The foundation of Baghdad also became the reason among the Arab Muslims for not undertaking further expedition towards Constantinople. Although they did raid different areas of Eastern Rome, no such expedition on Constantinople had been reported by Muslim historians. Abbasid caliphs focused on the strengthening of frontier borders rather than expansion to Eastern Roman lands.

Conclusion

The capital of Eastern Rome, Constantinople had a special place of focus in the narrative accounts of Muslim historians. The traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) regarding Rome and Constantinople are mainly about the reward for its conquest, while emergence of Ad-Dajjal and the descent of Isa bin Maryam and the conquest of Constantinople are with reference to the end of time. Muslim historian and their sources demonstrate only a few images of the actual event of the siege of Constantinople by Arab Muslims. Perhaps, their attentions were more on the political situations of the time of Arab Muslims world. Furthermore, their indifference between the date of the attacks and siege of Constantinople in historical documents of Arab Muslims. They lacked in reporting the compositions of army and military techniques as compared to the sources of Romans. To some extent, they illustrated the cause and reason behind the Arab Muslims attack and their failure to conquer Constantinople. Mainly they wrote about the events under the political and comparative themes, such as the works of Tabari and Ibn Khaldun. Moreover, they provided holistic image about Arab Muslims attacks and the siege of Constantinople. The dream of Muslims for the conquest of Constantinople did not stop even after the fall of Baghdad. It once again became the prime motive of Ottoman Sultans. From the day one under the Kingdom of Seljuk, they made policies to capture the lands of Eastern Rome.

Reference/End Notes

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