

AN ACCOUNT OF THE APPEARANCE OF MUQANNA' AND HIS FOLLOWERS OF THE “WHITE RAIMENTS”

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(This account from Chapter XXVII from *The History of Bukhara* is presented verbatim to provide an opportunity to the readers to see how the Muslims judge others and see their perspective.)

Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Nasr says that Muhammad ibn Ja'far (Narshakhi) has included this chapter in his book, but it is incomplete. Ibrahim, who is the author of the *Account of Muqanna'*, and Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari say that Muqanna' was a villager from the vicinity of Merv, from a village called Kaza. His name was Hashim ibn Hakim. At first he was a bleacher, but afterwards he busied himself studying science. He acquired knowledge of every sort; he studied conjuring, the art of incantations, and talismans. He knew conjuring very well, and also pretended to prophecy. Mahdl ibn Mansur killed him in the year 167/783. He learned incantations and was extremely clever. He had read many books of the science of the ancients and was a master in necromancy. His father was called Hakim and he had been one of the captains of the amir of Khurasan in the days of Abu Ja'far Dawaniqi (Mansur). He was from Balkh and he was called Muqanna' because he kept his head and face covered. (This was) because he was exceedingly ugly; his head was bald, and he was blind in one eye. So he constantly wore a piece of green cloth over his head and face.

Muqanna' had been one of the captains of Khurasan in the time of Abu Muslim, leader of the 'Abbasid revolt. Then he became the chief minister of 'Abd al-Jabbar Azdi. He made a claim to prophecy, and this lasted for some time. So Abu Ja'far Dawaniqi sent a man to him, brought him from Merv to Baghdad and imprisoned him.

After some years, when he had secured freedom, he returned to Merv. He gathered people around him, saying, “Do you know who I am? The people replied, “You are Haskim ibn Hakim.” He said, “You are wrong. I am your lord and lord of all the world.” <May ashes be in his mouth.> He continued, “I call myself by whatever name I wish. I am the one who showed myself to people as Adam, then in the form of Noah, also in the form of Abraham, Moses, then in he guise of Jesus, Muhammad the Prophet, in the guise of Abu Muslim, and now in this guise which you see.” The people said, “Others considered themselves prophets, but you pretend to be God.” He replied “They were corporeal. I am the soul which was in them. I have the power to be in any guise I

wish to show.”

He wrote letters to every district and gave them to his missionaries. In these letters he wrote thus, “In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate, From Hashim ibn Hakim, lord of lords, to so-and-so son of such a one. Praise be to God, there is no other God than He, God of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, and Abu Muslim. Verily al-Muqanna' had strength, power, glory and proof. Accept me and realize that I have dominion. <Curse him> Glory and omnipotence are mine. There is no other God but me. <May ashes be in his mouth.> He who follows me will go to paradise, but he who does not accept me will rest in hell.

At that time he was in Merv but his missionaries went everywhere, and he turned many people from the (true) path. In Merv there was an Arab called 'Abdallah ibn' Amr, who joined Muqanna' and gave him his daughter for a wife. This 'Abdallah crossed the Oxus and came to Nakhshab and Kesh. Everywhere he induced people to follow Muqanna' <Curse him.> He turned many people from the road (of truth). In Kesh and its suburbs they were (especially) numerous. The first village which joined Muqanna' and proclaimed his faith was a village of Kesh called Subakh. Their leaders was 'Uman Subakhl and they raised a revolt. Their amir was a pious Arab and they killed him. What Richard Frye notes in his *History of Bukhara* (Markus Weiner Publishers, Princeton, 2007) about the Iranian resistance to the Arab rule goes against any claim that the Sasanian rule had become so decadent that the Iranians readily welcomed the Arab invaders. In this chapter on Muqanna' for instance, Frye states: “In Sughd most of the villages accepted the faith of Muqanna'. Many of the villages of Bukhara turned to infidelity and made manifest their infidelity. This evil increased and the afflictions on the Muslims became severe. They (the infidels) attacked caravans, pillaged villages, and caused much devastation.” (p. 89).

The reason of the departure of Muqanna' for Transoxiana was this” when the news of Muqanna' was spread in Khurasan Humaid ibn Qahtaba, the governor of Khurasan, ordered him imprisoned. He fled from his village and remained hidden. It became known to him that a large number of people had joined his faith in Transoxiana and were publicly professing faith. He resolved to cross the Oxus river.

The amir of Khurasan had ordered guards to watch for him on the bank of Oxus with thirty-six followers, but he made a raft and crossed the river. He went to the district of Kesh, which submitted to him and the people esteemed him. On the mountain Sam was a very strong fortress. In it were running water; trees, and cultivated fields. There was another fortress, stronger than this one, which he ordered rebuilt. There he collected much wealth and innumerable possessions and posted guards.

The people of the "White Raiments" became numerous and the Muslims were impotent before them. A group (of fugitives) came to Baghdad while Mahdi was caliph. He became grieved and sent many troops to fight him (Muqanna'). Caliph Mahdi himself had to come to Nishapur to put down that uprising. He feared that there was a danger Islam would be lost and the religion of Muqanna' would spread throughout the entire world. Muqanna' invited the Turks and permitted them (to take) the life and possessions of the Muslims. Many troops came from Turkestan in the hope of plunder. (They pillaged the districts and carried the women and children of Muslims into captivity, and killed others) (pp. 89-90).

When first they appeared before Bukhara, a group of the "White Raiments," who were followers of Muqanna', went to the village called Numijkat. "At night they entered the mosque and killed the muezzin and fifteen people. Then they killed all of the people of the village." (p.90). This was in the year 159/775-6, while the amir of the Bukhara was Husain ibn Mu'adh. There was a man of Bukhara who was one of the leaders of the followers of Muqanna'. He was called Hakim (ibn) Ahmad, and with him were three other captains. One was named Khishwi, the second Baghi, both from the castle of Fudail, and the third was called Kirdik from the village Ghijduvan. These three men were fighters, vagrants, ferocious and thieves.

After they killed the people of the village and news of this came to the city, the people of Bukhara assembled and went to the amir. They said, "We must fight these people in "White Raiments" with all possible means." Husain ibn Mu'adh with his troops, and the judge of Bukhara 'Amir ibn 'Imran with the people of Bukhara, came out (of Bukhara) in the month of Rajah of the year 159 (April 776). They went to the village of Narshakh, now called Narjaq, and there pitched camp opposite them (the "White Raiments"). The judge of Bukhara said, "I shall preach to them the true faith, for we should not fight with them." So the judge entered the village, accompanied by people of integrity, to turn them back to the true faith. They replied, "We do not know what you are saying." Every day they increased their unbelief and would not accept admonition.

Then they joined in battle. The first man to attack them (the "White Raiments") was an Arab called Na'im ibn Sahl. He fought long and killed a number of people and finally was himself killed. The "White Raiments" were defeated and seven hundred of them were killed. The rest fled and the day came to an end. When it was morning they sent a messenger and asked for amnesty. They said, "We have become Muslims." Peace was made with them, and a peace treaty was written. Provisions were made forbidding them to molest the roads or to kill Muslims, and for them to disperse to their villages and obey their amir.

They confirmed their faith in God and His Prophet. All of the notables of the city signed that treaty. "When the Muslims had withdrawn the (White Raiments) broke the treaty. They again severed the highways and killed Muslims. They brought into the fortress of Narshakh the unripened ears of grain (of the Muslims), and the position of the Muslims became critical." (p. 91).

Mahdl, who was the caliph, sent his prime minister Jibra'll ibn Yahya to fight Muqanna'. He came to Bukhara and pitched camp before the Samarqand gate, before going to fight Muqanna'. Husain ibn Mu'adh went to him and said, "Give me aid in fighting with the "White Raiments" (here), so that when we finish with this business I can go with you to fight Muqanna'." Jibra'il consented. He broke camp and went to the village of Narshakh and ordered a ditch dug around the village. He pitched camp in the moat and ordered the troops to be vigilant so that the "White Raiments" could not come and attack at night. It happened just as he said. They came out the first night, made an assault and inflicted great loss. When Husain ibn Mu'adh, the amir of Bukhara, saw the he thanked Jibra'il very much and said, "Stay in Bukhara and do not go to Kesh till the work is finished here." Jibra'il joined in the fray, and fought continuously for four months morning and evening.

"The "White Raiments" were victorious every day and the Muslims were helpless. They sought for a ruse," Malik ibn I'fazih said, "I propose a plan." He ordered a tunnel dug from the camping ground to the wall of the fortress. He sent armed men into it and ordered all that was dug out to be made strong with wood reeds, and earth and kept covered till they came under the walls of the fortress. (He ordered) an area of fifty gaz (cubit) by measure to be excavated and strengthened with pillars. Then a space of fifty gaz had been dug they filled it full of fire wood and poured oil on it. They set fire to it so the pillars would burn and the walls of the fortress would collapse. But the fire would not start for a wind was necessary to make the fire burn and there was no way for the wind to blow into the fortress. They set up and prepared catapults against that tower under which (the tunnel) had been dug. They hurled stones and made a breach. The wind found a way and it began to burn. The pillar burned and the (walls), for an extent of fifty gaz, fell down. The Muslims wielded their swords and killed many people.

The remainder asked for a truce and they concluded an agreement on the same conditions they had made at first-not to cause trouble to Muslims, to return to their villages, to send their chiefs to the caliph, and not to carry arms on themselves. They concluded a treaty on these conditions and came out of the village. They crossed the trench, but they had concealed weapons. Jibra'il entrusted their chief Hakim to his son 'Abbas, and he told his son to let Hakim sit in the curtained court

and to kill him secretly. They obeyed his order. They brought him to the court, and stood at a distance. Jibra'il went to his curtained court. The "White Raiments" sent Khishwi, who was a friend of Hakim, to Jibra'il to tell him they would not go without Hakim. Khishwi was wearing new boots. He was talking when 'Abbas son of Jibra'il returned and said, "I have killed Hakim. Jibra'il ordered Khishwi pulled from his horse and killed immediately. "The White Raiments" raised a cry and brought out their weapons (they had concealed earlier), and a battle began. Jibra'il ordered his troops all to mount and enter into battle. The struggle was more obstinate than before. They fought fiercely and finally a second time they suffered defeat." (p. 92). A large number of them were killed, and those who remained fled.

The head of the village of Narshakh was a woman whose husband was called Sharaf. He had been a captain of Abu Muslim, and the latter had killed him. This woman was brought to Jibra'il, and with her a blind cousin, who was very foul and wicked. Jibra'il said to that woman, "Pardon Abu Muslim." She replied, "Abu Muslim is called the father of Muslims. He who killed my husband cannot be the father. Jabra'il ordered the woman cut in two parts and her cousin also put to death.

Kirdik went to Muqanna' but Baghi, who was also one of them, was killed in battle. "Jibra'il brought their heads (of the dead "White Raiments") to Sughd to frighten the "White Raiments" in Sughd. "The people of Sughd had an amir of the leaders of Muqanna' called Sughdiyan. The people of Sughd supported him and Jibra'il had to fight many times with the inhabitants of Sughd. Finally a man of Bukhara killed Sughdiyan, and that group was dispersed." (p. 93).

"Jibra'il went thence to Samarqand where he fought much with the Turks and the "Whie Raiments" till Mu'adh ibn Muslim became the amir of Khurasan," cira 777. He passed through the desert of Amui. When he arrived at Bukhara, from the people of Bukhara (the farmers), 570,000 (*sic*) warriors were assembled. Mu'adh ibn Muslim ordered many implements of war made. He made ready three thousand workers equipped with axes, spades, buckets and hatchets, and also all sorts of artisans who are useful in an army." He built catapults and ballistae, and with the best (possible) organization he moved towards Sughd. In Sughd there were many "White Raiments" and many Turkish troops had come."

"The amir of Herat had brought 10,000 sheep from Herat, which were all with him. Mu'adh ibn Muslim told him, "Here the Turks, our adversaries, are near, and they love sheep very much. Send these sheep to Bukhara, or sell them to me so I may divide them among the troops." He did not consent to do either. A troop of Turks came, attacked, and carried away all of those sheep to a place between Arbinjan and Zarman. The troops went in pursuit of them. Some (of the Turks) were

killed and they ('Abbasid forces) returned. Mu'adh ibn Muslim went to Sughd and Samarqand and fought a great deal with the Turks and the "White Raiments." In the course of two years sometimes he was victorious and sometimes his enemies." After two years Jabra'il was replaced by Musaiyab in 780.

"Every time a Muslim army came to Bukhara it raided in the summers and departed in the winter. Khatun (of Bukhara) fought a little with each army that came and then made peace. "The inhabitants of Bukhara became Muslims, but each time after the Muslims withdrew they apostatized. Qutaiba ibn Muslim converted them to Islam three times, but they (repeatedly) apostatized and became infidels. The fourth time he made war he seized the city and established Islam there after much difficulty.

He instilled Islam in their hearts and made (their religion) difficult for them in every way. They accepted Islam in appearance but in secret worshipped idols. Qutaiba thought it proper to order the people of Bukhara to give one-half of their homes to the Arabs so that the Arabs might be with them and informed of their sentiments. Then they would be obliged to be Muslims. In this manner he made Islam prevail and imposed the religious laws on them. He built mosques and eradicated traces of unbelief and the precepts of the fire worshippers. He labored a great deal and punished everyone who broke the decrees of the religious laws." (pp. 61-66). He built a grand mosque and ordered the people to perform the Friday prayer there so that God the Exalted would reward the people of Bukhara for this good (deed) on the final judgment.

Qutaiba Ibn Muslim built a grand mosque. That place (formerly) had been a (fire) temple. He ordered the people of Bukhara to assemble there every Friday, for he had it proclaimed that, "Whosoever is present at the Friday prayer, I will give him two *dirhams*." The people of Bukhara, at the beginning of (their conversion to) Islam, during prayer, read the Qur'an in Persian for they were unable to understand Arabic. When it was the time for the *ruku* (bowing from the waist) a man behind them told them to bow and when they wanted the *sujud* (full prostration) he loudly instructed them to prostrate. "Outside the city (of Bukhara) were seven hundred villas where the rich people lived and they were very arrogant. Most of them did not come to the grand mosque. The poor wanted the two *dirhams* but the rich had no need for them." (p. 57).