

DHU'L-FAQĀR AND THE LEGACY OF THE PROPHET, MĪRĀTH RASŪL ALLĀH

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RESUMEN - ABSTRACT

La espada es un símbolo de gran importancia en el Islam. Se analizan las fuentes para el estudio de la tradición conocida sobre la espada del Profeta, su iconografía y los tipos a los que dio lugar.

The sword is a very important symbol in Islam. Here the sources are examined of the well-known tradition of the Prophet's sword, its iconography and influence.

PALABRAS CLAVE - KEY WORDS

Armas blancas. Espadas. Simbología. Islam.

Swords. Symbolology. Islam

In European history, literature, and myth swords have been important symbols of righteousness and of royal power. Great heroes were known by their swords; Beowulf and Siegfried by their dragon-slaying swords, *Hrunting* and *Balmung*; King Arthur by *Excalibur*; Roland by *Durendal*; and El-Cid by the golden hilted swords *Tizón* and *Colada*. Swords were not just weapons but were also used for ceremonial functions such as in knighting and as symbols of power in solemn processions and in coronations. A similar situation developed in the Islamic world especially in regard to the sword known as *dhu'l-faqār*.

Dhu'l-faqār, the sword of the Prophet Muḥammad, is one of Islam's most enduring symbols. Representations of it were made throughout the Islamic world and it is referred to in numerous inscriptions; it appears on coins, tombstones, amulets, flags, and in miniature painting. Like many potent symbols its origins were mundane.

Dhu'l-faqār is not mentioned in the Qur'ān and seems originally to have been nothing more than an implement of war used by the Prophet Muḥammad in battle. Later, between the eighth and eleventh centuries reference to it is found in a large number of chronicles and histories, and it came to be regarded as a virtual "holy relic" of the Prophet, whose possession was often seen as underscoring political and spiritual legitimacy in the Islamic community. Eventually, *dhu'l-faqār* gained such importance that it became not only one of the insignia of the caliphate, but also a sign of the *mahdī* and a symbol of the Last Days, *yawm al-ākhirah*.

The Prophet Muḥammad died on June 8, 632/13 Rabī' I 11 without (publically?) nominating a successor nor did he create a system for the transfer of power within the newly for-

med Muslim community. An angry dispute immediately arose over these issues; one group supported the candidacy of the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, whilst another supported one of the Prophet's first followers, Abū Bakr. The latter prevailed and on 13 Rabī' I II/8 June 632 Abū Bakr was nominated caliph by an assembly of the Muslim community - the assembly of the portico, *sakifa* - and given their oath of allegiance and obedience, *bay'at*. The dispute, however, did not end and (those later known as) the party of 'Alī, *shī'at 'Alī*, or Shī'a continued to claim that Muḥammad had designated 'Alī as heir during his lifetime.

Two fundamentally different views regarding inheritance are reflected in the leadership quarrel. The Sunnī point to various traditions, *ḥadīth*, in which Muḥammad is reported as saying that a Prophet's property cannot be inherited, for example:

Narrated 'Ā'isha: The Prophet said, "Our (Messenger's) property should not be inherited, and whatever we leave, is to be spent in charity".¹

On the contrary the Shī'a maintained that the Prophet left both his personal property and his role as shepherd of the community to 'Alī and his descendants until the end of time. Their view regarding the Prophet's inheritance is well illustrated in an *aḥadīth* or *ḥadīth* attributed to the sixth Shī'a *imām* Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (ca.80-148/699-765). In this story the Prophet, on his deathbed, passed over Abū Bakr and bequeathed to 'Alī his weapons and armor, his animals, and his clothes and finally his ring and thereupon said:

O company of Muslims, 'Alī is my brother, my successor and caliph among my people and sect; he will pay my debts and cancel my engagements. O ye sons of Hāshim and Abū'l-Muṭṭalib, and ye other Muslims, be not hostile to 'Alī, and do not oppose him to another, lest ye be led astray, and do not envy him, nor incline from him to another, lest ye become infidels. He then ordered 'Abbās to give his place to 'Alī... 'Abbās rose in anger, and 'Alī took his place.²

A pro-'Abbasid tradition, seems to acknowledge that at some point 'Alī was in possession of *dhu'l-faqār*, but only thanks to the grace of Abū Bakr. The story is related by the historian Aḥmad ibn Yaḥya al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 279/892):

Al-'Abbās consulted Abū Bakr when he had a difference of opinion with 'Alī. Al-'Abbās asked Abū Bakr who has priority, the uncle or the cousin? Abū Bakr said the uncle does. Al-'Abbās then said "I wonder why the shield of the Prophet and his mule loosely sway to and fro and the sword is with 'Alī?" Abū Bakr replied that he found this very sword in 'Alī's hand and hated to take it away from him.³

Dhu'l-faqār was one of a group of objects subsequently used by either side in the leadership dispute to demonstrate that they alone had the right to rule. Collectively these objects were known as "the Legacy of the Prophet," *mīrāth rasūl Allāh*, but there is no complete agreement on the inventory involved. Most reports include his ring *katām*, cloak *burda*, staff, 'anaza (or baton, 'aṣā or rod, *qaḍīb*), and sword, but others speak of his flag, bow, and even an assortment of ancient relics such as the staff and basin of Moses, the Ark of the Covenant and the shirt of Adam. Finally, reference is often made to certain texts being among the legacy. These objects and texts, individually and collectively were all associated with power and with political and spiritual legitimacy.

The sword *dhu'l-faqār* was part of the Prophet's share of booty from the battle of Badr in 2/624. The Shī'a argued that it was given to 'Alī and that possession of it was a proof that he

¹ Bukharī 1987, vol.8, p. 472:719; see also Muslim 1971, vol. 3, pp. 956-58, nos. 4351-4357.

² Majlisī 1982, vol. 2, pp. 369-70, for other contradictory traditions see, for example, Momen 1985, ch. 2, pp.11-22.

³ Balādhurī 1959, p. 525, the *isnād* is Al-Madanī from Hishām b. Sa'd, from 'Isā b. 'Abd Allāh b. Malik.

was the Prophet's heir. This can be seen in a report of an exchange between 'Alī's son Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya (16-81/637-700-1) and the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65-95/685-705). The story was related by the historian Abū Abdallāh Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd (ca 168-230/784-845) writing during the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/813-33):

'Abd al-Malik asked to see the prophet's sword. Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya brought a shiny sword and claimed that it was the prophet's. 'Abd al-Malik looked at it and said "I have never seen a better and finer metal than this and I swear to God that people will never see a better person than the owner of this sword." The Caliph then asked Ibn Ḥanafīyya to give him the sword. Ibn Ḥanafīyya replied that whoever has the closest relationship to the prophet will take it.⁴

The Shī'a imāms consistently stated they were in possession of secret esoteric knowledge, and this claim goes to the core of their argument of moral and theological infallibility, *ma'sūm*. Certain texts said to have been copied by 'Alī formed the basis for traditions found in the works of the most important Shī'a traditionalists, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d.290/903) and Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. ca. 329/941).⁵ In one of many traditions ascribed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq it is said that knowledge of "all science first and last" was written on the emerald tablets given by God to Moses; that these were then hidden and later found and brought to Muḥammad. After reading them Muḥammad told 'Alī that "God has commanded me to entrust them to you" and 'Alī transcribed the information onto parchment:

The tables and staff of Mūsā, concluded the imām, are in our possession, all transmitted to us by inheritance from Muḥammad".⁶

This text was sometimes called *jafr* but it is not clear whether this refers to the book, or to the red leather bag or case in which it was kept with the sword and other objects, or to the sword's red leather scabbard.⁷ *Jafr* and *dhu'l-faqār* are physically connected in yet another way since there are numerous reports that both the Prophet and 'Alī kept texts, *ṣahīfah* attached to their swords. Whether these *ṣahīfah* included the esoteric texts of Shī'a tradition is disputed, but all seem to agree that they at least contained the Prophet's rulings on certain legal matters, dictated to 'Alī, and kept hanging on the sword's hilt (or kept in the scabbard). The Shī'a fervently maintained that both texts and sword were inherited by 'Alī. Ḥamidullāh notes that both Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath Abū Dā'ūd (d. 275/888) and Muḥammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) say that Muḥammad had a written document concerning taxes:

but died before despatching it to the governors. He had tied this document to his sword.⁸

⁴ Ibn Sa'd 1905, p. 83, the *isnād* is traced to Zayd b. 'Abdul Raḥmān b. Zayd al-Khaṭṭāb.

⁵ Kohlberg 1983, pp. 299-307 see p. 304.

⁶ Majlisī 1982, p. 105, according to another tradition when Muḥammad died 'Alī washed his body and then it came to life and imparted this secret knowledge, see Fahd 1965, p. 376.

⁷ Friedlander, 1908, pp. 104-107, called *jafr* because it was written on, or the case was made of, the skin of a small ox. In some versions Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is said to have possessed certain mystical documents and other objects including *dhu'l-faqār*, the ring, staff, and cloak as well as Moses' staff, basin and Adam's shirt; all stored in a red leather case or bag (scabbard?); see Crow 1982. Crow saw a connection between this case and the pre-Islamic "portable shrine" (*al-Jafr*), which he thought might be analogous to the red leather tent "originally a place of refuge" under the guardianship of the tribal chief, and in battle carried on the back of a camel. This has parallels with the tradition that the Prophet had a red tent, and on occasion wore a red cloak; for the red tent see van Ess 1992, esp. pp.102-03. Ibn Sa'd 1967, p. 577 records a *ḥadīth* in which the text is on (in) the scabbard.

⁸ Hamidullah 1962, p. 19, note 2. Taqī 'l-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) also says that there were texts hanging from the Prophet's sword Maqrīzī 1941, vol. 1, p. 107; Ṭabarī (224-310/838-923) reports that in the year 2/623 "someone says that in this year the Messenger of God wrote (a document) concerning the blood money (*al-ma'āqil*). (The document) was hung on his sword" see Goto 1982.

The great traditionalists Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (194-256/810-70) and Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāh (d. 261/875) both recorded a tradition that sometime after the Prophet's death ʿAlī stood upon a *mimbar* while girded with a sword from which hung a *ṣaḥīfa*. ʿAlī's account of what was written on this paper seems to indicate that it included the "Constitution of Medina"⁹, and also rulings on a number of other issues regarding "tax, pasture of camels, (penalties for woundings, and so on.)"¹⁰ These *ṣaḥīfa* were clearly similar to those Muḥammad is said to have had tied to his sword hilt. This is also the first recorded instance of a sword being held by the *imān* on the *mimbar*, indicating that *dhu'l-faḡār* had become not only a weapon that presaged victory in the *jihād* but was also associated with the law.

Dhu'l-faḡār was therefore not just a weapon associated with victory, but was also connected with the legislative function of the Muslim community. When the Shīʿa state that ʿAlī inherited the sword and texts it is another way of saying that ʿAlī inherited supreme military and legislative power, that he inherited the caliphate. Possession of the sword and *ṣaḥīfah* were proof in themselves of his descendants, the Shīʿa *imāms*, special status as the Prophet's legitimate heirs.¹¹

The importance later placed upon the physical inheritance of the Prophet is pertinent to understanding the development of royal ceremonial under the Umayyads and ʿAbbāsids. For although the ring, staff, cloak, and sword can all be associated with Muḥammad, there is no record that either he or any of the first four orthodox caliphs, the *rāshidūn*, used them as insignia of office. Their use in ceremonial occurred later when possession of the physical *mīrāth* became of major symbolic importance to the ruling caliph.

In 131/749 Abū'l-ʿAbbās, a direct descendant of the Prophet's uncle launched a revolt against the Umayyads. They marched under the black banner of the Prophet¹² and the pro-Shīʿa historian Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (ca 280-345/893-956), reported that in 132/750 the ʿAbbāsīd general ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī captured and executed the last Umayyad caliph Marwān, and sent his head and the insignia of the caliphate (the cloak, baton, and the stick) to Abū'l-ʿAbbās:

These relics, sent by amīr ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī, to Abū'l ʿAbbās al-Saffāh, passed into the hands of the ʿAbbasid caliphs, down to Muqtadir, who wore, it is said, the cloak on the day of his assassination.¹³

According to the pro-ʿAbbasid historian Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/838-923) writing of an event in the year 158/775:

⁹ There are a number of traditions reporting that ʿAlī, in his role as the Prophet's secretary, kept *ṣaḥīfah* in his sword case, and Serjeant 1983, p. 134, thinks these were passed on his descendants and later used by Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq (ca. 85/704-150/767) in compiling the relevant information in his "Biography". The "Constitution" essentially dealt with rules; about blood money; liberating prisoners; executions; damage for torts; taxes; and contractual relationships between believers and their clients (*mawla*). Versions are recorded by Ibn Ishāq, Abū ʿUbayd (d. 224/839), Ibn Zanūyah (d. 248/862) and Abi Khaythama (d. 279/892), many western scholars agree that it is a compilation of different documents of different dates. see especially Goto 1982 and Crone 1987, pp. 32-33. Goto points out that since the various *ḥadīth* only preserve parts of the "constitution" this may indicate that scholars rejected the other parts included by such biographers as Ibn Ishāq, common to all accounts is the reference to blood money, justice between Muslims, and the ransom of captives.

¹⁰ Serjeant 1983, p. 138; for an account of the text see Hamidullah, 1961, pp. 29-30:

¹¹ Kohlberg, 1983 pp. 299-307 notes that al-Qummī claimed many of the traditions he reported were copied from this *ṣaḥīfah*. The key issue was however inheritance and Serjeant, 1983 says that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's references to the *ṣaḥīfa* kept by ʿAlī "seem angled to show ʿAlī as explicitly denying that he had a proof or ordinance (*naṣṣ*) nominating him Muḥammad's successor." p. 138 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1313, vol. 1, pp. 79, 100, 118-119, 151-52.

¹² Ibn Ishāq reported that when the Prophet set out for the battle of Badr he gave one of his companions a white flag and was preceded by ʿAlī and one of the *anṣār*, who each carried a black flag. The flag carried by ʿAlī was called *al-Uqāb*, the eagle but the name of the other black flag has not been preserved.

¹³ Masūdī 1914, vol. 6, p. 77. Ibn al-Athir (555-630/1160-1233), reports that Muqtadir wore the mantle (*burda*) and carried the "famous exalted sword" (*fashhurua alyhu sayfhum*), Ibn al-Athir 1862, p. 179.

Mūsā b. al-Mahdī and Rabīʿ, mawlā of al-Manṣūr, sent Manāra, the mawlā of al-Manṣūr to al-Mahdī with news of his death and the accession of al-Mahdī, and after that they sent the Staff and the Mantle of the Prophet -God bless him and give him peace - which are the legacy of the Caliphs.¹⁴

Also Masʿūdī says that in 198/814 after the death of the Caliph al-Amīn, Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn, the general of al-Maʿmūn:

arrested one of Amīn's eunuchs, called Kawthar, who had been his favourite. He had with him the ring, the cloak, the sword, and the staff - the insignia of the Caliphate.¹⁵

In 251/865, there was a dispute over the caliphate between al-Muʿtazz and Mustaʿīn, and each tried to rally the people of Baghdad to their cause:

The grandson of Ṭāhir put Mustaʿīn on view on the roof of his palace. The people, seeing him in the Prophet's striped mantle and holding the Prophet's staff, acclaimed him. Mustaʿīn denied the rumors of his dethronement and expressed his gratitude to Ṭāhir's grandson.¹⁶

However, in 252/866 Mustaʿīn was deposed and:

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir, the brother of Muḥammad, brought Muʿtazz the striped cloak and the staff of the Prophet, together with the royal sword and the crown jewels. The eunuch Shahaq accompanied him,

and Muḥammad wrote to Muʿtazz recommending this servant in the following terms:

ʿHe who brings you the inheritance of the Messenger of God - may prayers and peace be upon him! - deserves that you should never violate the protection which is due him.¹⁷

There are many conflicting accounts of the ownership of dhu'l-faqār and of its loss. The story of the sword passing to the fourth ʿAbbāsīd caliph Mūsā b. al-Mahdī (r.169-170/785-86) can probably be interpreted in the light of Shīʿa propaganda. For Mūsā totally reversed his father's policy of accomodation with the Shīʿa. He especially earned their hatred for his suppression of a revolt in Medina and the massacre of about one hundred Shīʿa and their leader Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Ṣāhib Fakhkh at Fakhkh near Mecca in 169/786. His unworthiness in Shīʿa eyes is therefore underlined in the story that although he managed to obtain the *dhu'l-faqār* he failed to understand its true nature, used it on an unclean animal - a dog - and broke it. This story is recorded by al-Ṭabarī who reports that the sword was in the possession of Muḥammad b. ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥasan (Muḥammad al-Nafs al Zakiyya - the 'pure soul') during his rebellion at Medina in 145/762-3:

On the day he was killed, Muḥammad had with him Dhū al-Faqār the sword of the Prophet, but when he perceived he would be killed, he gave his sword to one of the merchants who was on his side and to whom he owed four hundred dīnārs, and told him, "Take this sword; you'll find no one from the family of Abū Ṭālib who won't take it and give you the price you ask." The sword stayed with this man until Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān governed Madīna, and learned of it. He sent for the man and took the sword from him giving him four hundred dīnārs. It stayed with Jaʿfar until the reign of al-Mahdī, while Jaʿfar governed Madīna. He told al-Mahdī where the sword was and he took it. Later it passed to Mūsā (al-Hādī, the fourth ʿAbbāsīd caliph r.169-170/785-86), who tried it out on a dog, and the sword broke.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ṭabarī 1989, p. 55. *isnād* ʿIsā b. Muḥammad - - - Mūsā b. Hārūn:

¹⁵ Masudī 1989, p. 172.

¹⁶ Masudī 1989, p. 291.

¹⁷ Masudī 1989, p. 292.

¹⁸ Ṭabarī, 1988, p. 125, the *isnād* is traced to Hurmuz Abū ʿAlī the mawlā of the Bāhila ---ʿAmr b. al Mutawakkil, whose mother had served Fāṭima bt. Ḥusayn

al-Ṭabarī also records a contradictory account according to which the sword was broken during the fight between Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakīyya and his enemies:

I saw Muḥammad that day...He would cut at them with his sword, and so long as he had a sword no one would come near him without being killed...until a man shot an arrow into him...Death came on him there, and he leaned heavily on his sword and broke it. I heard my grandfather say: "He had with him Dhū al-Faqār, the sword of God's Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace"¹⁹.

In a further contradictory account al-Ṭabarī relates that the unbroken sword was later in the possession of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170-193/786-809):

I saw al-Rashīd, Commander of the Faithful, at Tūs wearing a sword, and he told me. "Eh, Aṣma'ī, shall I show you Dhū al-Faqār?" I said, "Yes indeed, and God make me your ransom!" He said, "Draw my sword," so I unsheathed it, and saw eighteen vertebrae (*faqār*) carved on it"²⁰.

The revolt of the Shī'ā under the leadership of Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī Ṣāhib Fakhkh which led to the massacre at Fakhkh in 169/786 is also described by al-Ṭabarī. Immediately before the rebellion he recounts an account in which Al-Ḥusayn sits in the mosque with a sword across his knees, unfortunately he does not say whether or not this was *dhū al-faqār*:

on the day that Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, he of Fakhkh, rebelled. He prayed with us, and went up to the *minbar* of God's messenger, God bless him and give him peace, and sat down. He had on a white tunic, which he had loosened so that the ends hung down before and behind, and placed a drawn sword between his knees..."²¹

If we accept al-Maqrīzī's version, *dhū'l-faqār* was lost during the Fāṭimid period (in Egypt 969-1171). The Fāṭimid's claimed to be direct descendants of the Prophet through Ismā'īl, the son of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. They showed strong messianic tendencies and the founder of the dynasty 'Ubayd Allāh (909-934) seems to have regarded his son Qāsim (934-946) as the expected mahdī. The objects comprising the "legacy" were important to the Fāṭimids and in 1009 the caliph al-Ḥākim ordered his troops to search Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's house in Mecca for a book or script containing mystic knowledge of "all past and future events." Several years later in 451/1059 during the reign of al-Ma'add al-Mustansir (427-487/1036-94) the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qā'im bi-amr Allāh (422-467/1031-1075) was forced during a rebellion to renounce his rights in favor of the Fāṭimid ruler, and that the Prophet's cloak was transferred to Cairo. It is not specified if the other "relics" were also transferred at this time²². Al-Maqrīzī says that during the chaos that followed the famine of 459-464/1062-72 al-Mustansir was forced to give away many of the most precious objects in the treasury and that he gave *dhū'l-faqār* to one of his generals.²³

Later historians report that the cloak of the Prophet (and the other "relics"?) were returned from Cairo to Baghdad by Ṣalāh al-Dīn (532-589/1138-1193), and it is generally thought that the *mīrāth* were destroyed in 656/1258 when the Mongols burnt Baghdad and murdered the last 'Abbāsīd Caliph. But later during the Mamluk period when a "restored" 'Abbāsīd dynasty ruled in Egypt and Syria mention is made of imperial insignia including "the black cloak, the black turban, and the badawī sword"²⁴.

¹⁹ Ṭabarī 1988 p. 125, the *isnād* is traced to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl --- Abū // al Ḥajjāj al-Minqarī:

²⁰ Ṭabarī 1988 p. 125, the *isnād* is traced to 'Abd al-Malik b. Qurayb al-Aṣma'ī.

²¹ Ṭabarī 1989, pp. 152-53, the *isnād* is traced to 'Alī al-Sarī Abū Bishr, a confederate of the Banū Zuhra

²² Canard 1951, says the Fāṭimids used the "relics" in their courtly ceremonial and Canard 1960, p. 1074, notes that the objects sent to Cairo were the turban, *mindīl*, cloak, *ridā'*, and a latticed screen, *shubbāk*; see also Hitti, 1977, p. 622.

²³ conv. Shihab al-Sarraf, October 1998.

²⁴ Ibn Iyas 1921, p. 72 and Mayer 1943, vol. 10, p. 8.

In 922/1517 the Mamluks were in turn conquered by the Ottomans under Selīm I (r. 918-26/1512-20) and objects said to be the *mīrāth rasūl Allāh*, were transferred to Istanbul along with the caliph al-Mutawakkil²⁵. Later the Ottomans claimed that this also transferred the caliphate to them. This group of “relics” is said to have contained a bow and a banner of the Prophet.²⁶ These objects are now said to be preserved in the Treasury of the Prophet in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul.

‘Alī and the Mahdī

Upon his election as caliph in 23/644 ‘Alī must certainly have taken possession of *dhu’l-faqār*. Yet it is difficult to know whether it was given to him earlier by the Prophet because any analysis of the historical sources is complicated by their partisan nature and because in large part they were first transmitted orally and only later committed to writing. Our basic sources are the biographies, *sīra*, of the Prophet that sprang from accounts recording his military expeditions, *maghāz*. The term *sīra* was probably introduced by the biographer Abū Muḥammad Ibn Hishām (d. 218/834), editor of the *sīra* of Ibn Ishāq. The latter’s treatise was the earliest systematic biographical compilation and he is generally regarded as one of the most important authorities on traditions concerning the Prophet’s life.²⁷

There are a number of passages in the *sīra* that refer to the Prophet’s sword, in some instances these specify that it is *dhu’l-faqār*, in others the reference is merely to the “sword of the Prophet.” For example, the name of the sword in the story of Abū Dujāna is not given and it may or may not have been *dhu’l-faqār*.

Dhu’l-faqār was part of the Prophet’s share of booty from the battle of Badr in 2/624. According to Ibn Ishāq, it was taken by Abū’l Yassar from Munabbih ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-sahmī one of the Meccan notables killed during the fight.

On the night before the battle of Uḥud in 3/625 Muḥammad saw the sword in a dream:

By God I have seen something that augurs well, I saw cows and on the tip of my sword I saw a notch and I saw that I had thrust my hand into a strong coat of mail and I interpreted that to mean Medina.²⁸

Ibn Hishām notes that:

...a traditionalist told me that the Apostle said: ‘I saw some cows of mine being slaughtered; they are those of my companions who will be killed. As to the dent which I saw in my sword, that is one of my family who will be killed.’²⁹

These dream stories are attributed to un-named “traditionalists.” They do not occur in this precise form among the *ḥadīth* accepted by al-Bukhārī, who does, however, record a similar *ḥadīth*:

The Prophet said, ‘I saw in a dream that I waved a sword and it broke in the middle, and behold, that symbolised the casualties the believers suffered on the Day (of the battle) of Uḥud. Then I waved the

²⁵ Inalcik 1970, p.320.

²⁶ The banner *sançak-i şerif* was taken on major military campaigns, Żygulski 1992, pp. 18-24.

²⁷ Ibn Ishāq was criticised by his contemporary Mālik b. Anas (d.179/795) as unreliable and having Shī‘ā tendencies; for an outline of early opinions of his work see Jones 1986, pp. 810-11. The first *maghāzī* were compiled by ‘Uthmān’s son Abān (died ca. 100) and by ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr b. al-‘Awwām (23-94) see Jones 1983, pp. 344-51 and Guillaume in Ibn Ishāq 1982, introduction pp. xiv-xvii.

²⁸ Ibn Ishāq 1937, p. 168; Ibn Sa’d 1967 p. 577, records a tradition in which the sword seen in the dream is said to be *dhu’l-faqār*.

²⁹ Ibn Ishāq 1982, Ibn Hishām’s notes to Ibn Ishāq, p. 752, note 582.

sword again, and it became better than it had ever been before, and behold, that symbolised the Conquest (of Mecca) which Allāh brought about and the gathering of the believers'.³⁰

Ibn Ishāq also relates a long story about Abū Dujāna:

The apostle wore two coats of mail on the day of Uḥud, and he took up a sword and brandished it saying: 'Who will take this sword with its right?'

Several men tried to claim it and finally Muḥammad gave it to Abū Dujāna, who took it, fought fiercely, killing numerous enemies, until he came to Hind bint 'Utba. He stayed a blow in mid-air, turned away from her and later said:

I saw a person inciting the enemy, shouting violently, and I made for him, and when I lifted my sword against him, he shrieked, and lo, it was a woman; I respected the apostle's sword too much to use it on a woman.³¹

There are many diverse accounts associating 'Alī with *dhu'l-faqār* and stressing his heroism. The earliest and best known was recorded by Ibn Hishām with an *isnād* traced to Abū Najīh (d. ca. 749/132) citing an un-named traditionalist quoting "some knowledgeable people":

...on the day of the battle of Uḥud one of the companions of Muḥammad said in a loud voice 'There is no better sword than *dhu'l-faqār* and no better hero *fata* than 'Alī'.³²

Al-Ṭabarī writing at least fifty years later gave a variant version when he wrote that at Uḥud Muḥammad wore two cuirasses and two swords, *dhu'l-faqār* and *khaif*. During the battle 'Alī broke his sword and Muḥammad gave him *dhu'l-faqār*; then seeing 'Alī's heroic use of it, he proclaimed:

There is no sword but *dhu'l-faqār* and no hero but 'Alī.³³

In this account the anonymous "someone" has become the Prophet himself.

Another version is recorded by Abū'l Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ibrahim al-Qumī (d. 307/919), a Shī'a theologian who collected traditions from the *imāms* Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. In this report the sword was given to 'Alī by the Prophet at the battle of the Trench to use in single combat against 'Amr b. 'Abdu Wudd:

'Alī was the only one who dared fight him and taking *dhu'l-faqār* walked forward saying 'someone is coming to answer your request who is without weakness or fear'.³⁴

In other Shī'a versions this story is given a miraculous turn. The theologian Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. ca. 329/941) relates a tradition from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq that Muḥammad was deserted at Uḥud by all his followers except 'Alī. At this desperate moment the Prophet gave 'Alī his sword, and the latter leapt to the attack; the angel Gabriel appeared and said:

³⁰ Bukhārī 1987, vol. 9, pp.135-36, no. 168. *isnād* Abū Mūsā.

³¹ Ibn Ishāq 1982, pp. 373-75.

³² Ibn Hishām 1955, part 3, p. 40. In Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 756 "companion" is translated as "someone". In these accounts 'Alī is described by the word, *fata*, (lit. "young man") which designates the ideal qualities of a young man: nobility of spirit, chivalrous conduct, vigor, generosity, courage in battle, and a deep sense of the spiritual. In the Qur'ān 18:10 the word is used in reference to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, paradigms for heroic faith and loyalty.

³³ Ṭabarī 1989, pp. 194-97.

³⁴ Qumī 1968, pp. 180-84.

There is no sword but *dhu'l-faqār* and no *fata* like 'Alī.³⁵

In the seventeenth century 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1037-1111/1627-8-1699-70) compiled a Persian account of Shī'ā *ḥadīth* on the life of the Prophet. In this version the Prophet was originally given the sword by Gabriel:

The imām Ṣādiq enumerates a pair of red doors among the possessions of the prophet. As to his sword, *dhu'l-faqār*, it is related that Gabriel brought it from heaven, and that its mountings were silver.³⁶

Subsequently, in a variant version, the Prophet is said to have given it to 'Alī during the battle of Uḥud:

When 'Alī's sword was broken in battle, Muḥammad took a dry branch of a date tree, which became *dhu'l-faqār*, and gave it to 'Alī. The compiler observes that this account is contrary to numerous traditions, which describe *dhu'l-faqār* as being sent from heaven. It might, however, have been sent at this time, and to human appearance have been as above represented.³⁷

Later during the battle of Khaybar 'Alī repulsed a furious attack led by the Jewish champion Marhab who:

wore a coat of mail and a helmet upon which was a large stone ring... 'Alī's second blow cleft the stone ring, helmet, and head of his adversary, who reeled and fell from his horse...After 'Alī had cloved the Yehudī champion, Gabriel appeared before Muḥammad in great amazement. The prophet inquired the cause. He replied, the angels of heaven shout, There is no hero but 'Alī and no sword but *dhu'l-faqār*.³⁸

The intercessory prayer to 'Alī, the *nadī 'Alī*, has also in Shī'ā histories been ascribed to the battle of Uḥud and connected with *dhu'l-faqār*. In these accounts Gabriel appeared at the critical moment and told Muḥammad to recite the prayer:

Call upon 'Alī the revealer of miracles, you will find him a comfort to you in crisis. Every care and every sorrow will pass through your trusteeship. Trust in God, O 'Alī, O 'Alī, O 'Alī.³⁹

Immediately thereafter 'Alī appeared brandishing *dhu'l-faqār* and routed the enemy.

The slogan "there is no *fatā* but 'Alī and no sword but *dhu'l-faqār*." is intended to demonstrate a connection between 'Alī and the Prophet's sword - an important element in Shī'ā propaganda. These versions transform the sword from a simple weapon into a divine endowment. It comes from heaven, via the angel Gabriel, is given to Muḥammad and then is passed to 'Alī. This transfer is described variously as occurring when the Prophet gave it to 'Alī to use during battle or when 'Alī inherited it after the Prophet's death. The transfer of *dhu'l-faqār*, the sword of victory, from Muḥammad to 'Alī is a metaphor for the latter inheriting the caliphate directly from the Prophet.

The discussion between Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya and the caliph 'Abd al-Malik related above should also be interpreted in this light. Not only is the weapon spoken of in a paraphrase of the famous lines "there is no better sword, etc." but also is said to have been in possession of 'Alī's son Ibn Ḥanafīyya. The statement that it belongs to whomever has the closest rela-

³⁵ Kulaynī 1968, p. 110.

³⁶ Majlisī 1982, p. 88.

³⁷ Majlisī 1982, p. 255.

³⁸ Majlisī 1982, pp. 274-75.

³⁹ Birge 1937, pp. 138-39. Linda Komaroff has argued that the use of this prayer on metalwork does not seem to predate the Timurid period, Komaroff 1979-80, pp. 11-20. The prayer is inscribed as a talisman on many objects, especially swords see for example The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 36.25.1306.

tionship to the Prophet should probably be interpreted in the context of the politics of the time, for in 201/817 the caliph al-Ma'mūn designated the 'Alīd, 'Alī al-Riḍā, as his heir. Ibn Sa'd's version was written at about this time and the statement attributed to Ibn Ḥanafiyya was perhaps apocryphal and may be seen as an attempt to underscore the right of the Shī'a imāms to the caliphate.

As time passed the stories related about 'Alī became more and more elaborate, thematically they portray him as the ultimate hero saint and in popular lore his heroism was underscored by comparing and sometimes equating him with a lion. The equation between hero and lion is common in early Arab poetry,⁴⁰ but later popular traditions extended the imagery into the miraculous. For example in a Turkish work *Menāḳib-i ḥehār yār gūzīn* by the Khalvetī shaykh Qārā Shams-al-Dīn Aḥmad Sīvāsī (d. 926-1061/1520-97) 'Alī's birth is said to have been heralded in a dream in which his mother saw a sword transformed into a lion; that whilst a baby he had the strength of a lion; and when the Prophet visited the seventh heaven during his *mī'rāj* he saw a lion and was told by Gabriel that it was the "spirituality" of 'Alī. Gabriel then told the Prophet to place his ring in the lion's mouth. The next day Muḥammad met 'Alī told him the story, and to his surprise 'Alī took the ring from his mouth and returned it,⁴¹ Many tales of this type are illustrated in Iranian miniature painting such those in a copy of Ibn Ḥusām's (d.875/1470) *Khawar-nāma* painted in about 884/1480. In these miniature paintings 'Alī is generally portrayed wielding an enormous *dhu'l-faqār* with a curved bifurcated blade, such depictions are commonplace, but more unusual are representations of the Prophet with *dhu'l-faqār* (fig. 1)

Naturally, the association of 'Alī with the lion and the sword found material expression in countless sword blades made throughout the Islamic world, but especially in Iran during the Safavid and later period. Most of the Iranian examples can be categorized into two overlapping groups. Firstly, there are "reproductions of *dhu'l-faqār*," that is, swords and sabres with bifurcated blades; secondly, there are blades inscribed with the signature of the legendary swordsmith Assad Allāh, literally "the lion of God",⁴² These are often inscribed with the slogan "There is no hero but 'Alī and no sword but *dhu'l-faqār*," and engraved with the image of a lion within a rosette.

Just as possession of *dhu'l-faqār* was for the caliph part of the *mī'rāth rasūl Allāh*, it was also seen as an essential attribute of the *mahdī*, "The rightly guided one." Probably during the first/seventh century this word came to be used to describe an "expected ruler who would restore Islam to its original perfection".⁴³

This is significant, for at this time 'Alī had been defeated by Mu'āwiya, founder of the Umayyad dynasty. The Shī'a regarded the Umayyad's as usurpers and believed that this historic wrong would be corrected by a scion of 'Alī, the *mahdī*. The concept evolved and broadened over time and was current among both the Shī'a and Sunnī. For some, designating a ruler who would restore the original perfection of Islam and for others as designating one who would usher in the messianic age.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Among the numerous examples quoted in Ibn Ishāq 1982, see for example p. 417, where Hamza is described as "our great defender...the lion of the apostle," p. 355 for another warrior as "the bold lion," or p. 423 where fallen warriors are described as "Lions who fight for their cubs, to fight for their religion"; also Jones 1992, pp. 64 and 235.

⁴¹ The text is translated in Brown 1927, ch. XVII. Similar stories are also included in Birge 1937, pp. 134-39.

⁴² A number of blades with this signature are listed in Mayer 1962, many of the blades are also dedicated to Shāh 'Abbās, which could be either Shāh 'Abbās I (r. 996-1038/1588-1629) or 'Abbās II (r. 1052-77/1645-66). The signed pieces bear dates ranging from 908 to 1231/ 1502 to 1816; Mayer notes p. 27, "in the cartouches the names of practically every king of the Safavid dynasty are mentioned" Most are certainly fakes and there is good reason to think the smith is a legendary figure.

⁴³ See Madelung 1986, p.1231

⁴⁴ Douglas Crow 1982 argued that some of the Prophet Muḥammad's contemporaries regarded him as a messianic figure and suggested that this idea lived on among the early Shī'a, and that the possession of the *mī'rāth*, especially *dhu'l-faqār* and its association with victory in battle, was crucial to their messianic ideals.



Fig. 1. The *mi'raj* of the Prophet, who is surrounded by angels one carrying *dhu'l-faqār*, Iran, 16th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 13.228.3.

Predictions about the coming of the *mahdī* coincide with the collection of numerous prophetic *ḥadīth*. These covered the past and future; both Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Sa'd relate prophecies concerning the advent of Muḥammad and Bukhārī cites dozens of examples in which the Prophet speaks about the signs of the "Last Days".⁴⁵ Shī'a *ḥadīth* predicting the *mahdī* are cast in the same form and are an essential aspect of their thought. The various sects into which the Shī'a evolved all believed that eventually the *mahdī*, a descendant of the house of 'Alī, would arrive and usher in a new golden age. One of the signs of the *mahdī* would be his possession of the *mīrāth*, including both the supernatural knowledge of the Prophet and *imāms* and the physical legacy, especially *dhu'l-faqār*. This is illustrated in the large numbers of *ḥadīth* describing the *mahdī* and the circumstances of his arrival. In one account attributed to 'Alī and included in the *Nahj al-Balāgha* compiled by Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (359-406/970-1016) the *mahdī* is described as one who will:

Bring succor to humanity. He will take out the hidden wealth from the breast of the earth and will distribute it equitably amongst the needy and deserving...He will revive the teaching of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet.⁴⁶

In another example recorded by Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Hilī (d. 726/1325?)

The greatest believer will walk at that time with the banner of righteous guidance and the sword *dhu'l-faqār* and the staff. He will descend into the land of Hijra two times, once on the town of Kūfa where he will destroy its mosque and build a new one atop the first and he will destroy the houses of the strong who live around the mosque and then he will walk to the town of Baṣra until he reaches the sea and with him will be the coffin and the staff of Moses. He then will blow a stream of air on Baṣra and turn it into a raging sea that will swallow it up. The prophet will then walk to Ḥarūr to set it on fire as he passes through the gate of Banī Assad's palace and blow on Thaqīf. He will then walk to Egypt where he will go to the pulpit of the mosque and preach. Only then will peace and justice spread, the sky will bring forth rain, the trees will bear fruits and the land will grow plants.⁴⁷

The same deep beliefs also suffused the leaders of messianic mahdist movements from the early Islamic period until the present day. The revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakīyya in 145/762-3 has been noted above. There are scores of similar examples, such as that related in the chronicles of Mecca begun by al-Azrakī where there is a report that in 402/1011 the Hāshimīd amir of Mecca Abū 'l Futūḥ al-Ḥasan claimed the caliphate and went to Ramla taking with him a sword alleged to be *dhu'l-faqār* and:

he adopted the name al-Rashīd and...proclaimed an era of peace and justice.⁴⁸

A search through the rhetoric of virtually any mahdī claimant generally reveals a reference to possession of objects belonging to the *mīrāth*, and often to supernatural objects that by implication also relate to the *mīrāth*. As noted above in the report by Ibn Sa'd it appears that Ibn Ḥanifiyya claimed to have the *dhu'l-faqār* and many of his supporters insisted that he was the mahdī. Al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqafī (d. 67/687) who rebelled in support of Ibn Ḥanifiyya is said to have marched into battle with an empty chair and to have been in

⁴⁵ Ibn Sa'd, 1967, p. 181 cites a tradition traced to the time of Tubba' (a title of the kings of Yaman) in which the birth of the Prophet is predicted, as are his battles and eventual victory, he is described as "neither short nor tall, in his eyes there will be a red tinge; he will put on a cloak (*Shimlah*); his sword will be on his shoulder"; Ibn Ishāq 1982, pp. 11-12; for prophecies concerning the Last Days see Bukhārī Vol. 9, bk. LXXXVIII.

⁴⁶ Raḍī 1977, p. 104

⁴⁷ Ḥillī 1950, p. 201

⁴⁸ Wüstenfeld 1858, vol. 2, pp. 207-08 The statement "he proclaimed an era of peace and justice...and took the name Rashīd" (the rightly guided) evokes the ideas that *dhu'l-faqār* belonged to the rightful caliph and that ultimately the sword would be wielded by the mahdī.

communion with the angels Gabriel and Michael.⁴⁹ In another example, the North African *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart (ca 471-524/1078-1130) founder of the Almohad, *muwaḥḥidūn* movement, claimed to have the *jafr*, and by implication this almost certainly includes *dhu'l-faqār*.⁵⁰

The leaders of mahdist movements were often powerful rulers, for instance, the Safavid Shāh Ismā'īl (r. 906-930/1501-1524) who in presenting his claims wrote:

My name is Shāh Ismā'īl. I am God's mystery. I am the leader of these Ghāzīs. My mother is Fātima, my father 'Alī, and ergo I am the Pīr of the twelve imāms...Muḥammad's miracles, the Shāh's (sword) *dhu'l-faqār* are signs in my hand. Here I have come. I shall exterminate outsiders from the world. I am Khata'ī I have come to serve as a proof (of truth)...the mahdī's period has begun. The light of eternal light has dawned (upon the world)... with all your heart accept the scion of Imām Shāh Ḥaydar. My imāms Ja'far al-Ṣadiq and 'Alī Mūsā Riḍā have come.⁵¹

In modern times one of the most famous mahdi movements was that of Muḥammad Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh (1844-85) in the Sudan. He claimed to have been appointed *mahdī* by the Prophet Muḥammad and to have been girded with the *dhu'l-faqār*:

The eminent Lord Muḥammad...several times informed me that I am the mahdī...and he gave me the sword of victory of his excellency Muḥammad...and it was made known to me that none of either race, human or jinn, can conquer him who has it. I was told by the Lord of creation, Muḥammad, that I am the expected mahdī, and he placed me on his throne several times in the presence of the four caliphs, the *aktab*, and the *khudr*, he girded me with his sword in the presence of the saints, the *aktab*, the angels and the *khudr*. I was told that none could gain victory over me, having received the sword of victory from him.⁵²

Swords

The hilt and blade of *dhu'l-faqār*

a. The hilt

The chronicles of the early Islamic period indicate that the Prophet owned several swords. Ibn Sa'd records seven, whose names were: *abī ma'tūr*, *qala'ī*, *batār*, *al-ḥatf*, *al-mikdam*, *rasūb*, and *dhu'l-faqār*; an eighth, named *'adb*, is noted by al-Balāḍurī, and a ninth, *khaif*, is mentioned by al-Ṭabarī.⁵³

Dhu'l-faqār must have had a straight double-edged blade,⁵⁴ probably grooved, and its mountings were of silver. Ibn Sa'd, citing various authorities, gave a detailed description, noting that it had:

a hilt of silver, and the ring and the chain, in which it was suspended were (also) of silver. It was a sword which had been thinned . . . and . . . the edge of the scabbard of the sword . . . was of silver, its hilt was of silver and there was a silver ring between them.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Hawting 1993, p. 523.

⁵⁰ Macdonald 1913,

⁵¹ Minorsky 1942, pp. 1042-49.

⁵² Wingate 1891, pp. 64-65.

⁵³ Ibn Sa'd 1951, pp. 576-78; the Arabs habitually named their swords, cf. the famous sword, "the stone cutter" of Al-Walid b. al-Walid b. al-Mughīra; see Ibn Ishāq 1955, p. 729; Balāḍurī 1959, p. 521; Ṭabarī 1989, 194-97.

⁵⁴ There is no evidence to suggest that single-edged blades were in use at this time. They probably were introduced into the Islamic world by the Turkic soldiers of al-Mu'taṣim (r. 212-27/833-42) see Alexander forthcoming.

⁵⁵ Ibn Sa'd 1951, pp. 576-78.

The Yamani scholar ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammān al-Ṣanʿānī (126-211/744-827) citing Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767) reported that:

Ibn Jurayj said that he was told that the name of the Prophet's sword was *dhu'l-faqār*. Jaʿfar said I saw the handle of the sword made of silver, the bottom of the scabbard was also of silver, and in the middle is a round silver piece that meant that the bearer is from the al-ʿAbbās tribe.⁵⁶

These descriptions are precise. Significantly, a round piece of silver set in the middle of the scabbard indicated a specific tribal origin. Equally important is the reference to the ring on the hilt; intended for the attachment of a cord which could then be tied around the wrist. This enabled a warrior to easily retrieve his weapon if it were knocked out of his hand in battle, especially if he were mounted. Sword rings, *raziyazza*, are known from many near contemporary examples, the earliest are on Chinese swords of about A.D. 600 and it is likely that their use spread to the Middle East via Central Asia.⁵⁷ The earliest surviving examples from the Islamic world are on a sword hilt found in a Fātimid shipwreck off the coast of Turkey and on a sabre of the third/ninth century excavated at Nīshāpūr in Iran.⁵⁸

The reference to a silver chain refers to a chain attached to the scabbard. The Arabs at this time did not suspend their swords from a belt but rather from a baldaric, *nijad*, which went over the shoulder.⁵⁹ In the case of *dhu'l-faqār* this belt may have been of silver and attached to the scabbard in exactly the same way as is seen depicted on a tenth century ivory plaque from Byzantium (fig. 2).

There are two Umayyad representations of rulers holding swords which may be *dhu'l-faqār*. One is on the coinage of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik where he is depicted holding a sword with scabbard (fig. 3).⁶⁰ Three long streamers cascade from either his wrist or from the hilt of the sword, and although their presence has been remarked on several occasions their exact nature has remained a mystery. It is likely, however, that they represent *sahifa*, and that the sword carried by the caliph is *dhu'l-faqār*. ʿAbd al-Malik was one of the greatest Umayyad rulers and was responsible for building the *qubbat al-Ṣakhra* in Jerusalem. There were probably both political and religious reasons behind this project; the political included the need to demonstrate the caliph's power and the religious included eschatological speculation about the third Temple.⁶¹ The depiction of ʿAbd al-Malik on the coin fits snugly into this context, *dhu'l-faqār* is a symbol of military power, of political and spiritual legitimacy, and of the Last Days.

Above the doorway to the Umayyad palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar in the Jordan Valley was a plaster statue depicting a figure holding a sword. He is represented in exactly the same pose as was ʿAbd al-Malik and probably represents either the caliph Hishām (r. 105-125/724-43) or his successor Walīd (r. 125-126/743-744). Hishām is perhaps the most likely candidate, the figure is stern and bearded and not only was belief in the *mahdī* strong during the Umayyad period, but Hishām was called the *mahdī* by the court poet Jarīr b. ʿAtiyya (d. 110/728-9);⁶² whereas his successor Walīd was regarded as a *bon vivant*. It would have been appropriate therefore to portray Hishām with *dhu'l-faqār* and perhaps during the Umayyad period the figure of a standing ruler holding the sword had become a *topos* for legitimate rule.

⁵⁶ Ṣanʿānī 1972, vol. 5, p. 295-97, no.9663; Ibn Jurayj was one of the first compilers of *muṣannaʿ*.

⁵⁷ For the Chinese sword now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 30 65 2, see Grancsay 1986, p. 69.

⁵⁸ The Fātimid example was first published by George Bass 1978, pp. 768-93, for the Nishapur sabre see Allan 1982, pp. 204-05, no. 208.

⁵⁹ For references to this in poetry see Schwarzlose 1886, p. 55; also Hitti 1977, p. 327.

⁶⁰ American Numismatic Society, New York, no. 1970.63.1 dated 75/694-95, ill. in Blair 1992, p. 65, fig. 6.

⁶¹ conv. J. Raby Jan. 1996.

⁶² For Khirbat al-Mafjar see E. Baer 1986, pp. 10-17, and Hamilton 1969, pp. 61-67; for Hishām as *mahdī*, see Madelung 1986, pp. 1231-32.



Fig. 2. Sword suspended with a chain from a baldric, ivory plaque, Byzantium 10th-11th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no 17.190.140

The early sword hilts depicted on coins and at Khirbat al-Mafjar all have rounded pommels, these are paralleled by that of the hilt found in an Aegean shipwreck mentioned above, and by sword hilts depicted in the *Suwār al-kawākib al-thābita* of al-Ṣūfī dated 444/1009-10.⁶³ These large rounded pommels, are of exactly the same type as those used on a type of short Roman sword called a *gladius*, and it seems likely that *dhu'l-faqār* was based on a late Roman prototype.



Fig. 3. Coin of 'Abd al-Malik, American Numismatic Society, New York, inv. No. ANS 1970, 63,1

The belief that the Prophet's sword *dhu'l-faqār* was of this type most probably explains the persistence of this tradition and why the use of round pommel's on Arab swords was so long-lived. They occur for example, in the illustrations to Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* of 714/1314-5 where Arabs are always depicted with round pommeled straight swords suspended from baldarics,⁶⁴ and in numerous surviving swords, especially swords with dragon headed quillons, of the fifteenth century from Nasrid Spain, and the Mamluk period in Egypt and Syria (fig. 4 a,b,c).

b. The blade

There is no evidence to suggest that single-edged sabres were used at this early period and the blade of *dhu'l-faqār* must have been straight and double-edged. This coincides with the depictions of swords on the coin of 'Abd al-Malik and in the plaster sculpture from Khirbat al-Mafjar, both representing short straight and presumably double-edged weapons.

Understanding the nature of *dhu'l-faqār's* blade is, however, more complicated than determining whether or not it was straight and double-edged. Later representations often show it as having a bifurcated blade, whilst some of the earlier descriptions say that it had "ribs" or grooves. The idea that the blade was bifurcated can probably be traced to a misunderstanding of the Prophet's dream:

on the tip of my sword I saw a notch.⁶⁵

A notch, *talam*, on a blade is not manufactured but is caused by use during battle, and references to notched blades as symbols of heroism abound in early Arabic poetry:

And threaten me not! Verily, if thou meetest me face to face (thou shalt find that) I have a Mashrafite sword, with notches on its smiting edge from long use⁶⁶.
Swords of price, in their edges notches, record of fame in battle⁶⁷.

⁶³ See Wellesz 1965, pls. 7, 19. The sword on pl. 19 is suspended from a baldaric.

⁶⁴ Blair 1995, eg. folios 66a, 72a, 292a.

⁶⁵ Ibn Ishāq 1937, p. 168

⁶⁶ Lyall 1918, p. 247.

⁶⁷ Lyall 1913, p. 51 see also Jones 1992, p. 237 where a Yemeni sword is described as having notches in its edges *afallu*.

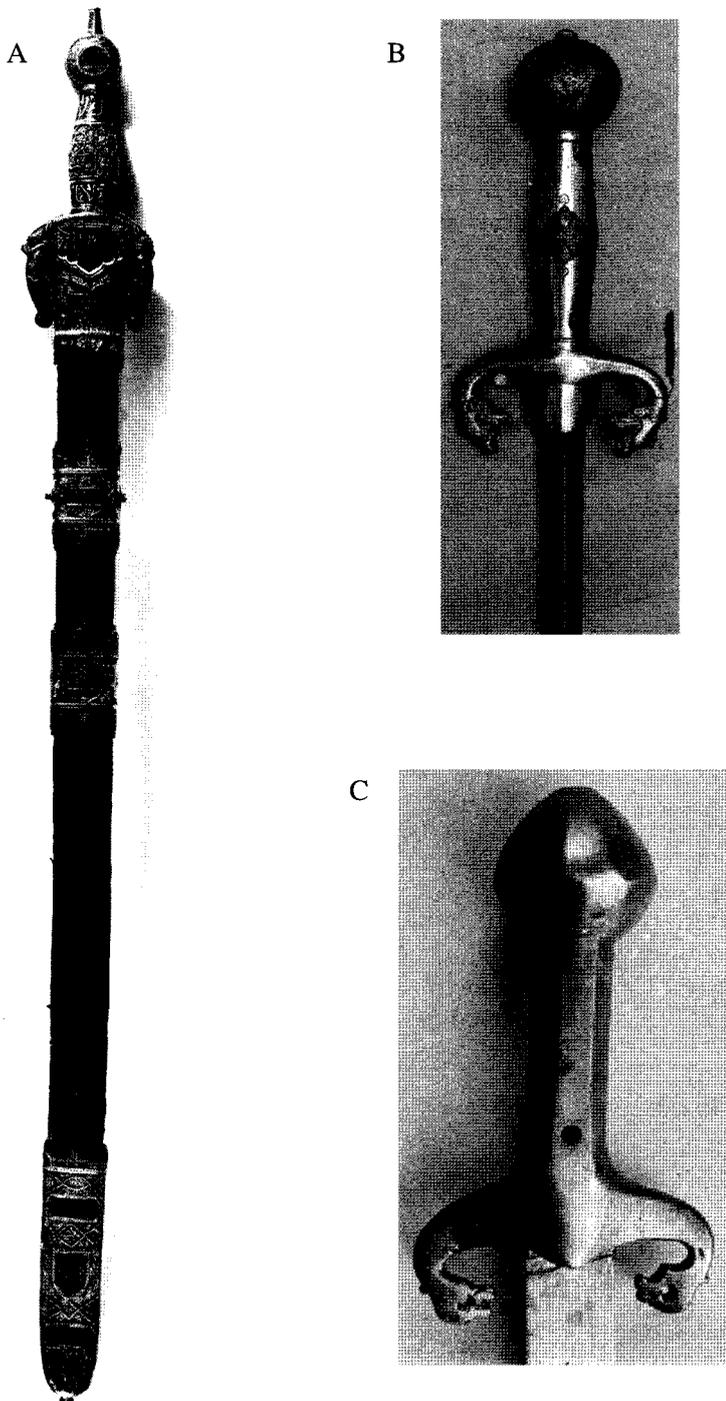


Fig. 4. a. Nasrid dragon sword with rounded pommel, fifteenth century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale.
b. Ottoman dragon sword with rounded pommel, sixteenth century, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 1/323.
c. Mamluk dragon sword with rounded pommel, fifteenth century, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 1/212.

The presence of a nick or notch at the end of the blade probably explains why *dhu'l-faqār* is often represented as having a split tip, for the notch would have created two small points. This must be the reason the weapon was later depicted as having a bifurcated blade. Portraying *dhu'l-faqār* with a bifurcated blade also neatly coincided with ancient Iranian ideas about the mace of Saoshyans which was to be used in the final battle between good and evil. In the *Shāh-nāma*, Ahriman (the god of darkness) kills the cow who nursed the hero Bahrām. As a memorial, Bahrām aided by the blacksmith Kāvah fashioned a cow-headed mace that became an emblem of good or light. This mace was inherited by a succession of heroes, most notably Rustam. It was prophesied that at the end of time it would be used by the hero Saoshyans in the final battle against the evil Ahriman - just as in Islamic eschatology the two-pointed sword *dhu'l-faqār* would be used to destroy the forces of evil. Ox-headed maces were known throughout the Islamic period in Iran and like *dhu'l-faqār* carried both heroic and eschatological connotations.

In reality the blade of *dhu'l-faqār* was probably grooved:

I unsheathed it, and saw eighteen vertebrae (*faqār*) carved on it⁶⁸.

The word seems to be used in the sense of “grooves” as is confirmed by linguists and scholars such as Abū'l Ṭāhir al-Fīrūzābādī (729-817/1329-1415) who described a type of sword blade called *mufaqqār*,⁶⁹ which had lengthwise grooves. Sword blades worked with grooves were well known during the early Islamic period. According to the philosopher and historian Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (ca. 185-252/801-66) grooved swords were either from Europe, those with one central groove, or from the Yaman, including the famous sword *samsam*, which had two grooves along one side.⁷⁰ Al-Kindī maintained that grooved Yamani swords were of the highest quality and it is very possible that seems *dhu'l-faqār* had a Yamani blade.

An alternate interpretation of Ṭabarī's account of the eighteen vertebrae is found in a tradition recorded by the anthologist al-Tha'ālibī (350-430/961-1038), who described *dhu'l-faqār* as having “small beautiful hollows,” that is, scallops along its edge.⁷¹ An unusual *dhu'l-faqār* now in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul has a serpentine blade probably based upon these early descriptions (fig. 5), as do several sword blades decorated with scenes of dragon and phoenix combats and inscribed with verses referring to *dhu'l-faqār*.⁷²



Fig. 5. *Dhu'l-faqār* with serpentine blade, Ottoman, late fifteenth - early sixteenth century Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 1/388.

⁶⁸ Ṭabarī 1988, p. 125, the *isnād* is traced to 'Abd al-Malik b. Qurayb al-Aṣma'ī.

⁶⁹ Fīrūzābādī 1959, p. 451.

⁷⁰ Kindī 1952, pp. 16-17, the *samsam* sword belonged to one of the Prophet's companions Khālid b. Sa'd, later it passed to Mu'āwiya and finally to the caliph al-Wāthiq (227-32/842-7) who ruined it when he ordered it re-polished and tempered, see al-Balādhurī tr. in Hitti 1916, pp. 1183-85.

⁷¹ Lane 1863 bk.1, pt. 5-6, pp. 2425-27, for maces with bifurcated heads see Alexander forthcoming.

⁷² Topkapı Sarayı Museum, no. 2/5066

The association of the dragon with *dhu'l-faqār* is curious, and represents an entirely non-Arab metamorphosis in the history of the Prophet's sword. It should not be thought that a sword or sabre with dragon imagery - decorating the blade, or more frequently as quillons sculpted as dragon heads -were always intended as representations of *dhu'l-faqār*. Yet from the fourteenth century onwards it appears that dragon swords were regarded as having a connection with the sword of the Prophet; and examples were produced in every part of the Islamic world, from Spain to India, as well as under numerous dynasties: Nasrid, Mamluk, Ottoman, Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal⁷³. Indeed, one of the swords preserved in the Treasury of the Prophet in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, has a hilt with dragon quillons. (fig. 6).

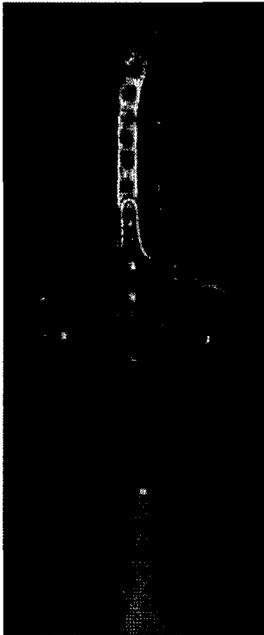


Fig. 6. Sword with dragon quillons, said to be the "sword of the Prophet", Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 21/129.

The earliest specific connection between a sword blade and a dragon is encountered in literature from the eleventh century, when the Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* and poet Abū Mu'īn Nāsir i-Khusraw (394-ca. 471/1004-ca 78) wrote that

the sword of 'Alī is a dragon held in the hands of a lion⁷⁴.

Dragon imagery was merged with the symbolism of *dhu'l-faqār* in three ways: firstly, by associating a bifurcated blade with dragon quillons on the hilt; secondly by inscribing a blade -especially one decorated with a dragon and phoenix combat with verses about the *dhu'l-faqār*; thirdly, by engraving a dragon on the blade of a bifurcated sword. Remarkable examples of the first type are found on Ottoman banners of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (fig. 7). An inscription characteristic of the second type reads:

⁷³ The prototype for the dragon sword can probably be traced back to the Chinese type described in Grancsay 1986.

⁷⁴ Esin 1974, p. 205. Much later the dragon virtually became a regnal symbol for the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II; it occurs on his coinage and cannon and his court poet and historian, Ibn Kamāl (ca. 873-940/1468-1534), described him as "the victorious panther at whose side hung a dragon sword," see Esin 1974, p. 211; the dragon metaphor was also popular with poets in Iran and an inscription on a blade in the Kremlin armory reads "The blade, even in its sheath, is terrible. It is a dragon hid in its cavern," see Egerton 1896, p. 53.



Fig. 7. Banner decorated with *dhu'l-faqār* with dragon head quillons, Ottoman 17th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 11.181.1

O sword may the idolaters be diminished by your agency!
 May the Garden of Victory flourish by your water
 May your owner be one who receives protection
 from the sword
 Your comrade will be the breath of the *dhu'l-faqār*
 Every day the sun draws a sword around the hearts of the faithful⁷⁵.

Examples of the third type include a series of swords made by the swordsmith Muḥammad ibn Abdullāh (see below and fig. 8).⁷⁶

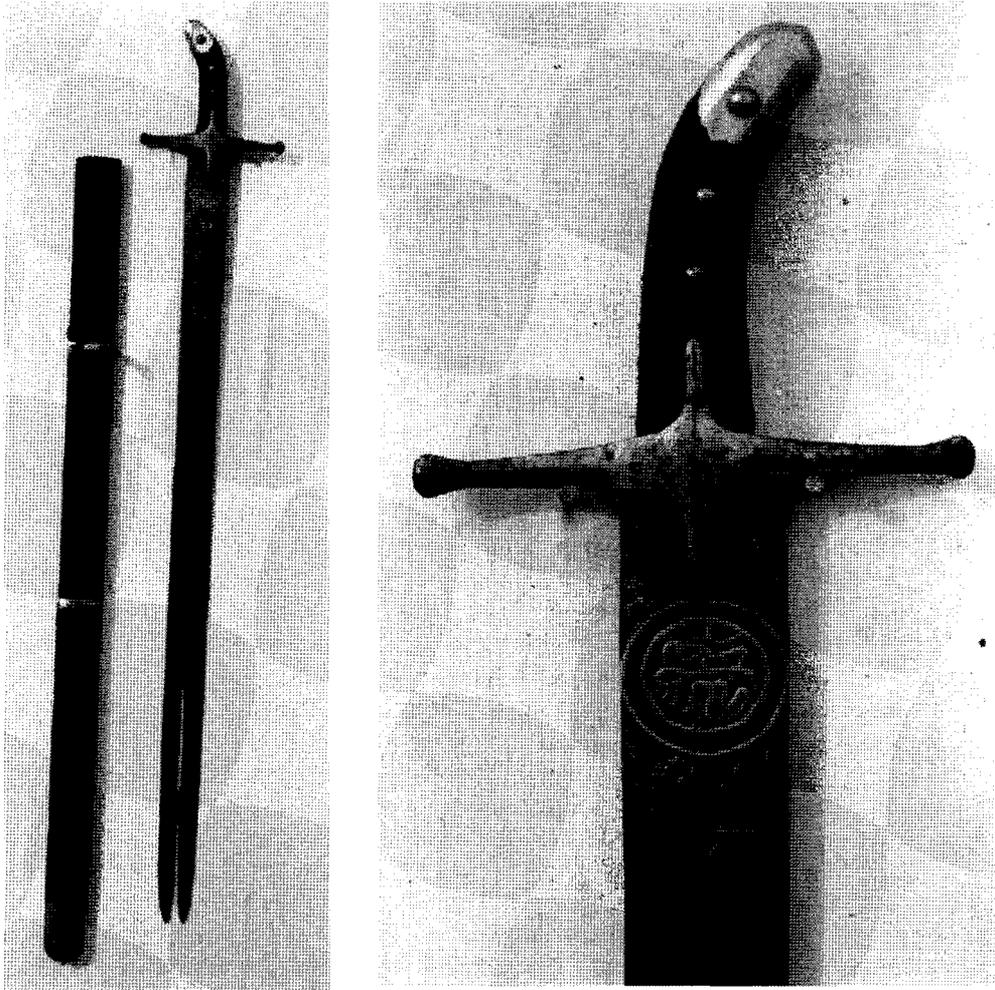


Fig. 8. *Dhu'l-faqār* decorated with a dragon sword, signed by Muḥammad Ibn Abdullāh, Anatolia? 16th century, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 1/205

⁷⁵ Waffensammlung, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, no. A1233, and Alexander 1984, no. 38; a translation of the same inscription is given in Schöbel 1975, cat. no. 179a, pp. 229-30.

⁷⁶ Also one carved with a dragon head, made for 'Abdī Pasha b. Abū. Nasr 'Alī Pasha, and dated 1194/1780 see Alexander 1984 no. 15, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, no. 1/487.

Reproductions of *dhu'l-faqār*

The earliest depiction of *dhu'l-faqār* is probably that on the coin of 'Abd al-Malik, but consistent attempts to portray it seem only to have been made at a much later date, especially in miniature painting. One of the earliest is a miniature in Bal'amī's translation of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-al-Mulūk*, thought to have been executed in Shīrāz during the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. In this miniature 'Alī is shown holding a straight sword with a bifurcated tip, thereby underlining his role as the Prophet's rightful heir in the strongest visual terms.⁷⁷

The earliest surviving reproduction of *dhu'l-faqār* can also be linked to Shīrāz (fig. 9). It is a straight double-edged blade with a bifurcated tip and is inscribed with the name of Jalāl al-Dīn Abū 'l-Fawāris Shāh Shujā' (r.765-86/1364-1384), the Muẓaffarid ruler whose residence was in Shīrāz. The blade is signed by an Egyptian swordsmith, Aḥmad al-Misrī, and perhaps was presented to Shāh Shujā' in 770/1368-9 when he accepted a diploma of investiture from the 'Abbasid caliph in Cairo. The problem with this blade is that the decoration is clearly done by two different hands and the possibility exists that it was re-worked as a *dhu'l-faqār* at a later date, perhaps during the sixteenth century⁷⁸.

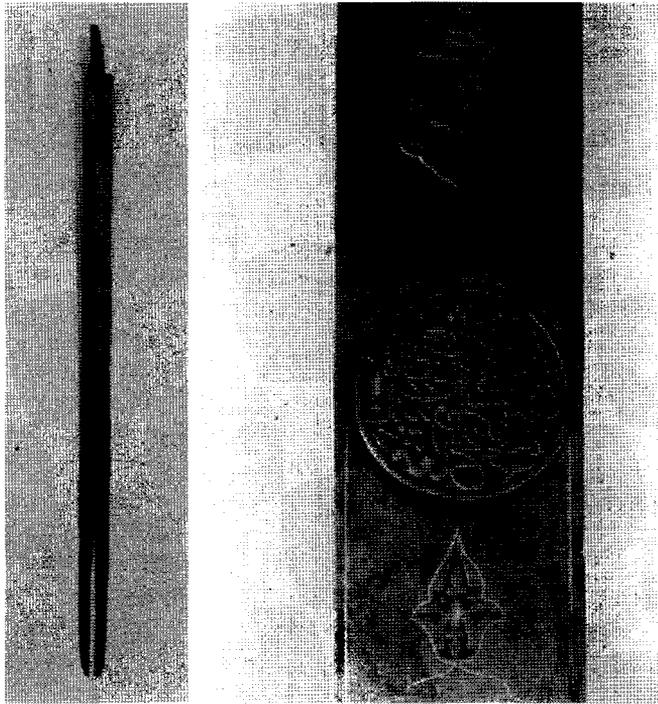


Fig. 9. *Dhu'l-faqār* inscribed with the name of the Shāh Shujā', Shīrāz, 765-86/1364-1384, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 1/216

⁷⁷ Soucek 1988, p. 194-95, fig. 3. she notes that the manuscript lays stress on the importance of 'Alī, of his heroism, and suffering and suggests that it was produced in a Sunnī environment.

⁷⁸ Shāh Shujā' ruled over Fars, Kirman, and Isfahan. The blade is preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı 1/215, see also 1/5198

Another example preserved in Istanbul can be attributed to Mamluk Egypt or Syria and dated to the second half of the fifteenth century⁷⁹ (fig. 10). The decoration of the blade is damascened in gold, partly in a contour reservé technique, there are typically Mamluk lancelote leaf forms on either edge and Arabic inscriptions. The decoration has many parallels in those from the period of Sultan Qaitbay (872-901/1468-1496). Its hilt, however, is Ottoman and was made in the imperial workshops during the second half of the sixteenth century.

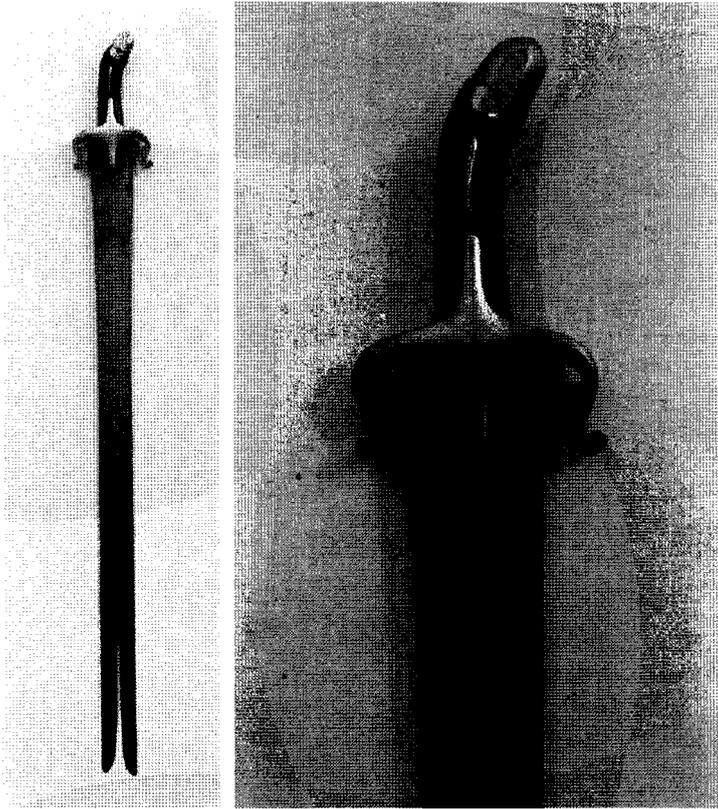


Fig. 10. Mamluk *dhū'l-faqār*, with an Ottoman hilt, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no.1/118.

Among the alleged *mīrāth* preserved in the Treasuries of the Ottoman sultans are three versions of *dhū'l-faqār*. The first is a sword purporting to be that of 'Alī (fig. 11). It has a wide straight double-edged blade damascened in gold with a floral roundel and an Arabic inscription. The scabbard is of red leather and is inscribed with the slogan, "There is no sword but *dhū'l-faqār* and no hero but 'Alī." The decoration of the blade is clearly of the Mamluk period and cannot be earlier than the fifteenth century, while the chiseled plaques on the scabbard are paralleled in Safavid metalwork of the early sixteenth century. But even though this may be a composite piece, the resonance with the red leather bag or scabbard once in the possession of Ja'far al-Şādiq is unmistakable, and it was perhaps this that led to its identification with 'Alī.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Topkapı Sarayı 1/118 the hilt has a fish emblem typical of the imperial workshops.

⁸⁰ See Alexander 1984 no. 51, Topkapı Sarayı no. 2/138.

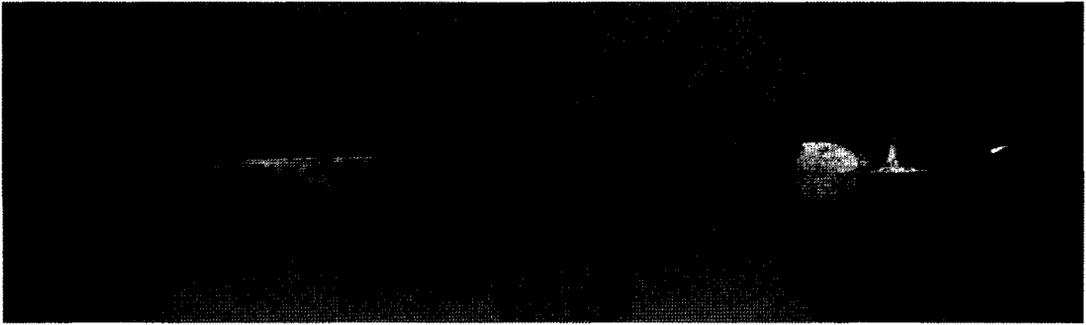


Fig. 11. Sword ascribed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 2/138

The second (Ill. 12) is the finest example of the large group of ceremonial swords decorated with a dragon and pheonix combat and inscribed with verses in praise of heroism and *dhū'l-faqār* which are mentioned above. The entire group can probably be assigned to an Ottoman or Safavid workshop of the sixteenth century although this blade has for some unknown reason been attributed to 'Alī's brother Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib. He was an early martyr known as al-Ṭayyar because after his heroic death at the battle of Mu'ta in 8/629 the Prophet dreamt he saw him flying on two bloody wings with the angels in Paradise.⁸¹

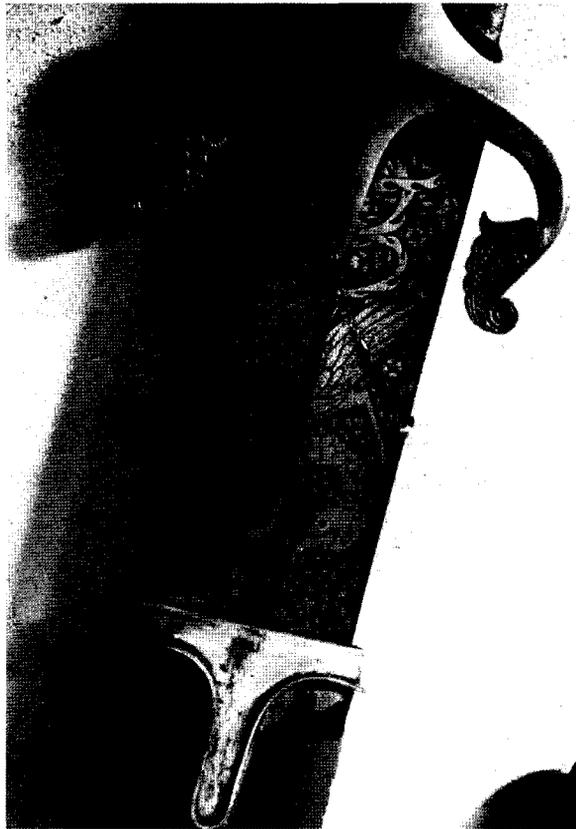


Fig. 12. Detail, Dragon sword ascribed to Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, 2/143

⁸¹ Vaglieri 1965, p. 372. Topkapı Sarayı no. 2/143

The third *dhū'l-faqār* now preserved in the Treasury of the Prophet of the Topkapı Sarayı Museum is said to be that of the third caliph ʿUthmān. This is a straight double-edged sword with a bifurcated tip and chiseled along its upper center with the image of a sabre with a split tip and dragon headed quillons. The blade is inscribed in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic and signed by the swordsmith Muḥammad ibn Abdullāh. The sword was at one stage kept in the room of circumcision and Emil Esin has argued that it was a thirteenth century Anatolian blade that had been an ex-voto offering at the tomb of the caliph ʿUthmān. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support this assertion, and the decoration on the blade is unlikely to be earlier than the sixteenth century, it is one of three signed by the same smith, all of which are virtually identical in decoration (fig. 8).⁸² In part the Turkish inscription mentions the “four sublime chosen friends, the four pillars of the palace of the faith” the *çehār yār gūzīn* that is the first four caliphs and perhaps the sword is in some way connected with the Khalvetī dervishes and the poem mentioned above by Aḥmad Sīvāsī.

In addition to the swords and sabres in the Treasury of the Prophet, several other *dhū'l-faqār* associated with Ottoman sultans are preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum. These include a large slightly curved sabre with a bifurcated tip made for the Ottoman Sultan Bāyezīd II (886-918/1481-1512) (fig. 13). Its hilt is missing and reveals several makers' stamps on the tang reading “made by Hajī Sunqur.” The blade is single-edged and only very

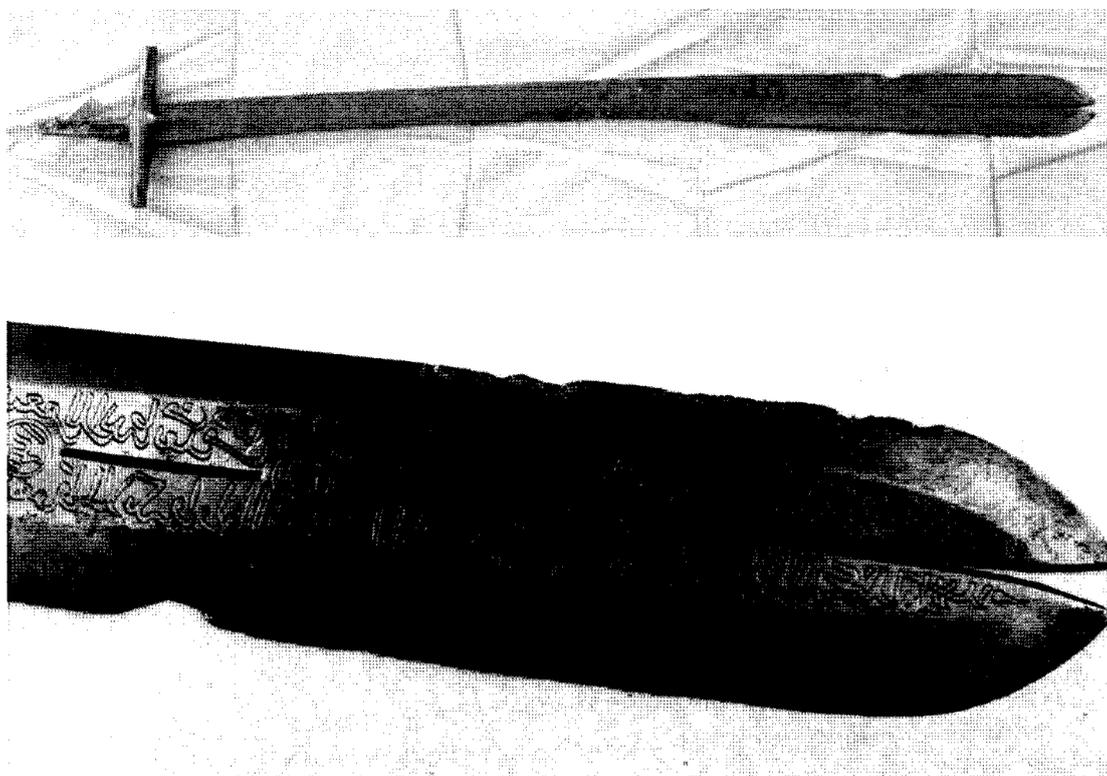


Fig. 13. *Dhu'l-faqār* of Bāyezīd II, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no. 1/384

⁸² See Esin 1974, pl. 21, fig. 36, Topkapı Sarayı 2/136; for a full description and bibliography. Several other blades are signed by the same smith including a sabre now in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo no. 15663, Nemzeti Museum, Budapest, 56-4269, and also an unsigned example almost certainly by the same smith Topkapı Sarayı 1/205



Fig. 14. Twin swords of ‘Osmān II, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, no.1/315

slightly curved and the double-edged section is immediately before its point. The blade is engraved with a verse from the Qur’ān; the “Throne sūra” (2:256); the names of the first four caliphs; and the name of the sultan, “owned by Bāyezīd Khan ibn Meḥmet Khan.” There is nothing Shī‘a about this and the weapon probably reflects Bāyezīd’s mystical tendencies, especially the influence on him of the Khalvetī dervishes

A luxurious sword sculpted at its pommel with a dragon head, with dragon quillons and a blade inscribed “There is no sword but *dhu’l-faqār* and no hero but ‘Alī.” is claimed to be the sword of investiture of the founder of the Ottoman dynasty ‘Osmān Ghāzī (d. ca. 724/1324). It is possible that the blade dates to the fourteenth century, but the decoration is certainly later, probably of the late sixteenth century⁸³.

Another curious variation on the theme of *dhu’l-faqār* was made for the Ottoman sultan ‘Osmān II (r. 1027-31/1618-22). In this instance the bifurcated blade becomes twin sabres fitting into a single scabbard (fig. 14). The blades are of typical form for the period, slightly curved with a double-edged section towards their points. They are each inlaid in gold with an inscription in Ottoman Turkish “*Nazar eyleyenler dilbeste bu iki tîq-i bürâna Verildi zu’l-fiqâr-i Ḥaydarî Sultan ‘Osmân,*” “Those who view these two blades are captivated, Ḥaydar’s (‘Alī’s) *dhu’l-faqār* has been given to Sultan ‘Osmân.”

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⁸³ Topkapı Sarayı Museum, no.H. 3775 see Alexander 1984 no 28, for bibliography.

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