

A PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MEDIEVAL ARABIC MILITARY LITERATURE

by Dr. A. *Rahman Zaky*

BEFORE Islam, the Arabs of the Peninsula had their own local system of warfare, that was not of big armies, but of small battles and skirmishes among the tribes. After the death of Muhammad (632), the caliphs established their rule in Arabia, and started their conquests towards Iraq and Persia in the East; and towards Syria, Egypt and North Africa in the West. After the conquest of Spain (711), the Arabs had already built a vast empire extending from the Atlantic shores to the Indus in about one hundred years. While the Arabs began to develop their warfare system, they did not disdain to learn many lessons from the nations they already defeated. Accordingly the Byzantine army served as a model for their land forces. Arab writers and translators began to contribute invaluable treatises on war, archery and chivalry. It is a pity that very few of these have survived, whether Arabic or Persian. Some of the treatises were the translations of books written in Latin, Greek, Persian or Sanskrit. One can say that by the tenth century, the Arabs had an art of war of their own.

As a specimen to the medieval military literature of the Arabs in Iraq, Egypt and Spain, I shall mention the following treatises.

1. *Mukhtasar Siāsat al-Hurūb*: written by Abu Sa'id al-Sha'arāny al-Harthamy who flourished circa 848, during the reign of the two Abbassid caliphs: al-Ma'amūn and al-Mutawakil.

It is an outline in the strategy of war, most probably abridged from an earlier and larger work. The manuscript of the outline exists at Koprilli Library in Istanbul (1). The outline includes forty titles on military discipline, characteristics of leaders, mobilisation and ambushes, etc.

2. *Tabsirat Arbāb al-Albāb fi kaifiyat al-najāt fi al-hurūb* (2); written by Murda ibn (son) Ali ibn Murda al-Tarssūsi, on the demand of Sultan Salah el-Din (circa 1187). Among the important contents of the treatise are the following titles:

(1) Edited and annotated by Abdel Raouf Awn, Cairo, 1963.
 (2) Cambridge Bodleian Library, Oxford, Hunt, 264. See also: CAHEN, Claude: «Un traité d'Armurerie composé pour Saladin», (*Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, Tome XII, p. 103-163, Beirut, 1947-1948).

1. General introduction, qualities of Salah el-Din to whom the work is dedicated.
 2. The plan of the work: the 1st part consecrated to arms, the second to field tactics.
 3. The sabre, its excellence: traditions, literary citations; its various names in Arabic literature.
 4. Sources of the ore, various methods of tempering the steel used in the fabrication of swords.
 5. The bow, literary quotations, its various names in early Arabic literature.
 6. Methods of operating the bow among different people.
 7. Various types of bows and arbalets.
 8. On arrows: different types and uses.
 9. On lances.
 10. On the shield.
 11. On coat-of-mail and armour.
 12. On maces.
 13. The Mongonel.
 14. Manouvres: description of its various kinds.
 15. The battering ram and creeping towers.
 16. The «muthallatha».
 17. The naphtae.
3. Al-tadhkirat al-harawiyah fi al-hiyal al-harbiyah: written by 'Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi (d. 1214). It is a study of the Moslem Army in the field and under siege; in twenty four chapters which cover the following:
1. On personal obligations of the Sultan.
 2. On the qualities of the vizier.
 3. On the qualities of the Chamberlain.
 4. On the qualities of the Governors.
 5. On the qualities of the judges.
 6. On the duties of taxes collectors and the officers of administration.
 7. On the duties of officers in the Sultan's court.
 8. On how to deal with the employees of the Government.
 9. On counsel.
 10. On the qualities of the delegates when sent on mission.
 11. On the qualities of a messenger when sent to the Sultan and how to deal with him.
 12. On the role of a spy or agent seeking after information.

13. On gathering wealth, provision and war equipments; and how to attract men-of-war.
 14. On meeting the enemy and employing ruses.
 15. On keeping secrets.
 16. On sending a detachment.
 17. On the cautiousness of the enemy.
 18. On following the true enterprises of the enemy.
 19. On making the troops excited for battle.
 20. On attacking enemy lines and employing ruses, and tricks.
 21. On attacking fortresses and making siege, using tricks to a good effect.
 22. On the use of authority and power, and the efforts after good reputation.
 23. About employing tricks and ruses when you are besieged by the enemy.
 24. On using solidity when victory is not attained, and any more ruses do not serve you (3).
4. Kitāb al-badā'i wa al-asrār fi haqiqat al-radd wa al-intisār wa ghāmid mā ijtama'at 'alayhi al-rumat fi al-amsār: written by Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Asbagh al-Harawi, probably the son of the previous Harawi.

It is a work on tactics, stratagems and ruses.

5. Al-adillah al-rasmiyah fi al-ta'iābi al-harbiyah: written by Muhammad ibn Manikly, head of the Sultan's guard in the reign of al-Ashraf Sha'ban (ruled 1362-1376). The treatise deals with the military systems and tactics of the Franks, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, and Kurds (4).
6. Al-tadbirāt al-sultāniyah fi siyāsāt al-sanā'i al-harbiyah: written also by Muhammad ibn Manikly (5).

The treatise is on military art and the management of weapons, their preparations and proper handling under a variety of circumstances. A manuscript exists in the British Museum (Or. 37-34).

(3) Four manuscripts of al-Harawi's are in Istanbul and Konieh. See: RITTER, pp. 144-146. See also: JANINE SOURDEL-THOMINE: «Les Conseils du Sheikh al-Harawi a un Prince Ayyubide». (Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales, Tome XVII, Inst. Fr. de Damas, pp. 205-266, Damas, Années 1961-62).

(4) RITTER, pp. 146-148.

(5) *Id.*, p. 148.

7. *Kashf al-kurūb fi ma'rifat al-hurūb*: written by Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūsifi al-Misri (d. c. 1358). The treatise deals with war in general in ten chapters. It exists in the National Library in Cairo (210, Military art).
8. *Kitāb al-anīq fi al-manjaniq*: written by ibn Arnbughā al-Zarda Kach, most probably during the reign of Sultan Sha'aban (r. 1362-1376). The treatise deals with various siege-machines when assaulting fortresses, particularly in the crusading period. There are two manuscripts—one in Istanbul, and the other in the National Library of Cairo (No. 705, Military art) (6).
9. *Kitāb al-mubarak fi ma'rifat la'b al-dabbūs wa al-sira' 'alā al-khayal 'ind mulāqāt al-khasm fi awkāt al-hurūb*: the author's name is unknown, but the only copy in Istanbul is dated 779 H/1377. The treatise explains the steps to be taken when engaged in single combat and the methods of wielding various weapons while astride, particularly the mace (7).
10. *Tafrij al-Kurūb fi tadbir al-hurūb*: written by 'Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Awsi al-Ansari, in the reign of the Mamluk Sultan Malik Faraj ibn Barquq (1399-1411). There exist two manuscripts: one in Istanbul, and the other was found in the Yahuda collection, now being catalogued in Princeton (8). It is a manuscript on Moslem warfare written by the author in the 15th century. He says that he pursued his research and wrote his treatise for two types of readers: «1) he who chances upon it of the Sultan's noble commanders and the leaders of his armies; and 2) he among them who did not experience the path of war, because of the youth of his age...»

The manuscript includes an introduction and twenty books (chapters) as follows:

Book one: About caution in time of peace when the ruler resides in his capital.

Book two: About agents and spies and what is pertinent in this matter.

(6) *Id.*, p. 150 f.

(7) *Id.*, p. 152.

(8) SCANLON, G. T.: *A Muslim Manual of War*; edited and translated. The American University at Cairo Press, 1961.

Book three: About envoys and what is specified about the characteristics of a well-qualified and that which he who strays from correct procedure deserves.

Book four: About deception and stratagems which obviate war.

Book five: About consultation in the matter of war.

Book six: About the qualifications of the general of the army and those of his troops and how he should handle them.

Book seven: About the explanation of when it is necessary to encounter the enemy and do battle against him.

Book eight: About the scouting party and the organization of its activities and what these activities encompass.

Book nine: About the explanation of matters which require cautiousness when departing and what must be done in the circumstances of marching.

Book ten: About the explanation of that which is necessary of precaution while camping and the period when the army remains in the camp.

Book eleven: About the explanation of when mobilizing and arranging the troops is necessary and what is required in the matter of mobilizing at this time.

Book twelve: About the explanation of the method of mobilizing while threatened in marching and the protection of the treasuries.

Book thirteen: About the description of the method of night attack on the enemy if the opportunity appears.

Book fourteen: About the selection of positions of the battle rankings and the time to carry this out.

Book fifteen: About the explanation of the setting up of ambushes and the management of their affairs.

Book sixteen: About the description of the method of arranging the soldiers when they are mobilized for battle.

Book seventeen: About what should be done while encountering the enemy and fighting him.

Book eighteen: About what should be done while putting the enemy to rout.

Book nineteen: About the description of the practice of taking fortresses and the method of accomplishing this.

Book twenty: A description of the method of the defence of fortified places and their protection.

11. Al 'izz wa al-manāfi' li al-mujahidin fi sabil Allah bi al-ālāt al-hurūb was al-madafi': written by Ibrahim ibn 'Ali Ghanim ibn Muhammad b. Zakariyah al-Andalusi. It is probably composed in the late 15th century in Spanish, and later translated into Arabic.
12. Hidayat al-Muhtadi fi ilm al-handasah wa al-misahah wa ramy al-khamirah wa hafr el-lughm: written by «Uthman al-Muhtadi» (d. after 1553). The treatise deals with military-geometry and surveying, the throwing of missiles and the digging of mines. The manuscript exists in the Garrett Collection (No 1056).

Reference also should be made to the following:

1. Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn al-Nadim: author of the famous bibliographical work «al-Fihrist» published 988. It has been translated into many languages.
2. Hajji Khalifah: Kashf al-Zunun, ed. G. Flugel. Vol. 1-7. Leipzig, 1833-58.
3. Sprenger, Aloys: Fihrist al-Kutub allati marghab an-nabta'aha. London, 1840. It is also known as Munster Fihrist.
4. M. Reinaud: «De l'art militaire chez les arabes au moyen age» (Journal Asiatique, VI série, No. 12, 1848, pp. 193-237).
5. Mercier, Louis: La Parure des Cavaliers et l'Insigne des Preux, translation of Ibn Hudhayl's, Hilyat al-Fursan, Paris, 1924.
6. Ritter, H.: «La parure des Cavaliers und die Litteratur über die ritterlichen Künste» (Der Islam, v. 18, 1929, pp. 116-154).
7. Brockelmann, Carl: Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur. 2 Vols. and 3 Vols. Suppl. Leiden, 1938-1949.
8. Zaki, Abdur Rahman: Military Literature of the Arabs (Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne, June 1955, pp. 149-160).
9. Scanlon, G. T. (ed. and trans.): 'Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Awsi al-Ansari: A Muslim Manual of War. American University of Cairo, 1961.
10. Atiya, Aziz S.: The Crusade. Historiography and Bibliography. Indiana University Press, 1962.