M. Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui

*Role of Booty in the Economy During the Prophet's Time*


**Comments:**

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(1) Dr. Muhammad Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui's paper "Role of Booty in the Economy during the Prophet's Time" has the statistical approach. The author depends on the primary sources that allude to the numbers of camels, cattle, weapons, foods, and clothes acquired as booty by the Muslim army. The most important of these sources in this respect is *al-Maghazi* of al-Waqidi (d. 207 A.H.) which is one of the richest sources of the Sira era in numbers, dates and description of events. Al-Waqidi was a knowledgeable, erudite scholar; he owned a large library and used to trace by himself the locations where the Sira events had occurred. He did this traveling to far-off places in severe desert circumstances during a period when the camel was the main means of transportation. But al-Waqidi, despite his recognizable position as a Maghazi writer, has not been authenticated by Hadith critics. Thus it is inconvenient to cite evidence from him in matters related to belief ('aqeeda) or law, but one may make use of his knowledge in history and historical geography, in view of his command over these subjects. Hence Dr. Muhammad Yasin Mazhar Siddiqi's study turns out to be an interesting approach supporting the view that the actual motives for Islamic Jihad during the Prophet's time were not to obtain booty, but to disseminate Islamic Faith and emancipate people from whims and fancies related to polytheism.

(2) The author's statistical research shows that the expenses the Muslims incurred on military expeditions amounted to 60 million dirhams while the booty they obtained did not exceed 6 million dirhams. Thus, the Muslims spent ten times what they got. If they had had economic motives, they should have given up their military expeditions from the early years. The author concludes that 98% of the Muslims' income is attributed to their own efforts in agriculture, industry, trade and commerce, while the spoils represent no more than 2% of that income.
The author thereby exposes the major misconception permeating the studies of the orientalists like Addison, Irving, Muir, Rodinson, Watt and Brockelman that lay emphasis on the importance of booty in Muslim economy during the Sira era. Those studies assert that capturing booty was the main urge for military expeditions, thus rendering those expeditions into something like the invasions that were prevalent among the Arab tribes in the pre-Islamic era. They exclude the religious motivation in this respect which is implicit in the new term of "Jihad in Allah's way".

This view of the orientalists has influenced some modern Muslim authors, such as Muhammad Abdul-Hay Sha’ban, while it has been rejected by others, like Nadvi, Mansurpuri, Amir Ali and others. Hence, the author’s claim that "there seems to be a consensus among all the historians and biographers of the Prophet, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, that the military expeditions entailed enrichment of the Muslims on a large or small scale," is not precise; for consensus implies the absence of any significant disagreement, while in the present case there are numerous opponents.

(3) All the figures the author presents are approximations based on conjecture and dependent on evaluating the various types of booty: (camels, sheep, weapons, clothes and other pieces of equipment; immovable property: houses, plots, farms, gardens, forts and other strongholds).

In estimating total value of the booty, the author relies on the prices of the things prevalent during the Sira era. Doubtless, prices are determined by the principle of offer, and demand (i.e., the market factor), on the one hand, and the quality of the merchandise, on the other. Camels are not a standard commodity, so you cannot find out the value of the total by using the price of a single camel; a specific camel may be equal in value to tens of other camels and the value of a certain sword may exceed that of tens of other swords. So approximation is the only approach available for the historian of the economic life in the Sira era.

The author, because of scarcity of economic data, is sometimes compelled to estimate the booty without presenting any specific evidence. He estimates the value of the booty of Nakhla Sariyyah at 2000 dirhams without offering any evidence. He could have alluded to the small number of escorts of the trade caravan to infer that it was carrying a small quantity of goods.

The author belittles such riches as used to be respected in that age, like his comment on the booty of Nakhla Sariyyah: "One may ask how many impoverished Muslims could have been sustained with an amount of four or five thousand dirhams?"

In fact, the amount that was distributed among the nine participants after setting the khumus aside was 16000 dirhams, each one's share being 1777 dirhams, which was enough to purchase 200 sheep or 20 precious Yemeni gowns or 10 valuable fine silk garments. A family of six persons could live moderately therewith for one full year.

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The sum is considered big if compared with what a fighter got in Badr Ghazwa, i.e., 80 dirhams only. Of course, a fighter in Badr who had captured a wealthy person obtained a bigger sum amounting to 4000 dirhams or coming down to 2000 or 1000 according to the economic status of the captive.

(4) There is an indication of casual, unintended impact of the orientalists' trend of thoughts on the author. His extensive readings of the orientalist' writings in both Arabic and English seem to have left their traces in the author's statements:

"But the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa were shrewd enough to take advantage of the ignorance of the Muslims. The latter did not take the field and fought from the inside of their fortresses. So, like Banu al-Nadir a year later, a large number of their weapons might have been concealed and carried away while they were leaving the city. Therefore, it is quite evident that the Muslims could have been deprived of a major portion of their booty on this occasion."

My comments on the author's assertions are as follows:

(a) To describe the Jews as shrewd and the Muslims as ignorant is unwarranted, particularly when the leader of the Muslims is a prophet who receives revelation from Allah.

(b) Even an orientalist like Watt is not oblivious to this significant point when he says: "To suggest that Muhammad was unaware of the wealth of the Jews would be a specious underestimate of his intelligence" (Note 3 of the paper under review).

(c) The Muslims of that early period used to mix up with the Jews and enter their fortresses. Therefore, their knowledge without their armament was extensive and it is untenable to claim that they were unaware of the exact number of Banu Qaynuqa's weapons. Peace with Banu Qaynuqa was concluded on condition that all their weapons, whether used in the war or not, were to be expropriated.

(d) None of the sources states that Banu Qaynuqa carried away the weapons when they were evacuated, while they referred to Banu al-Nadir as so doing. Here one may bear in mind the difficulty of concealing the weapons on the part of Banu Qaynuqa, because, according to the peace treaty, they retained the women and children while all their possessions returned to the Muslims, and Muhammad b. Maslamah al-Ansari was in charge of receiving them from the Jews (al-Waqidi, Maghazi, Vol. I, pp. 176-7, Ibn Sā'd, Tabaqat, Vol. 11, p.29). As for Banu al-Nadir, the terms of peace stipulated that only the weapons be confiscated to the exclusion of other property, so they could have concealed some weapons in their baggage.

The author is mistaken when he says:

"It is to be kept in mind that excepting the weapons and armour no other booty either in terms of cash or kind was captured from the vanquished (Cf. Muir, p.242; Glubb, p.198). What is more significant is the fact that the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa' were allowed to realize the loans they had advanced to the Muslims of Madina (Waqidi, p. 179; Cf. Watt, p. 209)."
The fact is that the Muslims obtained in booty the riches of Bany Qaynuqa' as Waqidi mentions (p. 179) in the very page to which W.M. Watt has referred. In the same context it is mentioned that permission was given by the Muslims to Bany Qaynuqa' to realize their loans from the Madman debtors. All these reports are not authentic from the viewpoint of hadith literature. Moreover, most of al-Waqidi's reports, excepting the one under consideration, do not refer to the realization of the debts, whereas the reports generally confirm the fact of confiscating the property of Banu Qaynuqa'. The author should have checked the original sources in the contexts where from the orientalists derived their evidence, in order to see the true picture of events. The orientalists often misunderstand ancient Arabic texts because they are unable to appreciate the subtleties of Arabic. Cultural differences result in additional difficulties, beside giving frequent deliberate twists.

(e) During the last two decades there have appeared several studies by Muslim historians in an attempt to falsify the Jewish-Islamic relationships in the Sira era for political purposes and to apologize for Islamic policy. One instance of such an approach is the attempt to deny the massacre that befell Banu Qurayza in the wake of al-Khandaq Ghazwa in a study by Walid Arafat. Another instance is what the author reports from Barakat Ahmad, who claims that Banu Qaynaqa’ were not expelled from Medina, but were allowed to remain in their strongholds after the unconditional surrender and eventual pardon by the Prophet. It is a pity that the author is so lured in this direction as to assert that Barakat Ahmad’s arguments are very cogent and convincing. Falsifying historical events does not serve Islam and Muslims and such fabrication is short-lived. The Jews, in reality, were sometimes evacuated because of not abiding by agreed-upon covenants, and sometimes killed because of high treason against their country through conspiring with the invaders to kill the citizens and cause the fall of their state, as Banu Qurayza did in al-Ahzab Ghazwa. They were deservedly put to death, as an actor retaliation.

(f) The author accounts for the successful attempts of the overzealous to convince the Prophet in Uhud Ghazwa to opt for fighting the enemy in the open field against his better judgement to the contrary by saying that they aimed at protecting their agricultural produce from being destroyed by Quraysh. The truth, as the sources state, is that the overzealous insisted on coming out to encounter the polytheists in an open field in order to show their strength and bravery (al-Waqidi, Maghazi, pp. 210-11).

The present paper by Dr. Siddiqi is both interesting and novel. It is an earnest endeavor in the studies of Muslim economy during the time of the Prophet. We hope the researcher will continue providing us with other interesting studies to defend the truth and serve those interested in Islamic history.

Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds.