Jerusalem in Muhammad's Strategy: The Role of the Prophet Muhammad in the Conquest of Jerusalem

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Jerusalem (*al-Quds*) is a holy place of importance in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. According to Jews, the city became a kingdom and a centre of worship with Prophet David (King David). Also, for Jews, the construction of the temple during the time of Prophet Solomon (King of Israel) provided further sacred character to the city. Additionally, Jerusalem occupies an important place for Christians. Prophet Jesus was born in this region. According to the current Gospels, the earthly life of Jesus ended in Jerusalem and he was crucified there. As for the importance of Jerusalem in Islam – even though the name of Jerusalem does not appear directly in the Qur'an – the Al-Aqsa Mosque, located in heart of Jerusalem, is seen as the holiest place to visit after the Kaʿba in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, as stated in the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad. As the original direction of prayer for early Muslims, Prophet Muhammad occasionally emphasized the importance of Jerusalem.

Marouf's *Jerusalem in Muhammad's Strategy: The Role of the Prophet Muhammad in the Conquest of Jerusalem* brings a new perspective to the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in the early Islamic period, and it provides us with an in-depth analysis of relevant Islamic sources, particularly focusing on the role of the Prophet Muhammad in this conquest. According to Marouf, it is the first detailed study of the political relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and Jerusalem using its sources, methods, and content. Moreover, the author offers a new perspective, arguing that the Prophet Muhammad was the primary influence behind the first Muslim caliph, Abū Bakr, and the second Muslim caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, in planning the conquest of Jerusalem that took place five years after the Prophet's death.

The study is based on the hypothesis that Muhammad was the true planner of the conquest of Jerusalem even though Abū Bakr and then ʿUmar carried out the plan. The author supports this mostly by drawing on the oral tradition sources of the Prophet (*aḥādīth*) (p. 2).

Marouf, in his literature review on the historiography of the conquest of Jerusalem, emphasizes that some sources describing Muhammad's role in the

conquest of Jerusalem are insufficient. The main reason for their incompleteness is due to the fact that they do not refer to primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, which inform us about the context.

Jerusalem in Muhammad's Strategy has three main sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The author clearly details the objectives of each chapter. The author's highlighting of the content at the beginning of each chapter helps the reader to fully understand the content and to see the relationships between chapters. Furthermore, the author underscores the general emphases, arguments, and goals of the book in each section. In the first chapter, titled "Historical Background", he establishes the grounds for the hypothesis that the Prophet Muhammad planned the conquest (*Fatḥ*) of the *Bayt al-Maqdis* and demonstrates the Prophet's potential reasons for developing such a plan. In another saying, Marouf provides a basis for the Prophet Muhammad's interest in *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Holy Land) and clarifies the causes of his later actions in conquering that region (p. 10).

The second chapter explores numerous historical documents that date back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, such as diplomatic letters, endowments, and political pacts or assurances of safety. The author uses these documents to support his hypothesis and analyzes them to understand the connection between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. As far as we know from historical documents, the Prophet Muhammad was conscious of the strategic alliances and loyalties within this area (p.33). The keen intelligence deduced from these documents and ultimately the military missions played a crucial role in identifying the situation in this region and the needs of campaigns that would follow.

In the third and final chapter, the author discusses the military operations towards the *Fatḥ* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The author suggests, importantly, that looking at the military actions taken by the Prophet during his lifetime may prove or disprove the hypothesized existence of a plan towards the *Fatḥ* of that region. These military expeditions have an important place in this context. Marouf, to some extent, agrees with W. Montgomery Watt's words: "a study of the numerous involved in the various expeditions in the direction of Syria shows that the road north had a prominent place in Muhammad's strategic thinking". In other words, knowledge of the Prophet Muhammad's military expeditions may be helpful in understanding his strategy regarding *al-Shām* (Damascus) and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The author adds that military actions during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad were not geared towards a single destination, but were spread throughout and north of the Arabian Peninsula, depending on the development of the Prophet Muhammad's relations and aims (p. 75).

Existing scholarship on the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem mostly remains limited to the Caliph ʿUmar's period or, at most, their studies date back to the times of Caliph Abū Bakr. The studies of Moshe Gil, Ḥassan Shurrāb, and Amnon Cohen either ignore the role of the Prophet Muhammad or do not present in-depth research. In this regard, Marouf's study bridges gaps in the scholarship by addressing practical, religious, and political relationships between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. On the other hand, studies in the first Islamic conquest of Jerusalem have generally been restricted to ʿUmar and a reductionist perspective, except for the works of a few scholars, such as Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, who suggests that the Prophet Muhammad formed a strategic plan for the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. In these matters, *Jerusalem in Muhammad's Strategy* is a valuable contribution to the history of Jerusalem studies as well as to Islamic History. Marouf expands the source base to including primary Islamic sources such as the Qurʾān and *aḥādīth*. Along with introducing several primary Islamic texts, he frequently uses Arabic terminology (such as *Bayt al-Maqdis*, *fatḥ*, *aḥādīth*, *ḥadīth*, and *qibla*). In doing so, he successfully highlights the importance and context of these Arabic concepts in the early Islamic history. Undoubtedly, using the Arabic terminology when detailing early Islamic history helps in elucidating the conquest of Jerusalem.

Methodologically, this research combines the techniques of historical analysis and *ḥadīth* methodology. Historical analysis is used for critical evaluation of varied historical documents, such as books of history and the biography of Prophet Muhammad (*sīra*); the author investigates the language of the documents and the ideas within their texts. The *ḥadīth* criticism deals essentially with the use of the authentic *hadīth* sources such as *al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*. Hence, *ḥadīth* criticism is used only when evaluating less authentic *aḥādīth*.

In short, Abdullah Marouf addresses experts of Islamic history with this rare book. In this context, the author successfully emphasizes that we should look at historical documents dating back to the time of Muhammad, the *aḥādīth*, and the military activities of Muhammad (*Sariyya* and *Ghazwa*) in the direction of Jerusalem as historical data. Although the historical sources do not include a clear plan about the conquest of Muhammad in Jerusalem, it can be said that Muhammad frequently referred to the virtues of Jerusalem in the hadiths, and that he indirectly paved the way for the Muslims who came after him (*Tābiʿīn*) and pointed to this region as a target.

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