

## 5. The Black Flags From Khurasan

In the last chapter, we analyzed the *sahih* Sunni *hadith* of Thawban which establishes that the army of the Mahdi, *'alaihi al-salam*, will march from “the Eastern towns” (as explained by Ibn Kathir), and will fight and kill other Muslims in a way no nation had ever done to them. So, what are these Eastern towns? Dr. al-Bastawi copies a *hadith* that gives their name:

عن عبد الله قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: إذا أقيمت الرايات السود من خراسان فانتوها فإن فيها خليفة الله المهدي "

Narrated 'Abd Allah (b. Mas'ud):

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “When **the black flags come from Khurasan**, go to them, for among them is the *khalifah* of Allah, the Mahdi.”<sup>1</sup>

After thoroughly examining the narrators of its *isnad*, he concludes:

وعلى هذا فهذا الإسناد صالح للاستشهاد ولا سيما وأن متنه قد ورد من طريق آخر عن ثوبان رضي الله عنه بسند حسن. وبذلك يصبح هذا الحديث حسنا لغيره

Based upon this, then this chain is fit to be used as a *shahid* (support), especially since its text has been narrated through another chain from Thawban, may Allah be pleased with him, **with a *hasan* chain**.

With that, **this *hadith* becomes *hasan li ghayrihi***.<sup>2</sup>

The Sahabi, Thawban, also confirmed this exact identity of the Eastern towns in one of his personal statements. Imam al-Hakim (d. 403 H) documents:

أخبرنا الحسين بن يعقوب بن يوسف العدل ثنا يحيى بن أبي طالب ثنا عبد الوهاب بن عطاء أنبأ خالد الحذاء عن أبي قلابة عن أبي أسماء عن ثوبان رضي الله عنه قال إذا رأيتم الرايات السود خرجت من قبل خراسان فأتوها ولو

حبوا فإن فيها خليفة الله المهدي

Al-Hasan b. Ya'qub b. Yusuf – Yahya b. Abi Talib – ‘Abd al-Wahhab b. ‘Aṣa – Khalid al-Hadha – Abu Qilabah – Abu Asma – Thawban, may Allah be pleased with him:

“When you see the black flags coming out from the direction of **Khurasan**, then go to them even if you have to crawl, for verily among them is the *khalifah* of Allah, the Mahdi.”<sup>3</sup>

Al-Hakim then says:

هذا حديث صحيح على شرط الشيخين

**This *hadith* is *sahih*** upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.<sup>4</sup>

Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H), on his part, keeps silent on the *riwayah*. This *hadith*, although *mawquf*, has the status (*hukm*) of a *marfu'* report. This is because it mentions a matter of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), which the Sahabi could have gotten only from the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*.

Imam al-Maruzi (d. 229 H) has recorded the same narration:

حدثنا أبو نصر الخفاف عن خالد عن أبي قلابة عن ثوبان قال إذا رأيتم الرايات السود خرجت من قبل خراسان فائتوها ولو حبوا على الثلج فإن فيها خليفة الله المهدي.

Abu Nasr al-Khaffaf – Khalid – Abu Qilabah – Thawban:

“When you see **the black flags coming out from the direction of Khurasan**, then go to them even if you have to crawl on snow, for verily among them is the *khalifah* of Allah, the Mahdi.”<sup>5</sup>

We already know about Khalid, Abu Qilabah and Thawban from the last chapter. Their *isnad* is *sahih*. The only new name here is Abu Nasr al-Khaffaf. His name is ‘Abd al-Wahhab b. ‘Aṣa. We see al-Hakim above declaring his *hadith* to be *sahih* too. Meanwhile, this is what al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) also says about him:

عبد الوهاب بن عطاء الخفاف أبو نصر العجلي مولاهم البصري نزيل بغداد صدوق ربما أخطأ

‘Abd al-Wahhab b. ‘Aṣa al-Khaffaf, Abu Nasr al-‘Ijli, their freed slave, al-Basri, a resident of Baghdad: ***Saduq* (very truthful)**, maybe he made mistakes.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, we also know, from the *riwayah* of al-Hakim, that there actually was a link between Abu

Qilabah and Thawban, and he was Abu Asma. As such, the *sanad* is *hasan*. Therefore, “the East” and “the Eastern towns” in the *ahadith* on the black flags are, again, only references to Khurasan.

In that case, where is Khurasan? The researcher easily notices that on the world map today, all the places called Khurasan are in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There used to be the Khurasan province until 2004, when it was divided into South Khurasan, North Khurasan and Razavi Khurasan. However, in ancient times, the word “Khurasan” covered a vast territory now lying in northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan and northern Afghanistan. So, the original army of Imam al-Mahdi will be made up of non-Arabs: Iranians, Turkmen and Afghans.

- [1.](#) Dr. ‘Abd al-‘Alim ‘Abd al-‘Azim al-Bastawi, *al-Mahdi al-Muntazar fi Dhaw-i al-Ahadith wa al-Athar al-Sahihah wa Aqwal al-‘Ulama wa Ara al-Firaq al-Mukhtalifah* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm; 1st edition, 1420 H), p. 158, # 2
- [2.](#) *Ibid*, p. 162
- [3.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Aḡa], vol. 4, p. 547, # 8531
- [4.](#) *Ibid*
- [5.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Na‘im b. Hammad al-Maruzi, *Kitab al-Fitan* (Dar al-Fikr; 1414 H) [annotator: Prof. Dr. Suhayl Zakar], part 4, p. 188
- [6.](#) Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Aḡa], vol. 1, pp. 626–627, # 4276

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