

The Oath of Allegiance

The Shi'as went in hordes to meet Muslim as he stayed at al-Mukhtar's house and expressed to him their obedience. This increased his happiness and elation. When he read to them al-Husayn's letter, 'Abis Ibn Shibib al-Shakiri stood and said, "I do not speak about the people, nor do I know what they conceal in their hearts, nor do I deceive you in their regard."

By Allah! I can tell you what I personally have decided to do. By Allah! I shall respond to your call, and I shall fight your enemy. I shall defend you with my sword till I meet Allah desiring nothing except what He has in store for me."

Habib Ibn Muzahir said, "You have briefly stated your intention, and by Allah, the One and only God, I feel exactly the same."

Sa'id Ibn 'Abdullah al-Hanafi made a similar statement.^{[1](#)}

Other Shi'as came to swear the oath of allegiance to him till his *diwan* counted as many as eighteen thousand men,^{[2](#)} whereas some historians said they were as many as twenty five thousand men.^{[3](#)}

According to al-Sha'bi, the number of those who swore allegiance to him reached forty thousand.^{[4](#)} It was then that Muslim wrote al-Husayn ('a) a letter which he handed to 'Abis Ibn Shibib al-Shakiri informing him of the consensus among the people of Kufa to obey him and to wait for his arrival.

In it, he said, "A scout does not lie to his people. Eighteen thousand Kufians have already come to me; so, hurry and come here as soon as this letter reaches you."^{[5](#)}

That was twenty-seven days prior to Muslim's martyrdom.^{[6](#)}

The Kufians, too, added to it their own letter wherein they stated the following: "Hurry and come to us, O son of the Messenger of Allah! A hundred thousand swords are in Kufa on your side; so, do not tarry."^{[7](#)}

This angered a group of the Umayyads with vested interests. Among them were ‘Umar Ibn Sa’d Ibn Abu Waqqas, ‘Abdullah Ibn Muslim Ibn Rabi’ah al-Hadrami, and ‘Imarah Ibn ‘Uqbah Ibn Abu Mu’it. They wrote Yazid warning him of the arrival of Muslim Ibn ‘Aqil and the rallying of the people of Kufa behind him, adding that al-Nu’man Ibn Bashir was not strong enough to stand in his [‘Aqil’s] way.[8](#)

Yazid solicited the advice of his slave Serjun[9](#) who was also his scribe and entertainer. Serjun said, “‘Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad is your man!”

“There is no good in him,” said Yazid. Serjun asked him, “Had Mu’awiyah been alive and suggested to you to employ him [as governor of Kufa], would you then do so?” Yazid answered in the affirmative. “Mu’awiyah had given him his own seal, and nothing stopped me from recommending him except my knowledge of how much you hate him.” Yazid, therefore, dispatched ‘Ubaydullah to Kufa and deposed al-Nu’man Ibn Bashir.

He wrote the latter saying, “One who is praised will one day be condemned, and one who is condemned will one day be praised. You are named for a task wherein the first part of this statement applies to you.”

Elevated, you were, reaching the clouds and beyond,
What ails you so you, crippled, watch the sun?[10](#)

He ordered Ibn Ziyad to rush to Kufa in the company of Muslim Ibn ‘Umar al-Bahili, al-Munthir Ibn al-Jarud, and ‘Abdullah Ibn al-Harith Ibn Nawfal escorted by five hundred soldiers whom he hand-picked from among the people of Basra.

Ibn Ziyad rushed to Kufa, paying no attention to anyone who fell off his horse due to exhaustion even if he were one of his own closest friends.

Even when Shurayk Ibn al-A’war fell on the way, and even when ‘Abdullah Ibn al-Harith fell, thinking that Ibn Ziyad would slow down for their sake, Ibn Ziyad paid no attention to them for fear al-Husayn (‘a) would reach Kufa before him. When he reached al-Qadisiyya, his slave Mahran fell down.

Ibn Ziyad said to him, “If you remain thus on foot and reach the [governor’s] mansion, your reward will be a hundred thousand [dinars].” Mahran said, “By Allah I cannot do that!” ‘Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad abandoned him on the highway then disguised in Yemeni clothes and put on a black turban.

He rode alone and whenever he passed by a checkpoint, its guards thought that he was al-Husayn (‘a), so they said, “Welcome, O son of the Messenger of Allah!” He remained silent till he reached Kufa via the Najaf highway.[11](#)

When he arrived, people welcomed him and said in one voice: "Welcome, O son of the Messenger of Allah!" This only intensified his ire.

He continued his march till he reached the governor's mansion. Al-Nu'man did not open the gate for him, and he spoke to him from the mansion's roof-top. Said he, "I shall not return the trust to you, O son of the Messenger of Allah!" Ibn Ziyad said to him, "Open the gate, for your night has extended for too long!"¹²

A man heard his voice and recognized him. He, therefore, said to the people, "He is Ibn Ziyad, by the Lord of the Ka'ba!"¹³ They, thereupon, dispersed, each going back home.

In the morning, Ibn Ziyad gathered people at the grand mosque. There, he delivered a speech warning them against mutiny and promising them generous rewards for conforming. Said he, "Anyone found to be sheltering one of those who scheme against the authority of the commander of the faithful and who does not hand him over will be crucified on the door of his own house."¹⁴

¹. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 199.

². Ibn al-Jawzi, the grandson, Tathkirat al-Khawass, p. 138. Al-al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 211.

³. Ibn Shahr Ashub, Vol. 2, p. 310.

⁴. Ibn Nama, p. 11.

⁵. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 210.

⁶. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 224.

⁷. al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 10, p. 185 (old edition).

⁸. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, pp. 99-201.

⁹. The following comment is stated on p. 158, Vol. 2, of Muhammad Kurd 'Ali's book Al-Islam wal Hadara al-'Arabiyya: "Serjun Ibn Mansur was a Syrian Christian who was employed by Mu'awiyah. His father, Mansur, was in charge of Syria's treasury since the days of Heracles, before the country fell to the Muslims. He assisted the Muslims in fighting the Romans (Byzantines). Like his father, Mansur Ibn Serjun Ibn Mansur also served the government, and [second caliph] 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab used not to appoint Christians in a government job except after they had embraced Islam."

¹⁰. al-Balathiri, Ansab al-Ashraf, Vol. 4, p. 82.

¹¹. Ibn Nama al-Hilli, Muthir al-Ahzan.

¹². Historians maintain no consensus with regard to [Ubaydullah] Ibn Ziyad's date of birth. Those who did state it cannot be accurate even if it is to be taken by way of guessing. On p. 283, Vol. 8, of his book Al-Bidaya, Ibn Kathir quotes Ibn 'Asakir citing Ahmad Ibn Yunus al-Dabi saying that 'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad was born in 39 A.H./660 A.D. If that is the case, he was, on the Battle of Taff, near the close of 60 A.H./680 A.D., twenty-one years old. This means that he was fourteen years old when his father, Ziyad, died in 53 A.H./673 A.D. This, however, does not agree with the date stated by Ibn Jarir [al-Tabari] on p. 166, Vol. 6, of his Tarikh.

Says the latter, "Mu'awiyah appointed 'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad as the wali [provincial governor] of Khurasan in 53 A.H./673 A.D." But it is highly unlikely that a fourteen-year old can be appointed to govern a vast country such as Khurasan. What Ibn Jarir says must be based on assumption, for he says on the same page that "In 53 A.H./673 A.D., Mu'awiyah appointed 'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad, who was twenty-five years old, as the wali of Khurasan." This would put his date of birth in 53 A.H./673 A.D. and his age during the Battle of Taff as thirty-two years.

His statement agrees with what is stated by Ibn Kathir who, on p. 283, Vol. 8, of his book *Al-Bidaya*, quotes al-Fadl Ibn Rakin Ibn 'Ubaydullah saying that ['Ubaydullah] Ibn Ziyad was twenty-eight years old when al-Husayn ('a) was killed." Based on this statement, his year of birth must have been 32 A.H./653 A.D. and that of his death at the age of twenty-one must have been 53 A.H./673 A.D. On p. 271 of Ibn Hajar's book *Ta'jil al-Manfa'a* (which was printed in Hyderabad, India), the author says, "'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad was born in 32 A.H./653 A.D. or in 33 A.H./654 A.D." He, therefore, was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old when the Battle of Taff took place at the beginning of 61 A.H./681 A.D.

At any rate, his mother, Marjana, was Zoroastrian. On p. 383, Vol. 8, of Ibn Kathir's book *Al-Bidaya*, and also according to al-'Ayni who, on p. 656, Vol. 7, of his book *'Umdat al-Qari fi Sharh al-Bukhari*, "*Kitab al-Fada'il*," discusses al-Husayn's merits, saying that Marjana was a war captive from Isfahan, and that she was said to be Zoroastrian.

On p. 6, Vol. 7, of al-Tabari's *Tarikh*, the author quotes Marjana, when 'Ubaydullah killed al-Husayn, saying [the following to her son], "Woe unto you! What have you done?! What madness have you committed?!" On p. 103, Vol. 4, of Ibn al-Athir's book *Al-Kamil*, where Ibn Ziyad's death is discussed, Marjana is quoted as saying the following to [her son] 'Ubaydullah: "O you corrupt one (khabeeth)! You have killed the son of the Messenger of Allah! By Allah! You shall never see Paradise," in addition to other such statements. Some historians say that she said to him, "I wish you had been a menstruation, and that you never saw al-Husayn nor committed what you have committed."

On p. 268, Vol. 6, of al-Tabari's *Tarikh*, as well as on p. 34, Vol. 4, of Ibn al-Athir's book *Al-Kamil*, which both agree with Muruj al-Thahab, 'Ubaydullah's brother, 'Uthman, said to him, "I wish there had been a ring in the nose of each man belonging to Banu Ziyad till the Day of Judgment, and that al-Husayn had never been killed." 'Ubaydullah did not respond. How could he, especially since he had already seen the walls of the governor's mansion with blood flowing over them as soon as the sacred [severed] head [of al-Husayn] was brought to it as stated on p. 116 of Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani's book *Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa* and on p. 339, Vol. 4, of Ibn 'Asakir's *Tarikh*.

On p. 77, Vol. 4, of al-Balathiri's book *Ansab al-Ashraf*, it is stated that, "'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad had no hair on his face, and that he was very beautiful." And on p. 81, the author says, "He was full of evil, and he was the first person to penalize people with the same faults which they had articulated." On p. 86, he is described as a man who was glutton and who would eat more than fifty times a day. On p. 256, Ibn Qutaybah says in his book *Al-Ma'arif*, "He was very tall; whenever he walked, he was thought to be riding."

On p. 75, Vol. 1, of his book *Al-Tibyan wal-Tabyin* (second edition), al-Jahiz says that he ['Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad] used to stutter, and on p. 167, Vol. 2, he adds saying, "His stuttering must have originated from his descending from the Aswaris. It was Sheer-a-wayh (Ceroe), the Aswari, who married him off to Marjana, who was with 'Ubaydullah. So he grew up among the Aswaris, and their language had an impact over his own." On p. 84, Vol. 5, of *Ansab al-Ashraf*, it is stated that, "Whenever Ibn Ziyad became angry with someone, he would throw him from the roof-top of the governor's mansion or from the peaks of the highest elevation."

On p. 82, the author says, "'Ubaydullah married Hind daughter of Asma' daughter of Kharijah, so Muhammad Ibn 'Umayr Ibn 'Utarid, Muhammad Ibn al-Ash'ath, and 'Amr Ibn Harith shamed him for having done so. 'Ubaydullah, therefore, married al-Nu'man's mother who was the daughter of Muhammad Ibn al-Ash'ath, and he married his brother 'Uthman off to the daughter of Umayr Ibn Utarid and married his brother 'Abdullah off to the daughter of 'Amr Ibn Harith."

On p. 50 of *Al-Nuqud al-Qadima al-Islamiyya*, al-Tabrizi, as quoted by Anastas al-Karmili in his own book *Majmu'at al-Nuqud al-'Arabiyya*, it is stated that, "The first person to forge dirhams and to counterfeit them is 'Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad who did so after fleeing from Basra in 64 A.H./684 A.D. After this date, it became common in other countries." The same is stated by al-Maqrizi on p. 61 of his book *Kashf al-Ghumma* and also on p. 50 of his other book *Al-Nuqud al-Islamiyya al-Qadima*. It is also stated on p. 185, Vol. 1, of al-Qalqashandi's book *Ma'athir al-Inaqa* where the author says, "During the caliphate of al-Mahdi, the lineage of Ziyad Ibn Abeeh [Ziyad the son of his father] was traced back to 'Ubaydullah, the [Byzantine] Roman."

[13.](#) al-Bukhari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 201.

[14.](#) al-Mufid, Al-Irshad.

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