

The Severed Heads

Ibn Sa'd ordered the heads to be severed from their bodies. They were distributed to various tribes that used them as means to seek favour with Ibn Ziyad. The Kindah tribe took thirteen brought by their envoy, Qays Ibn al-Ash'ath.

The Hawazin tribe brought twelve with their "man," Shimr Ibn Thul-Jawshan. The Tamim tribe brought seventeen; the Banu Asad tribe brought sixteen; the Mathhaj tribe brought seven, and the other tribes brought the rest.¹ The tribe to whom al-Hurr al-Riyahi belonged refused to cut anyone's head or to trample on the Imam's body with its horses.²

On the tenth day, Ibn Sa'd had already entrusted the head of Imam al-Husayn (‘a) to Khawli Ibn Yazid al-Asbahi and Hamid Ibn Muslim al-Azdi. He entrusted the heads of the Imam's family members and those of his companions to al-Shimr, Qays Ibn al-Ash'ath and ‘Amr Ibn al-Hajjaj.³

Khawli's house was one farasang from Kufa. Khawli hid the head from his Ansari wife whom he knew to be loyal to Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them. But when she saw a light emanating from the bakery oven [where it was hidden], she was terrified. When she came closer, she heard the voices of al-Husayn's women mourning al-Husayn in the most somber way.

She mentioned this to her husband then went out crying.⁴ Since then, she never used any kohl nor any perfume out of her grief for al-Husayn (‘a). She was called ‘Ayoof.⁵

In the morning, Khawli took the head to the governor's mansion. By then, Ibn Ziyad had returned from his camp at al-Nakhila. Khawli put the head in front of Ibn Ziyad as he recited these poetic verses:

Fill my stirrup with silver or with gold:
I killed the master of every honour told,
Their best when they mention descent.
I killed the best of people, son of the best parent.

But these words, spoken in front of everyone, were met by Ibn Ziyad with outrage. “Since you knew that he was that honourable,” said Ibn Ziyad, “why did you then take part in killing him?! By Allah, you will receive nothing from me at all.”⁶

^{1.} Ibn Tawus, *Al-Luhuf*, p. 81. *al-ʿAyni*, *ʿUmdat al-Qari fi Sharh al-Bukhari*, Vol. 7, p. 656, where the name of ‘Urwah Ibn Qays is included among them.

^{2.} al-Hajj Shaikh Muhammad Baqir Ibn Mawla Hasan al-Qaʿini al-Birjandi al-Safi (henceforth referred to only as Shaikh Muhammad Baqir al-Birjandi al-Safi), *Al-Kibrit al-Ahmar*.

^{3.} Shaikh al-Mufid, *Al-Irshad*.

^{4.} *Rawdat al-Shuhadaʾ*. On p. 190, Vol. 8, Ibn Kathir says that his wife saw the light emanating from underneath the lid, and it was stretching to the heavens as white birds kept hovering around it. He adds saying that his other wife, Nuwar daughter of Malik, said to him, “Have you brought the head of the son of the Messenger of Allah, peace of Allah and His blessings upon him and his family, here?! I shall never share a bed with you henceforth.” She separated from him.

^{5.} al-Balathiri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, Vol. 5, p. 238.

^{6.} According to p. 133, Vol. 1, of al-Yafiʿi’s book *Mirʾat al-Jinan*, Ibn Ziyad was very angry with him, so he killed him, but the author does not identify the name of the head bearer. On p. 213, Vol. 2, of *Al-ʿIqd al-Farid* of Sayyid Muhammad Riḍa al-Asterbadi al-Hilli, the head bearer is identified as “Khawli Ibn Yazid al-Asbahi who was killed by Ibn Ziyad.”

Historians contend among themselves about who had brought the head and who had said the above verses. According to Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, who indicates so on p. 261, Vol. 6, of his *Tarikh*, and Ibn al-Athir who states so on p. 33, Vol. 4, of his book *Al-Kamil*, the poet was Sinan Ibn Anas who recited them to ‘Umar Ibn Sa’d. On p. 144 of *Tathkirat al-Khawass* of Ibn al-Jawzi, the grandson, it is stated that ‘Umar said to him, “You are insane! Had Ibn Ziyad heard you, he would have killed you!” On p. 193, Vol. 1, of al-Sharishi’s *Maqamat*, the author says that the poet recited them to Ibn Ziyad. According to al-Irbili’s *Kashf al-Ghumma* and al-Khawarizmi’s p. 40, Vol. 2, of *Maqatal al-Husayn*, Bishr Ibn Malik recited them to Ibn Ziyad.

On p. 76 of Ibn Talhah’s *Matalib al-Sa’ul*, there is the addition of “... and whoever says his prayers in both Qiblas,” whereupon Ibn Ziyad became very angry with him and had him beheaded. On p. 437 of *Riyad al-Masa’ib*, it is stated that al-Shimr is the one who recited these verses. Since you know that al-Shimr is al-Husayn’s killer according to the text of the *ziyarat* of the sacred area and according to a host of historians, you likewise know that he must be the one who recited them.

It is very unlikely that he kills him and lets someone else take the head and use it to seek favour with Ibn Ziyad. We have mentioned the story from Khawli only to follow in the footsteps of those who wrote about the Imam’s martyrdom.

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