

# THE ISLAMIC OPENINGS

*(Al-Fatuhah Al-Islamiyah)*

by

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# OPENING NORTH AFRICA

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## The Berbers

The Arab regions to the west of Egypt were called Al-Maghrib. These lay in North Africa – or Ifriqiyah as the Arabs called it – and the Arabs' first contact with the natives of these lands was during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab after the opening of Egypt between the years 22 to 26 A.H.

The Arabs knew the people of Ifriqiyah as the Berbers. The Berbers consisted of two major groups, one called Al-Baranis and the other called Al-Bathar. Each group consisted of a number of tribes that varied in population.

It is obvious that these Berber groups were formed by the people who moved to North Africa during many long ancient eras. They came from Asia, Arab countries, Egypt and Europe.

When the Muslims came to open these lands, they found their people similar to their traditions, styles of living and in some characteristics. The natives were either Christians or Pagans, with the latter the dominating belief in many regions.

## Opening Tripoli

After `Amr ibn Al-'As finished opening Alexandria in 22 A.H., he marched with his army to Burqa in Libya. In Burqa, he signed a treaty with its people to pay jizyah and to sell whom they liked of their young ones.

When he was finished with Burqa, he went to Tripoli, which he besieged for a month but could not defeat. He was camping on the eastern side. One day, a man of the tribe of Banu Mudlaj went to hunt with seven other men to the west of the city. On their way back, they suffered from severely hot weather, so they decided to take a path along the sea. However, the city walls were not extended to the sea and the Byzantines' ships were in the harbors opposite to their houses. Al-Mudlaji and his friends discovered a passage between the sea and the town, so they broke into the town through it crying, "Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!"

The Byzantines' only refuge was their ships, for they thought the Muslims had invaded their houses. 'Amr ibn Al-'As and his troops heard the clash of swords and the tumult, so he advanced with the army and entered the town. The Byzantines fled, taking only lightweight things onto their ships.

Meanwhile, the people of the fort of Sabrah had fortified themselves against `Amr when he headed to Tripoli. When the people of Tripoli resisted him firmly, the people of

Sabrah felt assured and secure. However, when Tripoli fell into `Amr' s hands, he directed a huge army to Sabrah. They arrived there on a morning when the people had opened the gates and taken their cattle to breed, unaware of what had happened to Tripoli. The Muslims attacked them, broke into the town and looted it, then returned to 'Amr triumphantly.

Afterwards, 'Amr ibn Al-'As opened Libdah and Sabratah and took those regions by force from the Byzantines. He then directed his brigades and detachments in many raid inland to force the tribes to yield and to explore the land towards Tunisia.

'Amr wrote to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab telling him about his achievements and asking for permission to resume the planned advance. But 'Umar refused to allow him to expand further, saying, "No, for Africa is deceiving,"

The Arabs had a plan to advance and push into North Africa, and they had sufficient information about the land and its inhabitants. When 'Umar died and the Muslims consented to the caliphate of 'Uthman ibn `Affan, 'Uthman dismissed `Amr ibn Al-'As from governing Egypt and appointed `Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh.

### **'Uthman Gives Permission to Proceed**

`Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh was one of the soldiers of Egypt who was in charge of the money of its tributes. In 25 A.H., 'Uthman ibn 'Affan ordered `Amr to direct `Abdullah to the borders of Ifriqiyah. When he launched his plan, `Amr reinforced him with an army, and they had lots of spoils. When 'Abdullah ibn Sa' d returned, he wrote to his foster brother, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, asking for permission to invade Ifriqiyah.

'Uthman granted permission and said, "If Allah grants you victory your share of the spoils will be one fifth of the fifth."

He ordered 'Abdullah ibn Nafi' ibn Abdul Qais and `Abdullah ibn Nafi' ibn Al-Harith to head an army and sent them to Egypt, commanding them to join `Abdullah ibn Sa'd in his mission in Ifriqiyah, so they proceeded till they crossed the Egyptian lands.

'Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh, the governor of Egypt and part of Al-Maghrib, sent some troops on horseback to Ifriqiyah. The detachments gained some spoils and explored the land and people. When the expedition had fulfilled its objectives, 'Abdullah sent to 'Uthman for permission to invade Ifriqiyah and asked for reinforcements. North Africa at that time was under the control of the Byzantines.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, reinforced `Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh with a distinguished army that included many of the best fighters and Companions and their sons, such as 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As, 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, 'Abdullah ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, Al-Hassan and Al-Hussain (the

grandsons of the Prophet) as well as Marwan ibn Al-Hakam, Ma'bid ibn Al 'Abbas ibn 'Abdul Muttalib, 'Abdul Rahman ibn Abi Bakr and many other men.

'Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh marched with his army till they reached Burqa, where they met 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' and his troops. Then they resumed the march to Tripoli in an army of forty thousand men. They captured the Byzantines who were there, then marched to the north of Ifriqiyah and the detachments were sent everywhere.

The king of the north of Ifriqiyah at that time was Jurjir and his kingdom was from Tripoli to Tanja. He was appointed by Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, and had to give him tribute every year. Jurjir was a general of the army of the Byzantine Emperor, but he revolted against him and declared his independence and took the city of Subaitilah, which lay seventy miles from Qairawan, as his capital. It was a well-fortified city.

When King Jurjir knew about the Muslim's designs, he mobilized his army and gathered soldiers from the Berber tribes who were natives of the land. His army had about a hundred and twenty thousand men. The two armies encountered in a place that was a day-and-a-half distance from Subaitilah. The Muslim army fought every day in the morning from sunrise to noon. 'Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh sent to King Jurjir asking him to embrace Islam or pay jizyah, but he refused both suggestions.

### **'Uthman sends `Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair**

When the news of the army was cut from 'Uthman, he sent `Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair with some men to see what was wrong with 'Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh and his army.

Ibn Al-Zubair marched steadily day and night till he reached them. When he and his party arrived, the other Muslims rejoiced and cried, "Allahu Akbar!"

King Jurjir was astonished by the tumult and asked, "What happened?"

He was answered, "They had some reinforcements sent to them."

This information terrified Jurjir. The disturbance and worries put an end to his stamina and enthusiasm.

When Ibn Al-Zubair arrived, he did not see 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd, so he asked "Where is Ibn Abi Sarh?"

He was answered, "He heard the King's crier say that the one who kills `Abdullah ibn Sa'd will get a hundred thousand dinars and marry the king's daughter, so he is worried about himself"

'Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair went to 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd in his tent and said, "Order an announcement to be made: He who brings me the head of Jurjir will be given a hundred

thousand dinars and will be married to his daughter and will rule his land." So he did, and King Jurjir was more afraid than `Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh.

When `Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair observed that the two armies fought from morning till midday, he said to 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd, "If the fight continues in that fashion, it will take us a long time, for they have reinforcements coming in turn, and they are in their own land, while we are cut off from the Muslims."

`Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh asked, "What do you suggest?"

Ibn Al-Zubair said, "I suggest that tomorrow we leave a good group of the boldest Muslims ready in their tents while we go to fight the Byzantines with the rest of the army till they are fed up and bored. When they and the Muslims return to their camps, the Muslims who stayed resting in their camps and did not fight will have their turn to take the Byzantines by surprise. Thus may Allah grant us victory over them."

'Abdullah ibn Sa'd said, "Do you mean dividing the army into two parts, one part to fight and the other to have some rest?"

Al-Zubair replied, "Exactly."

`Abdullah ibn Sa'd consulted with the wisest of the Companions, and they agreed to Al-Zubair's plan.

The next day, 'Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair executed the plan and made all the boldest of the Muslims rest in their tents with their horses present with them and ready to go. The other group of the Muslims went to fight the Byzantines fiercely till noon.

When the adhan for Zhuhr Prayer was made, the Byzantines started to retreat and cease the battle, as they were accustomed to do every day. 'Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair forbade them and provoked them to fight till they were exhausted. Subsequently, he retreated with his group and both armies dropped their arms out of fatigue.

As soon as the Byzantines were completely exhausted, 'Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair brought the boldest Muslims and their most distinguished heroes and dashed towards the Byzantines, who did not notice their coming until they mingled with them and attacked, crying, "Allahu Akbar!"

The Byzantines were confused and unable to arm themselves, and the Muslims assaulted them and defeated them completely. The Muslim victory over them enabled them to take countless spoils.

'Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair captured King Jurjir, who was injured, and his daughter.

'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas talked to Jurjir, who admired his knowledge and logic. Jurjir said to him, "You alone deserve to be the Learned Man of the Arabs." Thus, King Jurjir was

the first to call 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas with the title "the Learned Man of the Arabs." Then Jurjir died of his wounds.

Afterwards, `Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh sent detachments through the lands till they reached a small town called Qafsah, which was a three days' march from Qairawan. The people of the city took shelter in a fortress called Ajam, but Ibn Sa'd besieged it and opened it peacefully by a treaty with the natives to pay large amounts of money. He reconciled with the Byzantines on the condition that they pay three hundred quintals of gold, and in return he was to depart their land and stop fighting them.

'Abdullah ibn Sa'd sent the glad tidings of victory to 'Uthman ibn 'Affan in the year 27 A.H.

It was said that Jurjir's daughter -who fought with her father and was a good horseback rider and knew how to use swords and weapons –was among the loot of `Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair, who returned to 'Uthman bearing the good news of the opening.

It was also said that she was among the loot of a man of the Ansar. He put her on a camel and led her, chanting on how her destiny had changed.

'Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh returned to Egypt after he had stayed in Ifriqiyah for a year and three months. He sent a fifth of the spoils to Madinah, but it was bought by Marwan ibn Al-Hakam for five hundred thousand dinars.

'Uthman then took it from him, and this was considered a mistake of his. It was also claimed that 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the Commander of the Faithful, gave one fifth of the spoils to `Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh or to Marwan ibn Al- Hakam.

### **African Breaks the Agreement and Is Opened Again**

When the caliphate to Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, he appointed `Arnr ibn Al-'As to rule Egypt, so 'Amr resumed his designs to open Ifriqiyah.

In the year 41 A.H., 'Amr ibn Al-'As appointed his cousin 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' Al-Fahri to rule Ifriqiyah. Consequently, 'Uqbah launched many raids into Ifriqiyah for three consecutive years.

In 44 A.H., 'Amr ibn Al-'As ibn Wa'il Al-Sahmi died.

Heraclius, the king of Constantinople, forced every Christian king to pay tribute to him from Egypt, North Africa, Andalusia and other places. When the Africans had a treaty with `Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh, Heraclius sent one of his patriarchs ordering him to collect in taxes as much as they gave the Muslims. The patriarch resided in Qirtaja and gathered the North Africans and told them the orders of King Heraclius. The Africans

refused and said, "We pay to the Muslims what he used to take from us. He should pardon us for what the Muslims have taken from us."

After the death of King Jurjir, another Byzantine succeeded him. The patriarch banished this man after some conflicts. The banished ruler went to Al-Sham, where he met Caliph Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. He described the situation in North Africa for him and asked him to send an army with him to restore it. Mu'awiyah agreed and sent Mu'awiyah ibn Khadij Al-Sakuni. When they arrived at Alexandria, the Byzantine man died, but

Mu'awiyah ibn Khadij resumed the march to Ifriqiyah and advanced to Burqa and Tripoli.

When Mu'awiyah ibn Khadij explored in an area near Qairawan, he learned that a Byzantine campaign had landed between Safaqis and Susa in an area known for its coast and massive olive trees. Fortunately, he succeeded to defeat the Byzantines and opened some territories.

The patriarch sent an army of thirty thousand fighters, but Mu'awiyah sent forth an army that defeated the Byzantines and besieged the castle of Jalula', but they could not overcome it. Later, the walls of the fort collapsed and the Muslims looted what was in it. After that, Mu'awiyah sent his brigades to raid inside Ifriqiyah for more than a year. The Africans, thus, were obedient and helpless. Then Mu'awiyah returned to Egypt.

### **Establishing Qairawan**

In the year 50 A.H., Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan sent 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' to North Africa. He planned to build and establish Qairawan, the first Islamic city in Tunisia. 'Uqbah resided in Qairawan for three years.

The establishment of Qairawan had a great influence in the region. He planned it to be the capital of the region in Al-Maghrib, a center of the army, and an advanced Arab base from which to send the army to further victories. He wanted it to be a center to spread Islam and the Arabic influence in the land and among the people.

It was said that when 'Uqbah witnessed the completion of the building of Qairawan, he gathered his army, took a tour round it and prayed, "O Allah, enrich it with knowledge and religion. Fill it with Your servants and devotees, and let it be a source of honor for Your religion and a source of humiliation for those who disbelieve in You. O Allah, grant power to Islam through it and guard it against the tyrants of the earth."

### **The Death of 'Uqbah ibn Nafi**

'Uqbah intended to depart, so he sent back the majority of his soldiers and generals together with the spoils and stayed behind with a small army. He had one of the chiefs of

the Berbers called Kasilah with him, but he succeeded to escape and mustered his tribe and allied with the Byzantines.

When 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' approached Qairawan he managed to reach Tahudah, but Kasilah surrounded him, thus enabling Kasilah to block the way before 'Uqbah.

Near the city of Tahudah 'Uqbah suddenly found himself facing a large group. He did not hesitate to engage with them in a fatal battle, and he fell as a martyr. He was buried in Tahudah and later on, the city was renamed Sidi 'Uqbah (Master `Uqbah) after him.

### **The Collapse of Qairawan**

Kasilah and his group succeeded in entering Qairawan and subjugating it. The death of 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' occurred at the same time as the death of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, and this resulted in the civil wars of Ash-Sham.

### **'Abdul Malik ibn Marwan tries to restore Qairawan**

When the caliphate passed to 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, he sent quickly to Zuhair ibn Qais Al-Balwi, 'Uqbah's deputy, who had withdrawn from Qairawan and stationed himself in Burqah. 'Abdul Malik ordered him to march with his cavalry to save Qairawan and its Muslims and return it.

Zuhair ibn Qais wrote to 'Abdul Malik informing him of the large numbers of people and supporters of Kasilah among the Berbers and Byzantines and asked him to reinforce him with men and money.

'Abdul Malik comprehended the situation and asked his brother `Abdul `Aziz ibn Marwan, the governor of Egypt, to send to Zuhair the distinguished armies of Ash-Sham supplied with much money. This was in the year 69 A.H.

Zuhair advanced towards Qairawan and when he approached it, Kasilah withdrew and camped in a place called Hamsh, which was one day's travel from Qairawan.

The two armies fought in Hamsh in a bold struggle. Many men were killed on both sides till the people despaired of life. Allah assured His army and they were patient till Kasilah was killed and, consequently, his party was defeated. Zuhair's army pursued the routed troops of Kasilah.

Afterwards, Al-Maghrib territories lived peacefully till the year 71 A.H., and then Zuhair returned eastwards.

### **The Death of Zuhair ibn Qais Al-Balwi**

The Byzantines took advantage of Zuhair's departure and absence by landing some troops, which raided in Burqa and other areas. They captured many Muslims and

plundered their money. The Muslims sent to Zuhair for help and he responded at once, telling his fellows, "Let's go to them. May Allah be merciful to us."

They went and encountered huge numbers of Byzantines. The enemy struggled desperately and killed all the Muslims, including Zuhair ibn Qais and his group.

When the grievous tidings of the death of Zuhair and his group were carried to 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, who was having conflicts with Zuhair, he was shaken by misery and agonized as when 'Uqbah was killed.

### **The Soothsayer**

After the conflict between `Abdul Malik ibn Marwan and `Abdullah ibn Zubair came to an end and the caliphate was given to 'Abdul Malik, he directed his efforts to the territories of Al-Maghrib. He mobilized a huge army under Hassan ibn Al-Nu'man Al-Ghassani, who marched to Egypt and from there resumed his advance to Tripoli, then to Qurtajanah. He was determined to put an end to the Byzantine power in Al-Maghrib areas. By abolishing their military, it would be easy to fight, for nothing would be left except the Berber forces.

Hassan ibn Al-Nu'man Al-Ghassani succeeded in overcoming the troops of Qurtajanah after a number of grave encounters, and thus all areas of Al-Maghrib yielded to him. However, he had some information about an alliance among the tribe of Uras led by a woman known as The Soothsayer.

Hassan's army fought with the army of The Soothsayer, but he was defeated and withdrew to Tripoli, where he resided for five years. When huge reinforcements reached him from Al-Sham, Hassan resumed the struggle against the army of The Soothsayer. But this time, Allah the Most Powerful granted victory to His servants and The Soothsayer and the majority of her army were killed. The rest of the Berber tribes fled, and so the Maghrib territories were for the Arabs, and many of the natives embraced Islam. The land enjoyed a life of peace and stability and the Muslims organized its affairs and arranged its government.

### **The Dismissal of Hassan and Appointment of Musa**

'Abdul Aziz ibn Marwan, the brother of Caliph `Abdul Malik ibn Marwan and the father of the pious caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abdul Aziz, managed to dismiss Hassan and appoint Musa ibn Nussair instead. This was in 84 A.H.

When Musa ibn Nussair took over after Hassan, it was a decisive event in the history of Al-Maghrib. This was because Musa energized the military action and drove it to the extremes of Maghribi territories. Musa's strategy enabled him to have the obedience of

all the tribes that accepted to Islam. He also succeeded in purging the area of all the gangs, cells and brigades of the Byzantine or Berber resistance in all the cities and forts.

Musa's progress was not within his territory only, but some of his troops raided on the coasts of Cyprus and the Iberian Peninsula. After Musa was assured of the submission of the area and the spoils of money, loot and captives, he started to scheme for a new conquest, which was later known as the opening of Andalus.