
Jihād – striving or fighting “in the path of God” – and its aims, legitimation, and practices are topics that in the course of history occupied the minds of Muslims and non-Muslims time and again. The resurgence of jihād since the 1980s has again aroused broad interest in the topic and led to a wave of publications, including studies that deal with the historical aspects of the phenomenon.

The volume under review is such a historical study. Part one contains seven chapters that give an introduction to jihād in 128 pages; part two contains a 70-page edition and translation of Ibn ‘Asākir’s small collection of ḥadīths entitled al-ʿArbaʿīna ḥadīth̄m fī l-ḥabīb ʿalā l-jihād (The forty ḥadīths dealing with inciting to jihād) and it also contains a bibliography and an index.

In the first chapter the authors address the life, career, and works of Ibn ‘Asākir. He is most famous for his monumental history of Damascus (Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq), and he also acquired renown among Muslim scholars as a reviver of Sunnism and as an opponent of non-Sunnī Muslim groups.

Chapter two gives a summary of the history of jihād in early Islam. The authors define the term on the basis of Qurʾānic terminology as “warfare against the infidels.” They point out that “violence in the name of religion” is a historical reality not only in Islam but also in Judaism and Christianity. In the Hebrew Bible, for instance, God orders and legitimizes warfare against the enemies of Israel, and in the Christian empires from the end of the 4th century rulers also fought against non-Christian communities inside and outside their empires with the consent of the Church. Against this background, it is not surprising that similar ideas are found in the Qurʾān, which, after all, contains many parallels with Jewish and Christian ideas. The authors use five Qurʾānic passages from sūra 9 (verses 111, 5, 29, 13-14 and
to demonstrate the basic principles of militant *jihād* that were current in later Muslim writings.

A few comments on this chapter are in order. The parallels between the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim views on fighting the adherents of other faiths are in principle correct but somewhat superficial. On the one hand the *differences* between the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim views are only adumbrated,¹ and on the other hand the choice of only those Qur’ānic passages on *jihād* which later Muslim scholars considered important prevents one gaining an impression of the overall Qur’ānic approach to *jihād*. Warfare against adherents of other faiths and apostates has many more facets than the verses from *sūra* 9 suggest. A complete picture of the Qur’ānic view on *jihād* is needed in order to assess the historical background and development of these many facets. Only then will the difference between earlier and later Qur’ānic concepts of *jihād* become clear.²

The second chapter concludes with a paragraph on *jihād* and warfare in the period from the death of Muḥammad until the beginning of the Crusader period. The authors sketch the development of classical medieval *jihād* ideology, which was inspired by Qur’ānic verses and ḥadīths, and which was developed in detail by Muslim scholars in the course of the first four centuries of Islamic history.

Chapter three covers the issue of “jihad preaching in Damascus between the first and second Crusades.” It starts with the presentation of ʿAlī ibn Ṭāhir al-Sulamī’s (d. 1106) *Kitāb al-jihād*, which the Damascus author read in public several times after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. In a second paragraph the authors identify on the basis of Ibn ʿAsākir’s *Muḥjam al-shuyūkh* a group of ten scholars who escaped from the Crusaders to Damascus, where they preached *jihād* against the invaders. Their preaching probably had an effect on

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Ibn ‘Asākir. The authors conclude from these facts that “the intensification and reorientation of *jihād* doctrine in mainstream Syrian Sunnī discourse” already started early in the 12th century, thus shortly after the Crusaders’ invasion of Syria. This was already remarked on by E. Sivan in his *L’Islam et la croisade. Idéologie et Propagande dans les Réactions Musulmanes aux Croisades* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1968), 28-58, which the authors do not mention.

The fourth chapter is devoted to Ibn ‘Asākir’s role in this process of intensification and reorientation of *jihād* doctrine. The authors first describe the close cooperation between Ibn ‘Asākir and Sultan Nūr al-Dīn, who took control of Damascus in 1154 after the Crusaders in the second Crusade had unsuccessfully tried to conquer the city. Nūr al-Dīn supported the Sunnī scholars of Damascus in general and Ibn ‘Asākir in particular by ordering the construction of schools and religious buildings, and he employed scholars as preachers in his army. The authors then dwell on Ibn ‘Asākir’s role as a “propagandist of *jihād*,” which began with his lectures on Ibn al-Mubārak’s (d. 797) *Kitāb al-jihād*, one of the first books written on *jihād*, and led to Ibn ‘Asākir’s own booklet entitled *al-Arba‘ūn ĥadīthīn fi l-ḥathīb ‘alā l-jihād* (The forty *ḥadīths* for inciting *jihād*), which he composed at Nūr al-Dīn’s request.

The authors discuss the question of why Ibn ‘Asākir did not compose a detailed compendium of the religious and legal aspects of *jihād* but merely a collection of *ḥadīths* on the subject, that is, sayings transmitted from the Prophet. Finally they refer to authors and scholars who lived at the same time as Ibn ‘Asākir but in other places, and whose writings exhibit similar tendencies of “intensification and reorientation of Sunnī *jihād* ideology and propaganda.” In this context, I miss a reference to Michael A. Köhler’s study *Allianzen und Verträge zwischen fränkischen und islamischen Herrschern im Vorderen Orient: Eine Studie über das zwischenstaatliche Zusammenleben vom 12. bis ins 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), which provides evidence of the fact that Muslim rulers in Syria such as Nūr al-Dīn and later Šalāḥ al-Dīn also used *jihād* propaganda in order to legitimize their rule and increase their power.

Chapter five presents the manuscript of Ibn ‘Asākir’s *al-Arba‘ūn ĥadīthīn fi l-ḥathīb ‘alā l-jihād*. Its characteristics are described and the teachers from whom Ibn ‘Asākir learned the *ḥadīths* in question
are listed. The chapter also indicates the four principal topics to which the narrations can be assigned and, in conclusion, it discusses the role of the Qur’anic verses quoted in the hadiths.

The next chapter is devoted to the manuscript’s colophons and to the question of what can be learned from these colophons about jihād propaganda in Damascus in the 13th century. Colophons are manuscript notes indicating when and where a manuscript’s content was taught, the names of the teachers and students present during the lectures, the owner of the manuscript, and other such matters.

In chapter 7, the authors deal with the “legacy of the intensification and reorientation of Sunni jihad ideology” that arose during the 12th century in reaction to the Crusades and the schisms within Islam, especially between Sunnites and Shi‘ites. They also elaborate on the role played by the scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) in this respect.

To summarize, the first part of the book confirms a proposition that has already been put forward in the past, namely that the concept of jihād changed in the course of history, as Islam itself adapted to changing historical circumstances. Such changes could already be seen during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad, and they recurred later. The Crusades and the religious and political situation of the Islamic world during the 12th and 13th centuries gave rise to new Sunnite jihād concepts. Like earlier jihād concepts, they were based on the Qur’ān and Sunna of the Prophet, but they emphasized other passages of these two sources. The authors rightly stress that the concept of jihād that emerged during the Crusades developed into a lasting legacy in mainstream Sunnī scholarship.

The edition and translation of the Arabic text of Ibn ʿAsākir’s al-Arbāʿīnā ḥadīthān fī l-ḥathib ʿalā l-jihād in the second part of the book is of a high quality and it is a welcome addition to the sources available on jihād. However, the transcription of a few Arabic words and several proper names is not correct:


See Motzki, op. cit., note 2.

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