

The History of Movarounnahr and its Source Analysis in "Futuh Al-Buldan" By Ahmad Ibn Yahya Al-Balazuri

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of Transoxiana (Māwarā' al-Nahr) in Aḥmad ibn Yahyā al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, with particular attention to its source-critical and historiographical features. The analysis focuses on the narrative techniques employed in the work, including the use of isnād (chain of transmission), biographical reporting of transmitters (ruwāt), and instances of abbreviated narration where full chains are omitted. These methodological choices reflect the early Islamic historiographical tradition, which was closely connected to ḥadīth scholarship and its standards of authentication. The study further highlights al-Balādhurī's reliance on a diverse network of transmitters from various regions, including scholars associated with Transoxiana, thereby demonstrating the geographical breadth of intellectual exchange in the early Islamic period. Special attention is given to the role of Central Asian scholars within the transmission chains, which underscores their contribution to the formation and preservation of historical knowledge. The findings indicate that *Futūḥ al-Buldān* should be regarded not only as a historical narrative of Islamic conquests but also as an important source for understanding the development of early Islamic historiography and its methodological foundations. The work reflects a transitional stage in historical writing, where critical approaches to sources and transmission began to take shape within the broader framework of Islamic scholarly tradition.

Keywords: Aḥmad Ibn Yahyā Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ Al-Buldān, Māwarā' Al-Nahr, Islamic Historiography, Source Criticism, Isnād, Transmitters (ruwāt), Ḥadīth Methodology, Sanad, Central Asia, Early Islamic History, Historical Narration

1. Introduction

The scientific value of any historical or literary work is determined, first of all, by its source base and how these sources are used. The reliability of sources, their selection, analysis and processing by the author are the main factors determining the overall scientific level of the work. From this point of view, when analyzing historical works created in the Middle Ages, it is of particular importance to study the system of sources used in them. In particular, in the traditions of Islamic historiography, the attitude to the source and the method of citing it have their own characteristics, which allows for a deep understanding of the scientific environment of this period.[1]

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Literature Review

Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Balazuri's "Futuh al-buldan" has been studied by many orientalists and local researchers as one of the most important sources in Islamic historiography. The originality of this work, its traditions of narration, and its unique features in the system of isnads have been widely analyzed within the framework of history, hadith studies, and the history of Islamic civilization. The initial research was carried out by hadith scholars within the framework of traditional Islamic source studies, focusing mainly on the reliability of narrations, the chain of narrators, and the principles of "ilm ar-rijal." From this perspective, Ibn Hibban's "Kitab as-Siqat" and az-Zahabi's "Siyar a'lam an-nubala" provide important biographical information about the hadith scholars narrated by al-Balazuri.[2] Through these sources, one can gain a general idea of the chain of narrators and the chain of narrations of the narrations presented in "Futuh al-Buldān."

Western Orientalism has also shown great interest in al-Balazuri's work. In particular, in the field of the formation of Islamic historiography and narrative traditions, Adolf von Kremen, Ignaz Goldzier and other researchers analyzed the work in connection with the methodology of hadith. They evaluated "Futuh al-buldan" not only as a collection of historical events, but also as an example of a critical narrative system formed in Islamic historiography.[3]

Among Arab and Muslim researchers, Abdulaziz al-Dawri's work "Nash'at al-'ilm at-ta'rih inda al-'arab" is of particular importance. It extensively covers the process of formation of Islamic historiography, traditions of narration, and the close connection between history and the science of hadith. The author interprets the method of historians such as al-Balazuri in their abbreviated use of the chain of transmission as a scientific tradition. At the same time, the research of Nur Sa'd Muhsin analyzed the system of narrators who were most frequently cited in Futuh al-buldan.[4] It showed the thematic distribution of narrations by such hadith scholars as Husayn ibn Ali al-Ajali, Muhammad ibn Sa'd, and Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Salam. This research is important for the thematic-structural analysis of the sources of the work.

Local and Central Asian researchers have also drawn attention to al-Balazuri's work. In particular, the mention of Transoxiana scholars in the work, including Ibrahim ibn Muslim al-Khwarizmi, demonstrates the geographical breadth of the scientific field. This confirms the place of Central Asian scholars in the development of Islamic science. Also, contemporary Uzbek and Arabic studies are specifically studying the source-based aspects of al-Balazuri's work, in particular the names of narrators, the chain of transmission system, and the abbreviated narrative forms.[5] Research in this area serves to identify the first manifestations of critical methodology in Islamic historiography. In general, the analysis of the existing literature shows that the work "Futuh al-buldan" has been widely studied within the framework of different scientific directions - historiography, hadith studies, source studies, and the history of Islamic civilization. However, some of its aspects, in particular, the method of shortening the sanad, the geographical analysis of the participation of local narrators, and the thematic structure of the sources still require in-depth research. From this point of view, re-study of al-Balazuri's work on the basis of complex source studies and historical-methodological approach makes it possible to reveal its scientific value more fully.[6]

2. Research Method

Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Balazuri's "Futuh al-buldan" is one such source, which not only sheds light on specific historical events, but also provides important information about the scientific and cultural environment of the 8th-9th centuries, in particular the relationship

between the science of history and the science of hadith. During this period, historiography was not fully formed as an independent discipline, and it developed largely under the influence of the methodology of the science of hadith. Therefore, historians widely used methods characteristic of hadith scholars in their works to describe events, including citing the chain of narrators, comparing narrations, and assessing their level of reliability. [7]

Al-Balazuri, continuing this tradition in his work, also tries to link each historical information to a specific source. He seeks to show the level of reliability of the information by mentioning the names of the narrators in the narrations he cites. This is directly related to such directions in the science of hadith as "ilm ar-rijal" and "jarh va ta'dil". While "ilm ar-rijal" is aimed at studying the lives of narrators, their level of knowledge, moral qualities and level of reliability, "jarh va ta'dil" deals with the critical evaluation of narrators and classifying them as reliable or unreliable.[8]

3. Results and Discussion

These two directions were important in ensuring the authenticity of historical information. At the same time, the early medieval sources do not always provide a complete chain of transmission. In some cases, a concise method, that is, an abbreviated form, was used. This method was first observed in the work of early historians and hadith scholars such as Muhammad ibn Shihab az-Zuhri and Muhammad ibn Ishaq. In some cases, they shortened the chain of transmission and limited themselves to general references. Al-Balathuri also used this method, in some places citing the narration using phrases that mean "they say." One of the reasons for this is that by the 9th century, certain views had developed among the hadith scholars regarding historical narrations.[9] In particular, the chain of transmission of some historians was considered weak, while the reliability of others was recognized. For example, while the narrations of historians such as al-Waqidi and Abu Mahnaf were criticized by some hadith scholars, the narrations of the hadith scholars of Medina were considered more reliable. Therefore, in cases where events were generally accepted and were considered to be without disagreement, the chain of narrators was not cited, but rather the narration of the event itself.[10] Al-Balathuri also used the same method to briefly describe events that were accepted by all historians and were not in dispute among them. For example, in the case of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) conquest of Khaibar, his travels to Fadak and other regions, and the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, he did not cite the chain of narrators. This shows that these events were considered absolutely reliable at that time. The scholar's source base is very extensive, and he has narrated from many hadith scholars and historians from different regions. His work includes the names of such famous scholars as Ismail ibn Ayyash, Abdurrahman al-Awzai, Hasan al-Basri, Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak, Abdurrazaq as-San'ani, Malik ibn Anas, and Muhammad ibn Ishaq. This indicates that the author was in contact with a wide scientific environment and used a variety of sources.[11]

In particular, the mention of scholars from Transoxiana in the work is significant. The mention of Ibrahim ibn Muslim al-Khwarizmi clearly demonstrates the contribution of Central Asian scholars to the development of Islamic science. The fact that he taught a famous historian like al-Balazuri indicates that this region had a high scientific prestige. In addition, the fact that al-Balazuri's teachers included teachers of great hadith scholars such as Muhammad al-Bukhari and at-Tirmidhi indicates the interconnectedness of the scientific chain. The distribution of narrations in the work is also noteworthy. For example, one of the people from whom al-Balazuri narrated the most is Hussein ibn Ali al-Ajali, who mainly conveyed

information on political and administrative issues. The narrations that came through Muhammad ibn Sa'd are related to the history of conquests and the history of cities. The narrations that came from Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Salam provide information on economic issues, including taxes such as *khiraj* and *jizya*. [12] This situation shows that al-Balazuri used sources selectively according to topics. At the same time, the work also contains narrations from state officials, caliphs, and judges. This indicates that the historian was in close contact not only with scholars, but also with the political elite. For example, information about the Ammuriyya campaign is provided through the caliph Mutawakkil. Such circumstances indicate that the information in the work is also based on official sources. [13]

In some cases, Al-Balazuri conveyed information about a specific area through the *muhaddis* of that area. For example, he indicated the source of the narration through expressions such as "sheikhs from Kufa", "sheikhs from Basra", "sheikhs from Baghdad". [14] This shows that the author used geographically extensive sources. Another important point is that al-Balazuri narrates some events based on information he heard directly from participants. This indicates that his work also contains first-hand sources. Such narrations usually begin with phrases like "I heard from someone." For example, information about the events in the city of Kairouan was obtained directly from participants. [15]

4. Conclusion

Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Balazuri's work "Futuh al-buldan" is one of the fundamental sources that has a special place in the development of Islamic historiography. This work not only preserves valuable information about the history of the first conquests of the Arab-Islamic world, but also clearly demonstrates the methodological features of the scientific environment of the 8th-9th centuries. Such aspects of the work as the system of sources, the method of transmission of narrations, and the attitude to chain of transmission and *isnad* indicate that the science of history developed in close connection with the study of *hadith* at that time.

The tradition of narration used in Al-Balazuri's work serves as an important tool in ensuring the reliability of historical information. The methods of citing the names of narrators, confirming information through chain of transmission, and in some cases abbreviating it indicate the existence of a culture of critical thinking that was formed in the scientific environment of that time. At the same time, it is established that the citation of the chain of transmission in full or in abbreviated form is directly related to the author's level of confidence in the source, as well as the state of popularity and acceptance of the historical event. Analysis of the work shows that al-Balazuri relied on a very wide and diverse scientific environment in selecting sources. He was not limited to *hadith* scholars, but also used historians, jurists, state officials, and even direct participants in the events. This indicates that his work formed a multi-layered source system and that he tried to cover historical events based on a comprehensive approach. In particular, the mention of scholars from Transoxiana in the work further highlights the role of the Central Asian scientific community in the development of Islamic science. Through figures such as Ibrahim ibn Muslim al-Khwarizmi, it is evident that the scientific chain was geographically broad and that the exchange of knowledge was not limited to the Arabian Peninsula or Iraq. This confirms the formation of Islamic civilization as a global scientific network.

The methodology used in *Futuh al-buldan* shows that historiography was formed in close connection with the science of *hadith* and later became the basis for its development as an independent science. The use of concepts such as "*ilm ar-rijal*" and "*jarh wa ta'dil*" in the

analysis of historical sources can be considered one of the first manifestations of the historical-critical approach. This indicates that scientific methodology was formed in the Islamic world at a very early stage. The thematic distribution of information in the work is also of particular importance. The presentation of narratives on political, economic, military, and social issues from various sources served to provide a comprehensive coverage of historical events. This shows that al-Balazuri was not only a narrator of events, but also a historian who systematized and analyzed them. Another important point is that the work also contains narrations from caliphs, judges and government officials, which means that the historical information is verified through official and unofficial sources. This increases the credibility of the work and makes it an important primary source for historical research. In general, the work "Futuh al-buldan" serves as a high example of the culture of source research in Islamic historiography. Through it, one can gain a broad idea not only of the history of the Arab-Islamic conquests, but also of the scientific environment of that time, the culture of approaching sources, and the methods of historical criticism. The scientific value of the work lies in the fact that it attempts to illuminate history from a complex and critical point of view, integrating various sources into a single system. Therefore, this work of al-Balazuri is not only a source of historical information, but also a valuable scientific heritage that helps to understand the important stages of the development of scientific thinking in Islamic civilization.

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