

BOOK SEVENTEEN : about what should be done while encountering the enemy and fighting him. In it are three chapters.

Chapter One : about [what should be done] when the army marches out against the enemy before the enemy marches out.

If the soldiers take the initiative in marching out against the enemy, their march should be from a high place, elevated above the ground so that the army will be higher than the enemy. Their going forth should be steady and cautious and slow. There should be in front of the cavalry those of the infantry who will defend it and protect it from the infantry of the enemy. When the infantry of the army have put the enemy's infantry to flight, it may happen that the cavalry of the army will follow upon them in the work of routing. If the infantry of the enemy is routed, and falls back upon their cavalry, it causes their horses to panic and their pursuit by the infantry of the army might be continued. This will be the cause of the break-up of the enemy and his rout.

If the center is required to march out against the enemy, its men should proceed slowly, little by little, without rushing or haste. If haste in movement towards the enemy occurs, perhaps those behind the [center's] ranking will think that they have arrived at the enemy's [position] and that they will be [engaged] with him. They will become disturbed because of this and will be affected by it.

If a troop of men attack the enemy and then are required to retire to their [original] station, they should avoid anything unseemly or hurried in their retreat, for such would indicate fear and anxiety. Rather their retreat should be the most ordered and steadiest of retreats. The unseemliness of their retreat could enhance the covetousness of the enemy towards [the army]. He will pursue it, and rout will ensue.

If the men who attacked the enemy were those of the center in their totality and they are compelled to retreat, they should retreat to a place behind their backs, swerving and looking sideways, some inclining shoulders and heads, and [with] chests in the direction of the chests of the enemy. They should not cease doing this until they reach their [original] positions. While doing this, they [must] display power [by] calling for victory, exhorting steadiness and conquest, so that their companions hear [this call]. This gives notice of the presence of the center and of its power in such cases where the hearts grow faint. If

one of the men of the center attacks and takes advantage of an opportunity against the enemy (i.e., for individual combat) and then has to retire, he should incline leftwards and towards the left flank or towards what is between the wings of the center and left flank.

If those who attack are men of the right flank, they should retire, [if forced to], by walking backwards to their [original] positions. Should one of the men of the right flank attack and take advantage of an opportunity [against] the enemy and [then] wishes to retire, he should incline leftwards towards the center or towards what is between the center wing and right flank. This latter method is easier in retreating than retiring towards the left flank and its vicinity would be.

If all of the left flank attacks, they should retire [by] moving backwards to their positions, as has been noted for the right flank. And if one of the left flank attacks, then retires, he should incline [in retreating towards] the left. If the warrior of the left flank, after the attack, moves towards the area of the center, it [will be] easier for him than [a motion] towards the right flank.

And among that which attentiveness demands is the knowledge that the return of the horseman after the engagement to his station, from which he sallied forth, is most salutary, if it be possible; so that he will be in the position established for him, [making him easier to find later on]. If it isn't possible, he should stand in its vicinity. There should be no altercation about this, because the object is simply that he remain in his [proper] ranking and not [necessarily] in that particular place.

It is required of the warrior [charging] against the enemy that he does not exhaust himself in rushing his horse and that he does not pursue his adversary beyond a third of the distance between him and the enemy. Thus there would be between him and the army a third of the distance, and between him and the enemy two-thirds. To go beyond this is heedlessness.

“For the heedless, no praise
E'en though he come through safe.”¹

(1) The source of this hemastich could not be found.

[Though] the enemy be put to rout before him, the attacker should not feel secure, because this [rout] might be like a stratagem such as [to enable] the springing of an ambush and the like; unless, of course, the failure of the enemy and his defeat are apparent. In the latter case pursuing the enemy is necessary, but the warrior should not hasten to thrust [too] deeply into the army of the enemy, even if the latter's failure is apparent and his horses are delayed [in retreat], until the men of bravery and patience from his own army join him and the battle-cavalry have come together once more.

If the enemy simulates flight and raises dust, the attack against him should not occur until this dust has settled, for fear of an ambush. If the enemy turns his back and his rout is certain, the entire army should not follow him, rather some of the army should pursue him while others plunder, and the remainder are employed to cover these operations. For the army, as a whole, to pursue [the enemy] is judged blameworthy.

Should the enemy remain standing after his [apparent] defeat, the standard bearer (or flag commander), *ṣāhib al-liwā'*, should advance a little distance, while the cavalry, who are chosen and prepared for that [eventuality], attacks. In this circumstance, it is incumbent upon the army to make every effort to surround them from every side. The commander of the army should set out [towards the enemy] with the largest standard, *al-band al-a'ẓam*, and all of the cavalry should surround and protect him. Verily, in all this there is dread and fright brought upon the enemy, especially if they have [already] tasted the edge of iron. When the enemy dallies at this point, it is the onset of victory, God willing.

If a combatant from the army rides out for single combat,² his position should be at a point one third of the distance between his comrades and the enemy. Should the latter simulate flight, he [can proceed] to two-thirds of the distance, but he must not go beyond that. Indeed some have said that he should not exceed a third of the distance between his comrades and the enemy under any circumstances.

Chapter Two : about what [should be done] when the enemy marches out against the army before the army takes the field.

(2) The term for the combatant or duellist is *mubārīz*, here employed in the technical sense, and lends weight to the argument noted in Book XVI, note 1, *supra*.

Men of exploits in wars hold that if the enemy attacks the army before it can attack the enemy or before its organization and mobilization for battle can be carried out thoroughly, the men of the army should kneel on one knee and point their spears from the upper part of the chest, concealing themselves behind leather shields and cuirasses, arrayed in a single ranking, assisting one another until the enemy is repelled or until [the cavalry's] mounting and engagement have been effected. Those experienced in war say that [this] is the hour of adversity for he who is not accustomed to its like.

Should the attack of the enemy occur after the tightening of the battle array of the soldiers, the infantry of the army should engage them and point their spears from the upper part of the chest and remain fixed in their places; and the archers of the army should assist them by shooting [arrows] at the faces [of the enemy]. If the infantry is unable to stand [the attack] in this manner, the cavalry will then respond.

Patience is most beneficial at this time. None but the people of strength and valor and he who has the practice of battle engagement is firm in this [quality of] patience. [Beneficial, too,] is cautiousness against the army's crumbling during the first attack of the enemy in the first moment [of battle]. The cowards will vacate their positions, and this will be a reason for the break-up [of the army's formation]. Should this happen, the correct procedure is to order their control by placing with them experienced warriors who will stand firmly with them, so that they will be made constant by their constancy, strengthening that which had softened their hearts.

If it happen that one of the men of the army should retire because of his fear of battle or the suffering of wounds, no other person of the army should obstruct him by standing in his way or should send him back to [his] position among the warriors; but rather he should be treated gently and be placated until he attains the rear of the battle-rankings.³

(3) It is interesting to note here the humane psychology in the treatment of the cowardly and the wounded. Cf. the attitude of Ibn Khaldūn, on the need of cohesion in the lines, vol. II, p. 75 :

“[the closed formation] makes it obvious what great wisdom there is in requiring that the lines be kept steady and in forbidding anyone to fall back during an attack. Battle lines are intended to preserve order, as we have stated.

If the enemy overwhelms [a group] of the army and they fail to repulse his assault, they should return to the [main ranks] of the army, maintaining their zeal until they close ranks, and regroup their cavalry and their infantry and protect themselves with [their] weapons and send to seek assistance and the hastening of it. If ranks are closed and the assistance they sought comes to them, they can join battle again to the degree that the situation demands.

If the enemy gives battle to the army right up to the trenches, the men should be prepared for this in the completest manner possible, and they should attack the enemy in a single foray, observing the footsteps of the enemy rather than their faces. Should the enemy hold forth to meet them at this time, nothing remains for them but to descend upon [the enemy] with swords and pointed maces, *al-dabābis al-muḥarrafah*,⁴ and battle axes. And when the army has taken of the battle-field a distance from that held by the enemy equal to the length of [the hurl of] a spear, and this happens again and again, the men of exploits count it among the beginnings of victory.

It is necessary that the men of the army hold to their positions with solid rankings [within the area] where the enemy had aimed at them and that they do not cease pointing their spears from their chests or to shoot [arrows] at them from every side. Should the enemy protract [his efforts] and remain patient [under attack], the men of the army should not become disquieted or anxious, because the suffering [of the encounter] is shared by both factions. God pointed this out in His saying: "If you are suffering, they also are suffering as you are suffering, and you are hoping from God for that for which they cannot hope." (4:104)

Should the right flank of the enemy enter the other parts (reserves ?) of the army, no one of the men of the army should leave the ranks unless

Those who turn their backs to the enemy bring disorder into the line formation. They are guilty of the crime of causing a rout. They somehow cause the Muslims to be routed and enable the enemy to gain power over them. This is a great sin, because the resulting damage is general and effects Islam in that it makes a breach in the protecting fence. Therefore, it is considered one of the great sins.'

- (4) For illustrations of various maces, none of them termed *muḥarrafah*, see 'Abd al-Raḥmān Zakī, *Al-silāḥ fī al-Islām* (Cairo: 1951), p. 26; Cahen, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 f. and 37 f.; and *MF*, p. 64.

he is confident that he can defeat his equal before returning to his battle position, for holding fast in his place and repulsing the enemy [from there] is better than being diverted from it; for he who is cut off from his place cannot foresee what his situation will be, unless he knows that the enemy who is advancing on him cannot escape [defeat]. Then engaging him [elsewhere] is permitted at this time.

Chapter Three : about what is required of cautiousness at the time of meeting the enemy.

Those accustomed to and experienced in wars say if a group of enemy's cavalry comes upon the army from the rear at the time of mobilization [for battle], or should spring an ambush upon them at that time, the commander of the army should establish a group of cavalry, which he sets aside for this purpose, to repel [the enemy] away from the army. If he has not done this, he should choose horsemen from the left flank to frustrate them and prevent them from [succeeding] in this action.

[The experts] say that it is incumbent upon those who go out against the enemy that they do not retreat except at the command of the commander of the army, and that they do not proceed beyond the limit set by him for them, because he knows better what he is directing them toward. In these circumstances, he is like the physician for the sick.

If night covers them and battle has not abated, it is necessary that the infantry and cavalry do not leave battle-stations until their enemy retires from the battle; after which they should retire [to their encampment] in their rankings according to their battle-array, one [ranking] after the other. In this circumstance, cautiousness against sudden attack by the enemy and the entrance of his spies is necessary.

When the men have entered their stations [in the camp], the cavalry officers retire to their posts. They close up the entrance-ways over the trenches. The night patrols and the [detailed] officers go round about with the corps commanders, *ru'asā al-ajnād*, [visiting those] on watch duty until morning arrives.

If the rankings are arrayed for battle, and night descends and there is no escape from passing the night [in battle formation], the ranks of the left flank should bend towards the middle part of the center and the

edge of the right flank should bend until it is linked to the left flank. The [entire] army will wheel about, the baggage being at this time in the middle [of the formation] and the cavalymen will surround it.⁵ In the darkness before the dawn they [all] return to their regular positions.

There should be shrewd men on all sides of the army who can look upon the faces of people and scrutinize them. He who sees a suspicious person, or imagines one to be such, should seize him and inquire about his business. The nature of a suspicious person is apparent from his face, and the shrewd men, those skilled in physiognomy, will know him as such. If he doubts the outward appearance of a person, and moves to arrest him, he should be wary of him at this moment, for perhaps [the suspect] thinks himself able to kill and hastens towards killing the one who had seized him in order to save himself or to take vengeance before being slain [himself]. Similarly, it is necessary to control those who have sought safe-conduct, *al-musta'min*, and [any] captives and to bind them after the terms given them have been fulfilled.⁶

Know that the conditions of war do not run according to a single plan but vary and change, and perhaps the commander of the army or some of his deputies, having disposed of a matter [in a certain way,] find that circumstances call for another method. He must do at that time what his opinion thinks necessary and his judgment will lead him to it.

It has been related that a fleet of ships, *ufrūṭah*⁷ *min marākib*, of the Franks sought [to capture] the city of Sabtah (Ceuta) in the lands of the Maghrib. An opposing force went out to engage it and a great battle ensued between them. Victory went finally to the Muslims. The Christians raised the sails of their ships and sailed away. But one large ship was delayed because of the difficulty in maneuvering it.

(5) This is probably the formation known as *al-kurah*; for sources see Bock XVI note 4 *supra*.

(6) For the treatment of spies and prisoners and those bearing safe-conduct rights, see Khaddūri, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-108 and 163-169.

(7) The origin or meaning of this word could not be ascertained from any standard lexicographical source. It was not included in the most comprehensive study of Mediterranean naval terminology, Henry and Renée Kahane and Andreas Tietze, *The Lingua Franca in the Levant* (Urbanat 1958).

The archers of the Muslims gathered to do battle against it. [The Franks] shielded it with leather shields and cuirasses. One of the Muslim shaykhs called out to the archers, "Look you to the rope of the Christians. Shoot at it." They did and the arrows became entangled in it and its flow through the pulleys was stopped, because of the arrows entangled in it. The Muslims overtook [the ship] and captured it.⁸

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- (8) The source of this story was not discovered. The Portugese captured the city in 818/1415. Before that the Genoese had helped to blockade the city at the instigation of the Muwahhid, al-Rashid, who reigned from 630 to 640/1232-1242. Between 708-716/1308-1316, Jaime of Aragon lent over fifty ships and a number of cavalry to the local ruler of Sabtah to use against a variety of pretenders; see article "Ceuta", *EI*, vol. I, pp. 836-838. For the later attempts of the Aragonese, in league with the Catalans, to wrest the littoral opposite Gibraltar, see J.A. Robson, "The Catalan Fleet and Moorish Sea-power", *English Historical Review*, LXXIV, no. 292 (July 1959), pp. 386-408.