



حبر أبيض  
WHITE INK



**Prof. Mohamed Afifi**

## Seferberlik

# Fakhri Pasha and the siege of Medina

Another era of the dark ages of the rule of the Federalists, the “Group of Union and Progress” in the Arab states in the turbulent last years of the Ottoman Empire.

It's the page of the Turkish military commander “Fakhri Pasha” the ruler of Medina during the period of WWII and during the Arab revolution against the Ottoman rule. So, who is Fakhri Pasha?

Resources states the birth of “Fakhri” in Rusjok City, which is located in Bulgaria, while it was affiliating the Ottoman Empire. Fakhri joined the Military School and graduated to join the Ottoman Army, thereafter joined the Federalists, then he became under the command of “Jamal Pasha”, commander of the Ottoman Army in the Arab provinces and at this moment, begins his dark era in Hijaz when “Jamal Pasha” sent him to Medina to become the ruler from 1916 until 1919.

We perceive that the appointment of Fakhri Pasha to Medina was in line with the general policy of the Federalists not to hold high-ranking Arab officers in the Ottoman army in major positions in the Arab states, rather to keep them away from these states fearing of the growth of Arab awareness and their alliance with the Arab inhabitants. In fact, this policy was a reason for the resentment of the Arab officers, and also the grumbling of the Arab people who were subject to a Turkish ruler who could not understand how they live, especially during a troublesome period where the Arab awareness was at its peak.

What made things worse; was the Turkification policy, which is intended to interject the Turkish culture in the Arab states, and impose the Turkish language instead of Arabic language, in the desperate attempt by them to pull the Ottoman Empire back together, which was in fact at its worst. We can conceive the effect of the Turkification policy in countries of Hijaz, especially in Medina; the country of Prophet “PBUH”. Thus, this matter led to more hatred between Arabs and Turks.

At the same time, the Arab revolution erupted after all the paths for the return of harmony between Arabs and Turks had been cut off. The revolution was able to control Hijaz, and Turks had nothing in hand but Medina, in which Fakhri Pasha and his soldiers were fortified.

Here begins a dark era in the history of the people of Medina; when for the first time in hundreds of years, the Holy City was under a long siege as a result of Fakhri Pasha's persistence not to surrender. So far, people of Medina remember the difficult days that their ancestors had to go through at that time; when the paths and roads between Medina and the rest of the countries of Hijaz were cut off, which led to a severe shortage of supplies and the necessities of daily life, and the Railway of Hijaz was the lifeline of Medina throughout the period of the harsh siege.

The shortage of supplies, and the necessity for supplies to be available to the Turkish military, prompted “Fakhri Pasha” to carry out one of the forced displacement crimes. As he ordered the displacement of large numbers of Arab residents out of Medina, where they were dispersed throughout the Ottoman provinces. It is also allegedly that “Fakhri Pasha” resorted to the policy of forced displacement, in order to evacuate most of its residents from Medina so that it would be easy for him to turn it into a large military barracks, or a fortified castle as he desired to cling to the city due to its religious importance to the Ottomans, especially after the breakout of the Arab revolution, as the Ottoman Sultan almost lose his religious luster. Fakhri Pasha wanted to claim that Medina was still Ottoman.

However, Fakhri Pasha's insistence of not to surrender and keep Medina under the Ottoman Empire's control, wreaked havoc on Medina and its inhabitants. In addition to the policy of forced displacement for most of its residents, Fakhri Pasha seized most of the contents of the Noble Prophet's Room then they were sent to Istanbul, claiming to be preserved. Surprisingly, contemporary testimonies of Medina people stated that “Fakhri Pasha” had transported ammunition boxes and weapons into the Prophet's Mosque, as if he was trying to make use of the Prophet's Mosque as a weapons store, under the pretext that the revolutionaries would not dare attack the Prophet's Mosque due to its sanctity of occupying a special religious place; at that time, it severely hurt the people of Hijaz.

Literature is always considered unofficial history and the witness to the peoples' conditions, as there is no evidence of the impact of the bleak period of the rule of “Fakhri Pasha” of Medina from 1916 to 1919 but which is portrayed in the contemporary Saudi literature. To illustrate, the Saudi author, Maqbool Al-Alawi, issued in 2019, that is, about a hundred years after these events, his novel “Seferberlik,” which is a Turkish word meaning displacement, in order to recall the difficult days Medina had witnessed.

Back again to “Fakhri Pasha” and the siege of Medina, the siege continued even after the end of the World War I in 1918, and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, “Fakhri Pasha” did not respond to the orders of his commanders to return to Istanbul. Indeed, “Fakhri Pasha” was, as the saying<sup>1</sup> says (more royal than king) ; he refused to return or even surrender, despite the outbreak of the Spanish flu among his soldiers, when this epidemic was spreading all over the world.

In 1919, Fakhri Pasha had no escape from surrender; the Ottoman Empire was defeated, an epidemic spread among its soldiers, and the supplies and ammunition were run out, especially after the Hijaz railway was cut off. On that occasion, Fakhri Pasha was arrested, transferred to Egypt then to the island of Malta, and treated as a prisoner of war, until he was released after reconciling with Turkey, when he returned and worked in the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

In fact, the “Fakhri Pasha” era in Medina is bleak in the history of Medina, and it is deemed as a part of the federal crimes against the Arabs. Accurately, Fakhri Pasha's defense of Medina was truly a defense of the Turanian policy of the Federalists, not a defense of the holy city.

(1) The saying means he was fanatic.