

Rebellion against the Central Caliphate (al-Jamal)

'A'isha had left Mecca after her pilgrimage happy in her belief that Talha had succeeded 'Uthman. When she reached Sarif, she met 'Ubayd b. Maslama Laythi who informed her of the succession the Prophet's cousin, 'Ali. She immediately turned back, curtained herself in the Sanctuary, accused 'Ali of jumping upon 'Uthman and murdering him, while a single finger of 'Uthman was better than the whole of 'Ali. 1

Whereas 'A'isha remained in Mecca, Umm Salama the Prophet's Makhzumite widow who had performed the pilgrimage with her, after vainly warning her against joining the rebel campaign returned to Medina and gave 'Ali her backing. 2

Mecca became the natural center of Quraysh opposition. 'A'isha raised the flag of revenge for 'Uthman. Talha and al-Zubayr, seeing that others had successfully resisted pledging allegiance to 'Ali quickly broke their own oaths and left without leave to join 'A'isha.

'Ali deposed 'Uthman's governor, 'Abd Allah b. 'Amir b. Kurayz, and appointed 'Uthman b. Hunayf, whom 'Umar had entrusted with the land survey of the *sawad*, for the government of Basra. For Egypt, 'Ali chose Qays b. Sa'd b. 'Ubada. He proposed to Qays b. Sa'd that he chooses a military guard in Medina to accompany him, but Qays declined stating that if he could enter Egypt only with a military escort he would rather never enter the country. In the Yemen, 'Ali appointed Hashimite 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Abbas governor of San'a' and Sa'id b. Sa'd b. 'Ubada, the brother of Qays, governor of Janad.

'Uthman's governors, Ya'la b. Umayya (Munya) in San'a' and 'Abd Allah b. Abi Rabi'a in Janad arrived in Mecca with much money, and Ya'la brought a large number of camels, which he had gathered in the Yemen. When Ibn Abi Rabi'a arrived in Mecca, he found 'A'isha summoning the people to revolt in order to seek revenge for the blood of 'Uthman. He ordered a seat to be placed for him in the mosque and proclaimed that he would equip whoever came forth to avenge the caliph's murder. 3

Mecca was now in open rebellion against Medina. 'A'isha having given the lead, the Meccan Quraysh pinned the guilt for the murder of 'Uthman on 'Ali. Safwan b. Umayya b. Khalaf al-Juhmi,

accused all Hashimite of the murder of 'Uthman. He was one of the grand old aristocrats of Quraysh and a leading enemy of the Prophet, who had fled at the time of the conquest of Mecca rather than accept Islam and eventually the Messenger of God permitted him to stay in Mecca rather than move to Medina.⁴ He saw a chance of getting back at the old enemy allied with the Medinan.

In the war council, which was held in 'A'isha's home, it was first suggested that they attack 'Ali in Medina. The decision to move to Basra and mobilize Basran support for the claim of revenge was influenced by the argument of 'Abd Allah b. 'Amir that he could count on strong support there and by the material means he was willing to provide.⁵ Ya'la b. Munya contributed from the funds he had carried off from the Yemen. He gave 400'000 *dirhams* and provided the beasts of burden for 70 men of Quraysh. He paid eighty *dinars* for 'A'isha's famous camel 'Asker.⁶

The rebels, taking 'A'isha with them, set off for Basra. As soon as they reached al-Haw'ab, 'A'isha heard dogs barking. She asked where it was. When she knew that it was al-Haw'ab, she sighed, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him we intend to return: Now I find myself the addressee to this tradition." She added, "Once the Prophet addressing us asked which of you would go with an army to the South, and the dogs of al-Haw'ab would bark at them." She wanted to return, but 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr made fifty men of Banu 'Amir swear that it was not al-Haw'ab.⁷

When the rebels approached Basra, 'Uthman b. Hunayf sent Abu Nujayd 'Imran b. Husayn al-Khuzai'is and Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali as envoys to enquire about their intention. They met 'A'isha and her companions at Hafar Abu Musa, a watering station on the road from Mecca to Basra. Moreover, they were told that they had come to claim revenge for the blood of 'Uthman and to see that an electoral council was set up to decide on the succession.⁹

Abu al-Aswad told 'A'isha that the Messenger of God had confined her for protection (*habis*). He had ordered her to stay at home and now she had come knocking the people against each other. She answered, "Is there anyone then who would fight me or say anything different from this?"¹⁰

The Basran were preparing to fight, but the night separated them. Next morning the governor moved to attack them, and there was fierce, but inconclusive, fighting in which many were killed.¹¹

The agreement to wait for 'Ali's arrival was clearly unfavorable to the rebels, and Talha persuaded al-Zubayr to break it and take 'Uthman b. Hunayf by surprise. On a windy and dark night, they attacked and seized him as he was leading the evening prayer in the mosque.¹²

'A'isha first advised them to kill 'Uthman b. Hunayf, but a woman reminded her of Ibn Hunayf's Companionship with the Prophet, she changed her mind and ordered them to imprison him. Now a Basran advised the captors to beat him and pluck his beard. Thus, they gave him forty lashes, plucked out the hair of his head, his eyebrows and eyelashes, and put him to prison.¹³

On the next morning, there was disagreement between Talha and al-Zubayr about who should now lead

the prayer. Al-Zubayr as the older man was then given precedence, and thereafter the leadership was alternated between them day by day.¹⁴ At dawn on this morning, 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr with a group of men went to the treasury, which was guarded by forty (or four hundred) Sayabija, the former slaves from Sind converted to Islam. Since they resisted, they killed all of them, including their leader, Abu Salama Zutti, a pious man.¹⁵

The general command of the Basran army was given to al-Zubayr. 'A'isha insisted that he should be acclaimed merely emir, not caliph. A decision on the caliphate would be made after the victory.¹⁶

In the exchanges before the battle, 'Ali b. Abi Talib took off his armor; approached al-Zubayr and reminded him of an incident in their childhood when the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) predicted that al-Zubayr would unjustly fight 'Ali. Remembering the incident, al-Zubayr swore that he would never fight 'Ali.¹⁷ His son 'Abd Allah, however, accused him of cowardice. Al-Zubayr changed his mind again and on 'Abd Allah's advice, freed a slave in atonement for his broken oath.¹⁸

Al-Zubayr became frightened when he learned that 'Ammar b. Yasir was participating on the side of 'Ali. He remembered the famous *hadith* ascribed to the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) stating that 'Ammar was of the righteous and predicting that the rebel party would kill him.¹⁹ He might have recognized that he was merely being used as a pawn for the ambitions of 'A'isha and Talha, who were clearly guiltier of inciting the rebellions against 'Uthman than was 'Ali. To fight a bloody battle against the Prophet's cousin, pitting Muslims against Muslims, under such circumstances must have seemed both foolish and immoral to him. His son 'Abd Allah, in contrast, stood much closer to his aunt 'A'isha and was determined to fight 'Ali in revenge for the blood of 'Uthman.

There was obviously no room for negotiation and compromise. While 'A'isha and her partisans accused 'Ali of being morally responsible for the violent death of 'Uthman, 'Ali charged Talha and 'A'isha with it. 'Ali ordered a young man of 'Abd al-Qays to raise a copy of the Holy Qur'an between the battle lines and to appeal for adherence to its rules for concord. When this man was hit by arrows and then killed, 'Ali gave the order to advance and fight.²⁰

Al-Zubayr left the battlefield quiet early, and immediately set out on the route to the Hijaz. He first went to the mosque of Banu Mujashi' asking for 'Iyadh b. Hammad to seek his protection. He was told that 'Iyadh was in Wadi al-Siba', and he went there in search of him.²¹ Ahnaf b. Qays was already alerted that al-Zubayr was passing by. He remarked that al-Zubayr had led the Muslims to fight each other with the sword and now he was running away home. Three men followed al-Zubayr, and 'Amr b. Jurmuz al-Mujashi'i killed him in Wadi al-Siba'. Ibn Jurmuz, sent by Ahnaf b. Qays with al-Zubayr's sword and head, was received by 'Ali, who questioned him about the circumstances under which he had killed him. 'Ali then unsheathed and looked at al-Zubayr's sword and commented that he knew it well; al-Zubayr had many a time fought in front of the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) but had come to an evil end.²²

Talha was mortally wounded not much later. Marwan hit him from behind with an arrow, which pierced

his sciatic vein near the knee. The wound kept bleeding profusely. Attempts to stop bleeding failed, and Talha died lying under a tree. Then Marwan turned towards Aban b. 'Uthman and told him, "We have taken care of one of the murderers of your father." [159]²³

With the two leaders killed, the defeat was sealed and the armed conflict could have been halted. The presence of 'A'isha in her camel litter spurred the army on to a supreme, though senseless, effort to defend her. Ferocious fighting centered now around her camel and litter, which were protected by the armored plate, and continued for many hours. The men holding the camel's halter were killed one after the other.

The slaughter came to a sudden halt when 'Ali called for someone to hamstring the camel. As the animal dropped with its load, 'Ali and his close companions were able to approach. 'A'isha's brother Muhammad, on 'Ali's order, cut the straps fastening the litter to the animal's body and with some helpers, carried it off. The litter looked like the spikes of a hedgehog from arrows. 'Ali banged at the litter and said, "Surely, this Humayra of Iram wanted to kill me as she killed 'Uthman b. 'Affan." Then her brother Muhammad asked her, "Has anything hit you?" She said, "An arrow in the upper arm." He drew her towards himself and pulled it out.²⁴

When 'Ali faced 'A'isha, he severely reproached her for the ruins she had brought to the Muslims. It was now her turn to sue humbly for peace. "You have won the reign, Ibn Abi Talib, so pardon with goodness.²⁵ 'Ali ordered her brother Muhammad to escort her to the town then she was lodged in the house of Safiyya bint al-Harith b. Talha b. Abi Talha of 'Abd al-Dar. There she stayed for a few days. 'A'isha requested a delay, and she was granted, but after a few days, she left for Medina accompanied by a group of Basran women and some men of her choice.²⁶

'A'isha's defeat in the Battle of Camel put an end to her political career. The memory of the horrible bloodshed taking place around her litter in which so many men close to her lost their own lives and driving Muslims to kill Muslims must have disturbed her. Remembering this terrible event, she often told, "I wish I had died years before this."²⁷

The losses were substantial on both sides, though more grievous in 'A'isha's camp. Quraysh paid a heavy toll, affecting most of its clans. The lowest figures of all the dead, given are 2'500 for 'A'isha's army and 400 or 500 for 'Ali's.²⁸

Fighting Muslims opponents in a regular battle was a new experience in Islam, which the rebels initiated it. 'Ali could have treated his opponents like Abu Bakr as apostates and infidels and thus applied the common rules of warfare to them, but he ordered at the beginning of the battle that wounded and captured enemies should not be killed, those throwing away their arms should not be fought, and those fleeing from the battleground should not be pursued. After the battle, he ordered that no war prisoners, women or children, were given to be enslaved and that the property of slain enemies was to go to their legal Muslim heirs.²⁹

Here we are not going to review the history of the early caliphate, but we hope we can explain some important events that our brother ignores them. To justify the rebellion against the Muslim community, he says that Talha and al-Zubayr were among 'the Ten Companions to whom the Prophet promised the Paradise', and they would go to the Paradise.³⁰

Considering the verse ﴿**Allah was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree.**﴾ (Q: 48/18), he thinks there were only ten Companions to whom the Prophet promised the Paradise and Allah was only pleased with them. Allah revealed this verse in Hdaybiya, in A.H. 6. There were seven hundred [not ten] men with the Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.A.). Not one of the Muslims who were present failed to swear allegiance except al-Jadd b. Qays. On this occasion, the verse of *ridhwan* (Q: 48/18) came down to the Prophet.³¹

Of course, we are neither the porters of the paradise nor the keepers of the hell. ﴿**To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He punishes whomever He wishes, and forgives whomever He wishes.**﴾ (Q: 5/40). Our brothers know well the verses ﴿**And obey Allah and His Apostle, and do not dispute, or you will lose heart and your power will be gone, and be patient, indeed Allah is with the patients.**﴾ (Q: 8/46) and ﴿**O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle, and do not render your works void.**﴾ (Q: 47/33).

'Ali b. Abi Talib was the Prophet's successor, his brother,³² son-in-law and the second in rank to him.³³ Does our brother not think fighting the right Imam and the second rank to the Prophet may renders the works void? Moreover, God has not imposed holy war (*jihad*) on women. 'A'isha, who claimed revenge for the blood of 'Uthman, was neither an Islamic judge nor one of the 'Uthman's children or clan, the Apostle of Allah had confined her for protection (*habis*) and Allah had ordered her to stay in her house.³⁴

1. Ibid, 3: 18.

2. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3101

3. Ibid, 3102.

4. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852/1449), al-Isaba fi tamyiz al-sahaba, ed. 'A. M. al-Bajawi, Cairo, 1970-2, 3: 187.

5. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 19, 22; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3100.

6. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 22 - 23; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3102.

7. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 24; Maqdisi, 5: 211- 212.

8. A Companion joining Islam early or in the time of Khaybar, he had carried the banner of Khuza'a at the conquest of Mecca. 'Umar sent him to Basra to teach the people Islam (Ibn Hajar, 3: 26).

9. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 26.

10. Ibid, 24.

11. Ibid, 26.

12. Ibid, 26.

13. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3126.

14. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 27-28.

15. Baladhuri (d. 279/822), Futuh al-buldan, ed. Ridhwan Muhammad Ridhwan, Dar al-kutub 'ilmiyya, Beirut, reprint

Qumm, 1404, 369.

16. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 59.

17. Ibid, 50.

18. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 52; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3185.

19. Ibn Sa'd, 3: 190.

20. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 37.

21. Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356/967), al-Aghani, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadhal Ibrahim, Beirut, 1390/1970, 18: 55.

22. Ibn Sa'd, 3: 83; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, al-Jamal wa al-nusra li-sayyid al-'itra fi harb al-Basra, ed. 'Ali Mir Sharifi, Qumm, 1413, 388-9.

23. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 43; see ibid, 6: 257.

24. Ibid, 3: 46.

25. Ibid; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3186.

26. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 45.

27. Ibid, 3: 45-46.

28. Ibid, 3: 45; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3232.

29. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 57.

30. Salimi, 27 - 28.

31. See above, 25; Ibn Hisham, 3: 330; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 3: 1543

32. Salimi, 17.

33. See Q 3: 61.

34. See Q 33: 33.

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