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Yazid's succession to Mu'awiya and the letters sent to al-Husayn

After the destruction of Hujr, the Shi'a in al-Kufa took al-Husayn's advice and went underground. It has already been noted that by demanding the cursing of 'Ali, Mu'awiya was breaking the spirit of the concord he had reached with al-Hasan. He was to break another article of that agreement by appointing his son Yazid as his successor. Al-Husayn resolutely refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid. After Mu'awiya's death, al-Husayn left Medina and went to Mecca in order to avoid paying homage to Yazid¹.

The Shi'a in Iraq, particularly al-Kufa, saw this as an opportunity to escape from Syrian domination and give back to al-Kufa and themselves some of the privileges they had enjoyed under 'Ali. They wrote to al-Husayn urging him to lead a revolt against Yazid. The support from the Shi'a rank and file must have been increased quite considerably. For not only did al-Husayn receive letters from the ordinary Shi'a, there were also letters from several of the tribal leaders².

It seems that these men seeing that the mood of the Kufans was favourable to the Shi'a and al-Husayn, had decided to try to safeguard their own tribal positions by joining the movement in favour of al-Husayn. Al-Husayn decided to act prudently by sending his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqil to al-Kufa to assess the actual situation there.

1. Tabari, II 220.

2. Tabari, II 233-5.

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