

10. Hadith Al-Qadha, An Age Of Jungle Justice

VII

No one ever knew that looking handsome could become a criminal offence until the rule of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. The grand Sunni *muffasir*, Imam al-Alusi (d. 1270 H), proclaims:

صح أن عمر بن الخطاب رضي الله تعالى عنه غرب نصر بن حجاج إلى
البصرة بسبب أنه لجماله افتتن بعض النساء به

It is **authentically transmitted** that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, may Allah the Most High pleased be pleased him, banished Nasr b. Hajjaj to Basra because – due to his good looks, some women were obsessed with him. 1

Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) also submits:

وقد أخرج بن سعد والخرائطي بسند صحيح عن عبد الله بن بريدة قال بينما
عمر بن الخطاب يعس ذات ليلة في خلافته فإذا امرأة تقول هل من سبيل إلى
خمر فأشربها أو من سبيل إلى نصر بن حجاج فلما أصبح سأله عن ذلك فأرسل إليه
فإذا هو من أحسن الناس شعرا وأصبحهم وجها فأمره عمر أن يطم شعره ففعل
فخرجت جبهته فازداد حسنا فأمره أن يعتم فازداد حسنا فقال عمر لا والذي
نفسى بيده لا تجامعني ببلد فأمر له بما يصلحه وصيره إلى البصرة

Ibn Sa'd and al-Kharaiṭi have recorded **with a *sahih* chain** from 'Abd Allah b. Buraydah who narrated:

While 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was on patrol one night during his *khilafah*, there was a woman (he

overheard) saying, “Is there a way to get to alcohol to drink, or a way to get to Nasr b. Hajjaj?” In the morning, he (‘Umar) asked about him (Nasr), and summoned him. **He was one of the most beautiful of mankind in terms of the hair, and one of their most good-looking.** So, he (‘Umar) ordered him to collect his hair. He did so, and his forehead appeared. As a result, he became even more handsome. He (‘Umar) ordered him (again) to wear a turban. But, his beauty increased (nonetheless). So, ‘Umar said, **“No! I swear by the One in Whose Hand my life is, you cannot stay WITH ME in the same town”.** Therefore, he ordered what befitted him and relocated to Basra.²

Nasr b. al-Hajjaj, one of the Sahabah, committed no other “crime” than that he looked *very* handsome. For that, he was summarily tried and penalized, forcibly “relocated” to Basra. ‘Umar was the first human being to do this throughout history. However, in April 2013, the Saudi authorities followed his precedent in a very famous, severely embarrassing case³ that caused widespread worldwide mockery of Islam over the internet. Three Emirati men were deported by Riyadh to the United Arab Emirates literally for being “too handsome”!

‘Umar’s reason for banishing Nasr seems even weirder than the “punishment” itself. If we assumed that the *khalifah* expelled him because “women were obsessed with him”, were there no women in Basra? Apparently, no matter the claims, the true motive behind ‘Umar’s action had nothing to do with women. In fact, the *khalifah* himself outlined his justification in very clear words: he could not tolerate living in the same city with Nasr. So if ‘Umar had later moved to Basra he would still have re-banished Nasr to another faraway town. From all indications, it seems that the *khalifah* was only very bitter about the latter’s good looks.

In any case, it is pretty obvious that ‘Umar would never have tolerated the presence of Prophet Yusuf, *‘alaihi al-salam*, in Madinah had the latter lived during the former’s rule. These are Allah’s Words concerning His prophet:

وقال نسوة في المدينة امرأت العزيز تراود فتاها عن نفسه قد شغفها حبا إنا
لنراها في ضلال مبين فلما سمعت بمكرهن أرسلت إليهن وأعتدت لهن متكأ
وآتت كل واحدة منهن سكيناً وقالت أخرج عليهن فلما رأينه أكبرنه وقطعن
أيديهن وقلن حاش لله ما هذا بشراً إن هذا إلا ملك كريم

And the women in the city said, “The Queen is seeking to seduce her young man (i.e. Yusuf, her slave then). Indeed, she loves him violently. Verily, we see her in plain error.” So when she (the queen) heard of their (the women’s) accusation, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them; she gave each one of them a knife (to cut the foodstuff with), and she said (to Yusuf), “Come out before them.” **Then, when they saw him, they exalted him AND CUT THEIR HANDS. They said, “Allah forbid! THIS IS NOT A MAN! This is none other than a noble angel!”**⁴

These were the women of ancient Egypt. Prophet Yusuf was so handsome that they could not believe that he was even a man! So, one can safely conclude that the noble prophet had superhuman beauty. What strengthens this submission is that these women, in their trance over the sight of him, were absentmindedly cutting their hands with knives, without flinching! With these facts, Nasr b. al-Hajjaj was apparently a *very* ugly duckling compared to Yusuf b. Ya'qub, the prophet of Allah. Interestingly, the pagan king of Egypt tolerated and honoured Prophet Yusuf in his city, even in his palace! By contrast, if it had been during 'Umar's *khalifah*, he would have banished the prophet to a very distant land! The *khalifah* simply could not accommodate in his city any man like Nasr or Yusuf.

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1. Abu al-Fadhl Mahmud al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim wa Sab' al-Mathani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi), vol. 18, p. 81
 2. Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1415 H) [annotators: Shaykh 'Adil Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Mawjud and Shaykh 'Ali Muhammad Ma'udh], vol. 4, pp. 382-383, # 8862
 3. Rob Williams, "Omar Borkan Al Gala: Is this one of the three men who are 'too sexy' for Saudi Arabia", *The Independent*, Friday 26 April 2013 [<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/omar-borkan-al-gala-...>] [1]
 4. Qur'an 12:30-31

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