Muḥammad's Authority and Leadership Reestablished: The Prophet and 'Umar b. al- Khaṭṭāb

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Muḥammad's Authority and Leadership Reestablished : The Prophet and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb

This article explores several early Islamic traditions which confront the authority of the Prophet Muḥammad with that of his second successor, the « rightly guided » caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. We asked why these traditions strove to « demonstrate » that the authority of Muḥammad was so superior to that of 'Umar as if it was not evident. We assume that at the beginning of Islam, after Muḥammad's death, the caliph's authority as that of the ultimate religious and political leader replaced that of the Prophet. Later, other traditions were circulated to support the pre-excellence of the Prophet over the caliph. The Muslim community ultimately preferred to formulate its law based on the prophetic authority and not the caliphal one.

La réhabilitation de l'autorité de Mahomet : Le Prophète et 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.

Cet article explore des traditions musulmanes dans lesquelles le Prophète est confronté avec son second successeur, le calife « bien guidé » 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Nous nous sommes demandé pourquoi ces traditions s'acharnaient à « démontrer » que l'autorité de Muḥammad était tellement supérieure à celle de 'Umar, comme si ce n'était pas évident. Notre l'hypothèse est qu'au début de l'Islam, après la mort de Muḥammad, l'autorité du calife en tant que dirigeant religieux et politique ultime remplaça celle du Prophète. Plus tard, d'autres traditions furent propagées pour soutenir la précellence du Prophète sur le calife. La communauté musulmane préféra en fin de compte formuler ses lois d'après l'autorité du Prophète et non celle du calife.

The Prophet Muḥammad, the ultimate and most revered leader in Muslim collective memory, is the ideal according to which Islamic leadership is conceived and modeled.

In several previous articles I described early traditions where the image of the second successor of the Prophet, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, not only outshone that of Muḥammad, but was also set up as the Prophet’s rival, both in matters of the Sunna, the oral law, as well as where the revelation of the Qur’ān, the written law, is concerned. There I argued that the traditions pertaining to ‘Umar’s superiority belong to an earlier layer, and that subsequently other traditions were circulated aiming at giving Muḥammad precedence over his successor, thus restoring his authority and leadership over ‘Umar.¹ Following Goldziher, Schacht and other modern scholars I argued that these traditions, like the ones to be discussed here, do not reflect historical occurrences, but rather the ideas and beliefs of the scholars who produced and circulated them by the end of the first and the beginning of the second century AH. The texts were projected back to the first era of Islam by means of chains of transmitters, *isnāds*, in order to bestow on them the authority of the Islamic community’s founding fathers, namely the Prophet Muḥammad, his companions and their followers.

The confrontation pertaining to the images of Muḥammad and ‘Umar originated most probably from early scholars differences over the source of the authority of the Muslim leader. While certain scholars were of the opinion that the caliphs were guided directly by God Who appointed each one of them as His representative on earth, other scholars maintained that the caliph was no more than the successor of the Prophet and should abide only by Muḥammad’s law, the Sunna.

In their joint research on the caliphal title of the Muslim rulers, *God’s Caliph*, Crone and Hinds described the views of some modern scholars like Goldziher, Nallino, Nagel and others regarding the title and function of the head of the Islamic state.² The authors differed on these views by advancing their basic thesis that from the very

1. See : Hakim, “Lawgivers”; “‘Umar”.

2. Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, p. 1-6.

beginning of the caliphate, especially since the third caliph ʿUthmān, Muslim rulers considered themselves, and were addressed by their entourage, as “God’s Caliph”, *khalīfat Allāh*. According to the authors, “this title, if taken seriously, leaves no room for ʿulamā’ : if God manifests His will through caliphs here and there, there is no need to seek guidance from scholars who remembered what a prophet had said in the past”.³ Muslim scholars preferred the title “caliph of the Prophet of God”, *khalīfat Rasūl Allāh*, a term by which they could abide because it left religious authority in their hands, or as the authors put it : “Successors of the Prophet and scholars could coexist”.⁴

As for the two first caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, they were described by the authors as having rejected the title of “God’s Caliph”, and consequently serving as a mouthpiece for Islamic scholars.⁵ In an article, I argued that the title *khalīfat Allāh* was also attributed both to Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, which means from the very beginning of the caliphate.⁶

In the present paper we shall describe traditions mentioning occurrences where the image of Muḥammad clashes with that of ʿUmar specifically, with an outcome that leaves no doubt that it is the Prophet and no one else who is the one-and-only true leader of the Islamic community. It is as if some of those traditions were circulated by scholars for the only purpose of re-establishing the image of Muḥammad as the ultimate leader versus that of his formidable successor, lest anyone were to have doubted that fact.

These traditions have as yet not been discussed in modern scholarship and it is hoped that the present article will shed some light on the development of leadership in early Islamic tradition.

1/ WORKING MIRACLES

a. ʿUmar initiates a miracle

Our first example is a remarkable tradition in which ʿUmar’s image overshadows that of the Prophet and is actually extolled.

3. *ibid.* p. 21.

4. *ibid.* p. 22

5. *ibid.* p. 22.

6. See : Hakim, “ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the title *Khalīfat Allāh*”.

The companion Abū Hurayra recounted that as a group of warriors led by Muḥammad were on their way to battle, their food supply became so depleted that they complained to their leader that they were hungry and asked for his permission to slaughter some of their riding camels and prepare food. The Prophet gave his consent and they went to slaughter the beasts. They were met by ‘Umar and informed him of the Prophet’s consent. ‘Umar urged them to wait, and asked Muḥammad if it was true that he gave his permission to slaughter the camels. The Prophet replied in the affirmative and ‘Umar asked : “Then what will they ride on (in battle)” ? Muḥammad commented that he could do nothing for he had no food to give the men. ‘Umar retorted : “Messenger of God, there is something you can do. Order every man to bring whatever food he still has, assemble all the leftovers in one place and offer a prayer to God for His blessing, then distribute the food among the men”. The Prophet complied, offered the prayer and distributed the food. Miraculously, all the warriors ate to their heart’s content, and much food still remained. When he witnessed this miracle Muḥammad exclaimed : “I testify that there is no God but Allāh and I testify that I am the Messenger of Allāh. Whoever meets God with these two testimonies without any doubt in his heart shall dwell in Paradise”.⁷

In another version of this story it is mentioned that ‘Umar objected to slaughtering the riding camels, saying : “How can we slaughter the camels and then fight the enemy on foot” ? It is further mentioned that after ‘Umar’s advice, it was as if a shroud (*ghīṭā’*) covering the Prophet was lifted (*inkashafa*). After the miracle occurred, the Prophet uttered the two testimonies.⁸

In this tradition it is ‘Umar who initiates the miracle and guides the Prophet, step by step, to perform it. It is as if ‘Umar knew in advance that a miracle would occur and what its outcome would be. The Prophet only follows ‘Umar’s guidance without realizing his own power to perform miracles. As a matter of fact, the miracle occurs out of ‘Umar’s sight. Moreover, by objecting to the slaughter of the camels ‘Umar is represented as the only one who really

7. Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 2, pp. 421-422 ; Firyābī, *Dalā’il*, pp. 31-32 (2). For the similarity of this miracle with Jesus’ multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, see : Goldziher, *MS*, vol. 2, pp. 346-347.

8. Ṭabarānī, *Awṣaṭ*, vol. 1, 75-77 (63).

cares for the ensuing battle, for without their mounts the Muslim warriors' military strength would be seriously damaged. 'Umar is a true military commander who comprehends the different aspects of battle. In this 'Umar is obviously remembered as the leader under whose command the Islamic community achieved its greatest military expansion, into Persia, Syria and Iraq.

Another significant element in this tradition is the self-confidence that 'Umar's advice infuses in the Prophet's behavior. 'Umar's words lifted a "shroud" that was covering the Prophet's judgment. This renewed self-confidence brings Muḥammad to reiterate the two testimonies.

b. The Prophet initiates miracles

As opposed to the tradition described above, many traditions represent the Prophet as performing miracles on his own initiative for increasing the food available to the warriors on their way to battle or in other circumstances.⁹ In these traditions 'Umar plays no role at all or a minor one at best. One tradition, though, is noteworthy. 'Umar's himself recalled that while on their way to the battle of Tabūk (9/631) the warriors were left without food. 'Umar complained to the Prophet: "Tomorrow we will meet the enemy, they will be full and we will be hungry". Muḥammad addressed his men and ordered them to bring their leftovers. He then offered a prayer to God and miraculously there was plenty of food for everyone and more remained after they ate. Then Muḥammad uttered the two testimonies, claiming that they were the keys to Paradise for anyone who believed sincerely.¹⁰

It seems evident that this tradition, in which the same incident is reported as in the one mentioned previously, was circulated on the authority of 'Umar himself as a means to re-establish the Prophet's leadership versus that of 'Umar. Here it is 'Umar who complains about the inadvisability of fighting the enemy while hungry and it is Muḥammad who initiates the miracle on his own.

Unequivocal evidence for Muslim scholars' intention to re-establish the Prophet's leadership vis-à-vis that of 'Umar can be

9. Firyābī's *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa*, quoted here, is devoted almost in its entirety to this topic.

10. Firyābī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 35-36 (5).

found in the following report. The companion Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh recounts that his father died (version : at the battle of Uḥud), leaving a huge debt, thirty camel loads (*wasq*) of dates, to a Jewish creditor (version : his creditors). The latter demanded of Jābir that the entire debt be paid forthwith and did not agree to any delay. Jābir, who was unable to repay his father’s entire debt at once, requested Muḥammad’s help in the matter. The latter proposed to pay the debt out of the yearly crop of Jābir’s palm orchard, but the creditor refused. The next day Muḥammad came to Jābir’s orchard, walked between the palm trees and offered a prayer. After that he told Jābir to pay the man and left. Jābir found that he could pay the thirty *wasq* and was left with seventeen more. Then he went to meet the Prophet and informed him that the man received payment in full and that seventeen *wasq* of dates were left. Upon hearing this Muḥammad said to Jābir : “Tell this to ‘Umar”. Jābir informed ‘Umar and the latter commented : “As soon as he went walking between the palm trees I knew that he would bless them”.¹¹

In a different version of this story we are told that after the miracle was performed Jābir informed the Prophet that not only had he paid the creditor in full but that he was also left with a great amount of dates. Upon hearing this, Muḥammad turned to ‘Umar who was at his side and said to him : “Did you hear that”? And ‘Umar answered : “We know that you are the Messenger of God, and I swear by God that you are indeed the Messenger of God”.¹²

The Prophet performed the miracle on his own and his superiority was uncontested. Why then, did he see fit to inform ‘Umar, of all people, about this accomplishment? Why did he ask him if he heard Jābir’s story, as if he was saying to him : “Do you see what I can do”? ‘Umar’s answer is significant : he acknowledged that Muḥammad could indeed perform miracles and that he was indeed the Messenger of God, as if anyone had any doubt about this. It is evident that the scholars who circulated the different versions of this tradition were aware of opposing reports, previously circulated, according to which one might have been induced to believe that ‘Umar was superior to Muḥammad.

11. Firyābī, *Dalā’il*, 82-83 (47).

12. Firyābī, *Dalā’il*, 84-85 (49).

c. Salmān's conversion to Islam and his manumission

It seems that the most significant tradition aiming at establishing the superiority of the Prophet's image over that of 'Umar is the one recounting the wondrous story of Salmān al-Fārisī's conversion to Islam and the contract he made for his manumission (*mukātaba*).¹³ This tradition was circulated in many versions and the differences between these versions reflect the differing attitudes which the scholars who circulated them had towards the two leaders' images.

Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/768) quotes one of the earliest detailed versions of this story. Salmān reports that he was born as a Magian (*Majūsī*) and very early in his life set out to find the "true" religion. During his wanderings he met a Christian monk who introduced him to Holy Scripture and converted him to Christianity. For a while he lived under the tutelage of his spiritual mentor. After the latter died, he lived with other Christians in various places. From the Christian scriptures he studied, Salmān acquired knowledge about a great prophet who was due to appear and learned to recognize the "signs of prophethood" (*alāmāt al-nubuwwa*) that would characterize this prophet. Unfortunately, Salmān was abducted and sold into slavery to a Jew from Medina. There he heard about Muḥammad, about whom it was said that he was a prophet. Salmān looked for the "signs of prophethood" in Muḥammad and indeed found them : Muḥammad did not eat food destined for alms, agreed to eat only food that was offered to him as a gift, and on his shoulder one could discern a signet (*khātam*). Salmān became convinced that this was the prophet announced in the Christian scriptures, and soon believed in him and converted to Islam. Salmān then recounts that the Messenger of God instructed him to draw a contract with his master (*kātib*) to free him from slavery. He drew a contract according to which he would have to plant three hundred date palms and pay forty ounces of gold to his master. Muḥammad ordered his companions to help Salmān in his endeavor. Each one of them contributed as many palm plantlets as he could afford until all three hundred were available. Then the Prophet ordered Salmān to dig holes and declared that he himself would plant every one of the plantlets. After the holes were

13. On Salmān, see : Horovitz, "Salmān al-Fārisī".

ready the Prophet came and planted each sprout with his own hand. Miraculously, all the plantlets soon took root and flourished. Later on the Prophet miraculously produced the right amount of gold to pay for Salmān's freedom.¹⁴

This version of Salmān's story is considered an important piece of evidence among Muḥammad's "proofs of prophethood" (*dalā'il al-nubuwwa*) and is quoted in the sources dealing with this topic.¹⁵

Other versions of this story differ significantly from Ibn Ishāq's. In them Muḥammad's image is opposed to that of 'Umar. The companion Burayda b. al-Khaṣīb (d. 63/683) recounts the story of Salmān's conversion as told in the above version. Then Burayda relates that Salmān was the slave of some Jews¹⁶ and that the Prophet bought him from them for a certain amount of dirhams and it was agreed that Salmān would plant a certain number of palm sprouts and would work in the orchard until the trees flourished and bore dates (after several years). The Prophet himself came and planted all the sprouts except one that 'Umar planted. Miraculously, all the trees bore dates in the same year except one. Muḥammad asked who planted this sprout and was told that it was 'Umar. He uprooted it and planted a new one, which soon flourished.¹⁷

Here again the palm trees miraculously bore dates in the same year they were planted by the Prophet. But unlike Ibn Ishāq's version, Burayda's has 'Umar planting one sprout, which failed to grow. Muḥammad discarded it and planted a new one in its stead, which then flourished. We are made to understand that 'Umar's minimal endeavor was no match for Muḥammad's great achievements. Taken metaphorically, it seems that this version represents the scholars' answer to all the traditions pertaining to 'Umar superiority : whatever laws 'Umar was supposed to have formulated¹⁸ could not prevail; only Muḥammad's law would regulate the everyday life of the Muslim community in the future, just as the palm trees bore

14. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, vol. 1, pp. 173-178; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 5, pp. 441-444.

15. Abū Nu'aym, *Dalā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 258-269 (199); Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 82-100. Both sources quote Ibn Ishāq's version.

16. One source claims that these were Jews of the Banū Qurayza. See Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, Vol. 4, p. 293.

17. Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 5, p. 354.

18. For which, see : Hakim, "Lawgivers".

dates immediately after Muḥammad planted them, while 'Umar's single shriveled and remained fruitless. It seems evident that this version was put into circulation with the sole aim of re-establishing the Prophet's leadership.

And yet there is evidence that other scholars strove to preserve 'Umar's authority as much as possible. A version of Burayda's report recounts the same story but refers to the companion who planted the sprout that did not flourish as "somebody" (*fulān*), thus avoiding any explicit mention of 'Umar.¹⁹

But even this version was apparently not favorable enough in the view of 'Umar's supporters. Another version has Salmān himself recalling the story of his conversion to Islam. When he reached the account of the one sprout that was planted and did not flourish, he admitted that he, Salmān, was the one who had planted it.²⁰

The scholars who circulated this latter version found no difficulty in identifying Salmān as the companion who planted the fruitless sprout. A comparison with the reports described above leaves little room for doubt that here Salmān's image replaced 'Umar's. Be that as it may, the superiority of Muḥammad over 'Umar remained uncontested.

Beside the conflict between Muḥammad and 'Umar over the matter of performing miracles, our sources have preserved several other instances where the two leaders clashed. In these reports 'Umar is depicted as unruly and rebellious, compelling Muḥammad to exert his authority as if to show him "who is the boss". 'Umar can do nothing but yield and obey. Below several such incidents will be described.

2/ THE CONTROVERSY OVER JUDEO-CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE

The Muslim attitude towards the Holy Scripture of Jews and Christians is complex. The controversy over whether or not it is permissible to read them and learn from them has been well investigated in modern research.²¹ Here we shall analyze the

19. Bazzār-Haythamī, *Kashf*, vol. 3, pp. 268-269 (2726).

20. Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 5, p. 440; Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 2, pp. 217-218.

21. See: Kister, "Ḥaddithū". Many of the reports quoted here were already mentioned by Kister.

reports concerning this topic from the perspective of 'Umar's role in them. This will enable us to highlight the methods used by scholars who circulated them to rehabilitate the Prophet's image versus that of 'Umar, even if, admittedly, such was not their main purpose.

A report circulated in many versions relates a frame story according to which 'Umar read a Jewish-Christian holy book and expressed admiration for its contents. He also proposed that some of the commandments included in these scriptures should be incorporated into Muslim law. This proposal saddened and angered the Prophet. When 'Umar became aware of Muḥammad's wrath, he immediately repented and stressed his devotion to Islam and to Muḥammad.

According to the most widespread version, the companion Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh recounts that 'Umar came into the presence of the Prophet holding a book he received from one of the "people of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitāb*). The Prophet read the book and became angry. He said to 'Umar: "Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, are you confused (*mutahawwikūn*) about 'it'?"²² I brought "it" to you white and pure. Don't ask the People of the Book a thing. They may tell you a truth which you will not believe or tell you lies which you will believe. By God, I swear that were Moses alive he would not have had a choice but to believe in me".²³

The Prophet describes those who read or study the scriptures of the People of the Book, 'Umar included, as "confused" (*mutahawwikūn*). Al-Ḥasan al Baṣrī (d. 110/719) renders this term as "perplexed" (*mutaḥayyirūn*).²⁴ Abū 'Ubayd, al-Qāsim b. Salām (d. 224/839) interpreted the Prophet's utterance as if he said to 'Umar: "Are you perplexed regarding Islam? Do you know so little about your religion that you need to learn it from the Jews and Christians?"²⁵ Lexicographers interpreted the term *mutahawwik* as "hesitant", "indecisive" (*mutaraddid*), "base, vile" (*sāqit*), "sinner" (*yarkabu al-dhunūba wa al-khaṭāyā*) or even as "someone who

22. The Prophet literally said : *fthā*, in it, and *ji'tukum bihā*, "I brought it to you", by which he meant, according to Muslim interpretation, the True Religion, the *Ḥanifiyya*. See : Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb*, vol. 3, p. 29.

23. Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 387.

24. Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb*, vol. 3, pp. 28-29.

25. Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb*, vol. 3, p. 29.

undertakes something without proper consideration, with little care and in a headlong manner" (*yarkabu al-shay'a bi-qillati mubālātin wa ghayri rawiyyatin*).²⁶

Whatever the interpretation, 'Umar is obviously reprimanded harshly by Muḥammad. The Prophet is the one devoted to the True Religion, the white and pure one, while 'Umar and his likes are represented as weak in their faith, and thus driven to seek knowledge in other religions.

In another version of this tradition, Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh reports that 'Umar showed the Prophet a copy of the Torah but Muḥammad did not pay heed. As 'Umar started to read from the book the face of the Prophet expressed deep anger. Abū Bakr admonished 'Umar and cursed him for angering Muḥammad. 'Umar, terrified, immediately exclaimed: "I seek protection from God for having angered God and His Prophet. We are satisfied with Allāh as our God, with Islam as our religion and with Muḥammad as our Prophet". Then Muḥammad said: "I swear by God that if Moses were to appear before you and you decided to follow him and leave me you would have strayed from the right path. Were he living now when I am Prophet he would have believed in me".²⁷

Learning from the Torah is considered by the Prophet as doubting the basic fundamentals of Islam. Muḥammad's harsh reaction compels 'Umar to declare his abject and unequivocal devotion to God, Islam and the Prophet.

In this version Abū Bakr, a Qurayshī *Muhājir* from Mecca, is the defender of Muḥammad, who expresses his total devotion to him. In other versions this role is attributed to either of two companions from the *Anṣār*: 'Abd Allāh b. Thābit²⁸ or 'Abd Allāh b. Zayd²⁹. The variable ascription of this role would seem to point to the existence of some tension between *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār* regarding the task of defending Muḥammad in times of crisis. This can be concluded also from another version of our tradition in which, when Muḥammad was angered by 'Umar's reading of the Torah,

26. See: Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, s.v. *h w k*

27. Dārimī, *Sunan*, vol. 1, p. 122.

28. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Mu'annaf*, vol. 10, pp. 313-314 (19213).

29. Haythamī, *Majma'*, vol. 1, p. 421 (810). The tradition is quoted in this source from Tabarānī's *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, yet it is not to be found there, since some parts of this book are still missing.

the Anṣār quickly took their swords in hand to defend the Prophet against the aggressor.³⁰

The main purpose of these traditions is to deter Muslim believers who would seek knowledge from Jewish-Christian Holy Scripture, and make them abide by the Qur'ān and the Prophet's Sunna only. Scriptural knowledge is considered harmful and may lead to confusion. While the Prophet forbids it, 'Umar tends to allow it. In the conflict that developed in early Islam regarding this topic, as described by Kister,³¹ Muslim scholars needed a strong leading image to oppose the Prophet and ultimately yield to him. Only 'Umar could play such a role in this heated conflict. By stressing the Prophet's supremacy over 'Umar in this matter, Muslim tradition both annulled the legitimacy of Jewish-Christian Holy Scripture and re-established Muḥammad's authority by giving him the upper hand over his opponent.

3/ THE ḤUDAYBIYYA AFFAIR

Modern scholarship has explored the Ḥudaybiyya affair from almost every possible aspect, and yet it has almost completely ignored 'Umar's provocative role in the events and its background.³² In some versions describing the affair, 'Umar fiercely opposes the Prophet's decision to sign a treaty with his Qurayshī enemies, but eventually he submits to the will of Muḥammad. Certainly these reports recounting the clash between the two men must not be considered historical, at least not as far as the Ḥudaybiyya treaty is concerned; rather, Muslim scholars put them into circulation in order to contrast these two conflicting figures. By using this device, the scholars first legitimized a treaty that may have appeared intolerable in Muslim collective memory, as will be described below, and also crystallized the Prophet's image as the one true leader of the Muslim Umma.

Al-Miswar b. Makhrama and Marwān b. al-Ḥakam both recount that during the deliberations between the Prophet and Suhayl b.

30. 'Uqaylī, *Du'afā'*, vol. 2, p. 21.

31. See : Kister, "Haddithū".

32. See : Goerke, "Hudaybiya"; Hawting, "Hudaybiyya"; Ali, "Hudaybiyya"; Lecker, "Hudaybiyya" (in Hebrew). These studies virtually ignored 'Umar's role in the affair.

ʿAmr, the representative of Quraysh, the former agreed to the harsh conditions imposed by the latter. These included giving up the *basmala*, the Islamic formula “In the name of Allāh the Compassionate, the Merciful”, in favor of the pre-Islamic formula “In Your Name O Lord” (*bismika Allāhumma*). Moreover, Muḥammad agreed to forsake his title of “Messenger of God” and instead to use just his name, “Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh”. But Muḥammad’s most painful concession was his commitment to return back to Quraysh any Muslim convert who fled from Mecca and found refuge in Medina. Upon hearing this last concession ʿUmar is supposed to have commented : “I swear by God, never since my conversion have I doubted Islam but this day”. Following this comment ʿUmar confronted the Prophet and the following harsh argument ensued :

“U : Are you not really the Prophet of God ?

M : Yes I am.

U : Are we not on the right path and is our enemy not on the wrong path ?

M : Yes.

U : Why then do we agree to demean our religion ? (*fa-ʿalāma nuʿtī al-daniyya fī dīninā*)

M : I am the Messenger of God. I will never disobey His command and He will not mislead me.

U : Did you not claim that we shall reach the Kaʿba and perform the circumambulations around it ?

M : I did, but did I ever say that we shall perform [the pilgrimage] this very year ?

U : No, you did not.

M : You shall reach the Kaʿba and perform the circumambulations around it”.³³

Here ʿUmar admits quite explicitly that he doubted Islam on that day because he could not accept the Prophet’s resolve to yield to the harsh conditions imposed by the Qurayshī delegate. As far as ʿUmar was concerned, the Prophet’s compliance meant the humiliation (*daniyya*) of Islam. He was unable to grasp the more general considerations which dictated the Prophet’s behavior, and therefore fell into doubt. That doubt drove him to ask Muḥammad to re-affirm the certainty that he was the Messenger of God, the truth of his godly mission and the eventual fulfillment of the promise he had

33. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, vol. 3, p. 247 ; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣnafa*, vol. 5, pp. 339-340.

made his companions that they would perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Prophet answered out of a deep devotion to his mission and a conviction that he had been guided by God on the right path. He agreed to yield to the conditions imposed upon him because God commanded so, and he could never go against God's wish. As for the promise he gave his companions to perform the rites of the pilgrimage, it was to be fulfilled eventually, but deferred to a later time.

ʿUmar, who doubted the Prophet, used to say later : "I have not ceased giving alms and praying and freeing slaves because of what I did that day out of fear for what I have said, when I hoped that (my plan) would be better".³⁴ There is no doubt that this episode re-establishes the Prophet's image as the highest authority pertaining to the leadership of the Muslim *Umma*.

In another version of this episode ʿUmar's behavior is even bolder. His doubts concerning the Prophet's decision to yield to Quraysh brings him to almost open rebellion. In his own words ʿUmar is made to say : "The Prophet of God reached an agreement with the people of Mecca at Ḥudaybiyya and yielded on several issues. Had he appointed as my leader anyone else who would have done what the Prophet did, I would not have listened to him nor would I have obeyed him" (*mā sami'tu wa lā ata'tu*).³⁵

In this version ʿUmar openly admitted that he would have rebelled against any authority except Muḥammad's. The scholars who circulated this version obviously represented the undaunted ʿUmar as yielding only to the leadership of Muḥammad, which, after all, was what they strove to achieve.

ʿUmar's deeds at Ḥudaybiyya were evoked in the aftermath of Ṣiffīn, when the two rival parties were trying to reach an agreement to stop the bloodshed between Muʿāwiya's supporters and ʿAlī's. Abū Wā'il, Shaqīq b. Salama (d. 82/702) recalls that when ʿAlī yielded to what seemed to be the unjust conditions imposed by his enemies to hold negotiations and end the struggle according to the Qur'ān, the Khawārij, known at that time as *Qurra'*, objected and demanded to continue fighting the enemy until God made manifest

34. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, vol. 3, p. 247; for the English translation, see : Guillaume, *Muḥammad*, 504.

35. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol.2, p. 101; Ibn Shayba, *Musnad ʿUmar*, p. 55 (10).

on the battle field who the victor was. The companion Sahl b. Ḥunayf (d. 38/659), a famous supporter of 'Alī, addressed them and reminded them of Ḥudaybiyya, where the Muslims had wanted to fight the unbelievers but the Prophet had accepted the conditions imposed by Quraysh, just as 'Alī had accepted the conditions imposed on him. Suhayl recalled the episode as describe above, albeit with a remarkable difference. In the heated argument between 'Umar and Muḥammad the former is made to say : "Isn't it true that those of us who will be killed in the battle will go to Paradise, while the slain unbelievers will go to Hell"? And when the Prophet answered in the affirmative 'Umar asked rhetorically : "Why then do we accept the demeaning of our faith as long as God had not ruled (which is the right side) between us" (*fa-fīmā nu'tī al-daniyya fī dīninā wa lammā yaḥkum Allāh baynanā wa baynahum*). The Prophet gave 'Umar a similar answer to the one quoted above.³⁶

'Umar's pronouncements in this version represent him as wanting to fight the unbelievers until victory. So much so that he is made to oppose the Prophet on this issue. Muḥammad's answers do not satisfy him. Since it is clear to him that Muslim fighters who are killed in battle go to Paradise and their enemies to Hell, he sees no point in negotiation. It seems that he does not understand the Prophet's view, that in negotiations one can sometimes achieve more than in battle. As far as he is concerned, God decides which side to support in the battle and grants him victory. However, Muḥammad through divine guidance knows that the time is ripe for negotiations. Muḥammad's pragmatic leadership in this affair became a model for Muslims in later generations³⁷ and was perceived as one of the proofs of his prophethood.³⁸

By linking the Ḥudaybiyya affair with the events at Šiffīn many interesting parallels could be drawn. It will be remembered that in the above-quoted tradition Sahl b. Ḥunayf recalled that after 'Alī agreed to sign the agreement the Khawārij approached him fully

36. Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 485. For a detailed version of this tradition, see : Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 7, pp. 557-558 (37901). This version was quoted there in the chapter dealing with the fight against the Khawārij.

37. Lecker comments that both Anwar al-Sādāt from Egypt and Yassir 'Arafāt from the PLO used the Ḥudaybiyya agreement in order to legitimize their agreements with Israel. See : Lecker, "Ḥudaybiyya" (in Hebrew), p. 14.

38. Qiwām al-Sunna, *Dalā'il*, vol.3, pp. 1131-1133 (102).

armed and swore that they would not stop the battle, but would fight until God judged between the two factions (*ḥattā yaḥkuma Allāh baynnā wa baynahum*). This utterance constituted a refusal to let mortals decide which side was in the right. Hence the title *Muḥakkima* given to the Khawārij, meaning “those who look forward to God’s rule”. Their position is supposedly derived from the statement, twice repeated in the Qur’ān (Q12:40 and Q12:67), that : “*ini-l-ḥukmu illā li-Llāhi*, judgment belongs only to God”. Another verse that comes to mind is Q7:87 : “And if there is a party among you who believe in the Message I have been sent with, and a party who believe not, be patient till God shall judge between us (*ḥattā yaḥkuma-Llāhu baynanā*). ‘Umar’s statement to the Prophet at Ḥudaybiyya is astoundingly similar : “*wa lammā yaḥkumu-Llāhu baynanā wa baynahum*”, meaning : “as long as God has not ruled (which is the right side) between us”. His behavior at Ḥudaybiyya is thus shown to be a precursor to the conduct of the Khawārij at Šiffin. Both strove to determine the outcome of the conflict on the battlefield, regardless of the price. ‘Umar would not accept the judgment of a mortal, even if it was the Prophet himself who had agreed to yield. The Khawārij appeared later on the scene and similarly would not yield to human authority. It seems that the scholars who circulated this version needed a man of ‘Umar’s stature to represent the Khawārij and then have him defer to the leadership of Muḥammad. His zealous protectiveness toward the honor of Islam put him in direct conflict with Muḥammad. But ultimately he yielded to the Prophet’s superior authority. This illustrates how ‘Umar’s greatness shrivels when opposed to Muḥammad’s authority. We are made to understand that the Prophet, the true leader, knows best what is good for the community as a whole.

4. THE SHĪ‘ITE REACTION

The Shī‘ite scholars were well aware of ‘Umar’s own utterance concerning the Ḥudaybiyya treaty when he exclaimed : “I swear by God, never since my conversion have I doubted Islam but this day”. Since they always claimed that ‘Umar never truly believed, this utterance came in very handy for them. By his own admission, ‘Umar here doubted the truth of Islam ; such doubt was a heresy that

rejected Islam and Muḥammad's prophethood. As such, the Muslim community should consider him as a *munāfiq*, one who claims to profess Islam while in fact concealing doubt and hatred towards it.³⁹ For the Shī'ites, there could never be an authority higher than that of Muḥammad and the Imāms after him.

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39. Mufīd, *Fuṣūl*, p. 27; Bayyāḏī, *Ṣirāṭs*, vol. 3, p. 79.

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