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Sulayaman b. Surad and the Shi'a Revival in Kufa

Soon after the death of al-Husayn, the Shi'a in Kufa began to revive but it appears that their revival was very secretive and not on a unified basis. Five groups of Shi'a are reported by Abu Mikhnaf under five separate leaders1.

First there wasa group led by Sulayaman b. Surad al-Khuza'i who was a companion of the Prophet. Wellhausen casts doubt on this because of the name Sulayaman2.

But Ibn Sa'd explains that the name was given to him by the Prophet and he was originally called Yassar3.

His Shiite sympathies were well-known. He had fought at Siffin and in the time when al-Mughira was governor of Kufa, he was made to attend the mosque to hear the denunciation of 'Ali4.

It was also at his house that the group met that sent the first letter to al-Husayn summoning him to Kufa.

There were two other groups led by Musayyib b. Najaba al-Fazari and Rifa'a b. Shaddad al-Bajali. Both of these men belonged to the group that wrote the first letter to Husayn asking him to come to Kufa5 and Rifa'a b. Shaddad had been a member of the Shi'a at the time of Hujr b. 'Adi6.

There are two new names: 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl al-Azdi and 'Abd Allah b. Wal(in) al-Taymi of Bakr b. Wail of Rabi'a. However, at a meeting in 64 A.H. it is mentioned that all five leaders were over sixty years of age7.

They carried on their activities in secret spreading their propaganda among the Shi'a and others. It is reported that many people answered their call.

At some time, probably before the death of Yazid in 64, five leaders and a hundred members of their groups met in the house of Sulayman b. Surad, whom they chose to be the general leader of the Shi'a in

Kufa. Their main programme at this stage seems to have been to take vengeance for the murder of Husayn on his killers or for themselves to be killed in atonement for their desertion of him[8].

They named no Imam but they probably felt that after what had happened to Husayh, no surviving member of the family of 'Ali would accept leadership until they had actually secured power.

After Sulayman b. Surad had made a speech accepting leadership, Khalid b. Sa'd b. Nufayl (probably the brother of one of the five leaders, 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl al-Azdi) offered to give up his property to the Shi'a. Abu Mu'tamir, Hanash b. Rabi'a al-Kinani[9] offered the same. So Sulayman b. Surad appointed 'Abd Allah b. Wal(in) al-Taymi to be the treasurer. His task was to collect the offerings of the Shi'a and use the money to help in the preparation of those who were poor and needy[10].

The two eye-witness reporters of this meeting are 'Abd Allah b. Awf b. al Ahmar al-Azdi[11] and Humayd b. Muslim al-Azdi.[12]

Humayd b. Muslim was in the ranks of 'Umar b. Sa'd's army which massacred al-Husayn and is one of the principal reporters of that affair. It seems that the event had affected his conscience and he had now become an ardent Shi'a supporter.

With the death of Yazid, three years after the death of al-Husayn, according to a report from 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl al-Azdi, one of the Shi'a leaders, many of the Shi'a came to Sulayman and suggested that they should drive out 'Amr b. Hurayth, 'Ubayd Allah's deputy in Kufa. ('Ubayd Allah was governor of both Basra and Kufa.)

They wanted to demand vengeance publicly, pursue al-Husayn's killers, and call the people to *ahl al-bayt.* But Sulayaman told them not to be in a hurry. He pointed out that the murderers of al-Husayn were the nobles of Kufa and they would be the ones who were being asked to pay for his blood. They would become very oppressive towards the Shi'a, if they knew what the Shi'a intended and a revolt against them would achieve nothing but the slaughter of the Shi'a themselves. He ordered them to carry out a propaganda campaign among their own Shi'a and others throughout Kufa, adding that now that Yazid was dead the people would join them more quickly. 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl adds that many more people did answer the call than before[13].

Abu Mikhnaf has preserved for us an account of a speech of one of these Shi'a *dais,* 'Ubayd Allah b. Abd Allah al-Murri. It is related by a man of Muzayna, who said that he heard it so many times that he knew it by heart. The *da'i* was very eloquent and whenever he came on a group of people he would preach to them. He would begin by praising God and praying for His Apostle. Then he would say:

"God chose Muhammad as His creature for His prophethood. He singled him out for all His benefit. He strengthened you by making you his followers and bestowed on you faith in him. Through him, He prevented the shedding of your blood. By him He made safe your dangerous paths.

You were on the edge of the pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus God makes clear His signs to you. Perhaps you will be guided.[14]

Has God created from the first to the last anyone with a greater right over this *umma* than its Prophets? Has the offspring of one of the Prophets or Messengers of anyone else more right over this *umma* than the offspring of one of its own Prophet? No, by God this was never the case, nor will it ever be. You belong to God. Don't you see – don't you understand what crime you have committed against the son of the daughter of your Prophet?

Don't you see the people's violation of his sacredness, their seeking out weakness in his oneness, their staining him with blood. His things they spread out. They did not see their master in him, nor his relationship to the Messenger. By God, Husayn b. 'Ali, what trust and forbearance they betrayed – what courage, what resolution!

The son of the first Muslim in Islam, the son of the daughter of the Apostle of the Lord of the worlds. His defenders were few, his attackers were many. His enemy attacked him while his friend deserted him. Woe to the killer and reproach to the deserter. God will accept no excuse from his killer. Nor any excuse from his deserter except he sincerely repent to God and make war on the killers and thwart the corrupters.

Perhaps then God will accept repentance and remove the guilt. We call you to the Book of God and the *sunna* of the Prophet, to vengeance for the blood of the family of his house, and to war on the heretics and deviators from the true religion. If we are killed, it is better for the pious to be with God. If we are successful, we will restore power to the *ahl al-bayt* of the Prophet.[15]"

In this speech the main emphasis on al-Husayn's position is his relationship to the Prophet through Fatima. Only twice is 'Ali mentioned: the first time in al-Husayn's name al-Husayn b. 'Ali, the second time when al-Husayn is called the son of the first Muslim.

Clearly the Shi'a of Sulayman b. Surad place far more stress on the idea of succession to the Prophet by blood, than succession to 'Ali by blood. No Imam is named but from the whole tenor of the speech it must be presumed that if and when the Shi'a succeeded they would call upon the young 'Ali b. al-Husayn to take over the leadership.

In terms of policy there are three main points: to kill the murderers of al-Husayn in order to avenge his blood; to make war on the heretics and deviators from the true religion, which we can assume are the Umayyads and their supporters; and thirdly, a call to the Book of God and the *sunna* of the Prophet, which is an implicit rejection of the practice of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman, giving the Imam a great deal of scope for re-interpretation.

Probably soon after the death of al-Husayn, Sulayman b. Surad decided on what action to take. We have already seen that he was averse to coming out in open revolution against the nobles of Kufa,

fearing that the result would be another catastrophe for the Shi'a. He now decided that an outright attack on the Syrians by all the 'Iraqi Shi'a would probably have more chance of success. He fixed the blame for the death of al–Husayn on the Umayyad government and their agents. He probably thought that if he was able to conduct a successful military campaign against the Syrians,the nobles of Kufa would reject their past ways and fall in with him.

This policy was influenced by the political circumstances prevailing at the time. The Syrians were in some disarray. Trouble had broken out over the succession after Mu'awiya, the young sickly son of Yazid, had died. This had developed in Syria into a tribal conflict between Kalb and Qays. Qays were severely defeated at the end of 64 A.H. and one of their leaders, Zufar b. Harith, had taken refuge in Qarqisiyya and was still in open rebellion against the Umayyad government16.

In the Hijaz, 'Abd Allah b. al–Zubayr had put forward claims to the caliphate and assumed the title of Amir *al–Muininin.* When Yazid had died, 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad had had homage paid to Yazid's son in Basra. When he had tried to do the same in Kufa, his delegates had been driven off. Then the Kufan nobles had driven away 'Ubayd Allah's deputy 'Amr b. Hurayth and pledged allegiance to Ibn alZubayr17.

Ibn al–Zubayr had sent 'Abd Allah b. Yazid al–Ansari as his governor in charge of the military and Ibrahim b. Muhammad b. Talha in charge of *kharaj* to Kufa18.

In these circumstances, Sulayman b. Surad's decision does not seem wholly unreasonable. His aim was not to disturb the tribal leaders and still be able to get the most massive army possible. To this effect it was about this time that he probably made contact with Shi'a leaders in Mada'in and Basra. In his letters he called on them to avenge the blood of al–Husayn and to put right affairs which had become unjust. He arranged that they should meet at Nukhayla outside Kufa on the first of Rabi' al–Akhir, the next year 65 A.H19.

The Shi'a leader in Mada'in, Sa'd b. Hudhayfa b. al–Yaman called in the Shi'a members from the outlying country – apparently they were people who used to come to al–Kufa for their *'ata'* (pay) and rizq (rations) and then go back to their homes. He read them the letter and they all accepted the call?20

The Shi'a leader in Basra, al–Muthanna b. Mukharraba al–'Abdi also accepted the call21.

The letter to Basra was– taken by Zubyan b. 'Umara al–Tam imi22, while there are two names of messengers for Mada'in, 'Abd Allah b. Malik al–Taq23 and Husayn b. Yazid b. 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl24, probably the grandson of one of the five Kufan Shi'a leaders, 'Abd Allah b. Sa'd b. Nufayl.

1. Al–Tabari Ta'rikh al–rusul wal–rnuluk ed. M. J. de Goeje etal (Leiden, 1879–1901) (Hereafter referred to as Tabari,) II 497.
2. J. Wellhausen The Religio–Political Factions in Early Islam (English translation by R. C. Ostle and S. M. Walzer – Amsterdam, 1975) 124.
3. Ibn Sa'd Kitab al–tabaqat al–kabir ed. E. Sachau et al (Leiden, 1905–1940) (Hereafter referred to as I.S.) VI 15.
4. Tabari, II 32

5. Tabari, II 233–5.
6. Tabari, II 125–6.
7. Tabari, II 498.
8. Tabari, II 498.
9. I.S. VI 157 gives his name as Hanash b. Mu'tamir; with the same kunya–Abu M u'tamir.
10. Tabari, II 501.
11. Tabari, II 497.
12. Tabari, II 502.
13. Tabari, II 506–7.
14. Holy Qur'an, 3:103.
15. Tabari, II 507–8.
16. J. Wellhausen The Arab Kingdom and its Fall (English translation M. Weir – Calcutta, 1927) 184–5.
17. Tabari, II 530.
18. Tabari, II 509.
19. Tabari, II 502–3.
20. Tabari, II 504.
21. Tabari, II 505.
22. Tabari, II 505.
23. Tabari, II 504.
24. Tabari, II 502.

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