Events and Circumstances Surrounding the Martyrdom of al-Husain b. Ali

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This account is based principally on the account of Abu Mikhnaf (d. 132 A.H.) as it has been preserved in the writings of al_Tabari. It discusses the events that culminated in the murder of the Prophet's grandson.

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Introduction

This account is based principally on the account of Abu Mikhnaf (d. 132 A.H.) as it has been preserved in the writings of al_Tabari. The works of other historians such as Ibn al_A'tham, al_Dinawari, and al_Ya'qubi have also been referred to. Before discussing the events that culminated in the murder of the Prophet's grandson, it will be necessary to discuss briefly, the situation that had developed in al_Kufa during the previous twenty years.

The Abdication of al_Hasan

When in 40 A.H. 'Ali b. Abi Talib had been murdered in Kufa, his son, al_Hasan succeeded him to the caliphate. 'Ali had collected a force of 40,000 men to march on Syria in an attempt to put down Mu'awiya1.

The latter on the pretext of avenging the death of his uncle 'Uthman had been steadily increasing his power and authority at 'Ali's expense. When 'Ali was killed, confusion rapidly developed among the forces which he had assembled. It soon became apparent to al_Hasan that the situation had reached

the point where any continuation of hostilities against Mu'awiya would result in catastrophic defeat. In order to avoid this and the useless bloodshed that such a defeat would involve, al_Hasan came to terms with Mu'awiya.

A version of the settlement made between al_Hasan and Mu'awiya has been preserved by Ibn A'tham2. These are (the terms) on which al_Hasan b.'Ali b. Abi Talib settled with Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan. The latter would make peace with the former provided that he handed over to him authority for ruling the believers on condition that:

- 1. He (Mu'awiya) governed them according to the Book of God and the sunna of His Prophet, Muhammad, and the practice established by the righteous Caliphs (*sirat al_khulafa 'al_salihin*)3;
- 2. Mu'awiya was not to make a bequest (of the caliphate) to anyone after him. Rather the matter should be (settled by) a *shura* (deliberative council) of the Muslims after him;
- 3. The people (*al_nas*) would be guaranteed security wherever they were in the land of God, Syria, Iraq, Tihama or Hijaz;
- 4. The followers of 'Ali and his shi'a were guaranteed security with regard to their persons, property, women and children:
- 5. Accordingly Mu'awiya would take up the covenant and compact of God (ahd Allah wa_mithaquh); what God barred from any of His creatures would be compensated by what He gave of His own accord;
- 6. He (Mu'awiya) would not oppress al_Hasan, nor his brother al_Husayn nor any of the family of the Prophet (*ahl bait al_nabi*) with any evil (*gha'ila*) either secret or public, nor cause any of them to be afraid anywhere.

Then follow the names of witnesses to the document.

The document, if genuine presents several points of interest. It demonstrates that succession to political authority was to be decided by the Muslims and was not to lie in the hands of Mu'awiya. Although many Shi'i would oppose the idea of a shura to decide the next political leader instead of the office going automatically to the leading member of *ahl al_bait*, it was the sort of compromise that al_Hasan would have to have made. After all he himself was to pledge allegiance to Mu'awiya as the political ruler. The second important point is that Mu'awiya guaranteed the security of all 'Ali's supporters. Some of these had been involved in the death of 'Uthman and as Mu'awiya's pretext for the war was to avenge the death of 'Uthman, the treaty reveals that Mu'awiya's real interest had been the acquisition of power. The sixth clause is an undertaking by Mu'awiya not to harm any member of the Prophet's family. The public cursing of 'Ali which continued after the treaty seems to violate the condition, particularly when the ancient Arab view of cursing is taken into consideration.

Al_Tabari does not include this treaty. However he does include a story from al_Zuhri of how Mu'awiya

had sent al_Hasan a blank sheet with his own signature at the bottom, but at the same time al_Hasan had sent a sheet including his own terms, which were much less than Mu'awiya had expected. When al_Hasan received Mu'awiya's letter he doubled his demands but Mu'awiya, as he had the original terms of al_Hasan, refused to accept al_Hasan's second terms4.

The only things mentioned by al_Tabari consist of funds in the Kufan treasury and security for al_Hasan and his family5. The accounts seem to indicate at this point a strong Umaiyad bias, but at least they give evidence for the existence of a version of the treaty which was not adhered to by Mu'awiya, and probably was the actual treaty.

Al_Imama wa_I_siyasa attributed to Ibn Qutaiba includes only one condition that "The (terms) on which he, al_Hasan, made peace with him were that the Imamate should belong to Mu'awiya for as long as he was alive, but when he died, authority should belong to al_Hasan."6

This can hardly have been the full treaty and it looks like a gloss on the 2nd condition in Ibn A'tham's version. It seems likely that al_Hasan believed that the Imamate would revert to his family if the items of that condition were adhered to.

There seems to be fairly strong evidence that although al_Hasan gave the oath of allegiance to Mu'awiya, al_Husayn did not. According to Ibn A'tham al_Hasan dissuaded Mu'awiya from attempting to force al_Husayn to pledge allegiance to him7.

- 1. al_Tabari Tarikh al_rusul wa_'l_muluk ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden 1879_1901) II 1 (hereafter referred to as Tabari).
- 2. Ibn A'tham Kitab al_futuh ed. Muhammad 'Abd al_Mu'id Khan (Hyderabad 1971) IV 159_160 hereafter referred to as I.A.
- 3. On sira meaning "practice" cf. M. M. Bravmann The Spiritual Background of Early Islam (Leiden 1971) 126_130
- 4. Tabari, II 5_6.
- 5. Tabari, II 8
- 6. Ibn Qutaiba (attributed) al_Imama wa_'l_siyasa (Cairo 1904). V1, p. 261
- 7. I.A. IV 161_2 cf. Ibn Qutaiba op.cit. I 262.

The Revolt of Hujr b. Adi

While Mu'awiya was in power adherents of the Shi'a in al_Kufa remained fairly quiet. On the death of al_Hasan some of the Kufan Shi'a were prompted to write to al_Husayn urging him to lead a revolt against Mu'awiya. However in his reply al_Husayn advises them to keep their views to themselves while Mu'awiya is alive. When Mu'awiya died, he would be prepared to seek office1.

Al_Husayn may have been being merely politic in avoiding any confrontation with Mu'awiya, who had clearly established his power. However it is also possible that he was observing the terms of the treaty his brother had concluded with Mu'awiya.

During this time, the cursing of 'Ali had regularly taken place in the mosque at al_Kufa on the orders of Mu'awiya. Some of the leading members of the Shi'a, notable among them Hujr b. 'Adi, had voiced their opposition to this practice. However, Mu'awiya's governor in al_Kufa, al_Mughira b. Shu'ba, had turned a blind eye to such protests2.

On al_Mughira's death Mu'awiya had joined the governorship of al_Kufa to that of al-Basra and put the governor of al_Basra in charge of both cities. This man was Ziyad. Ziyad had been a follower of 'Ali and had enjoyed positions of some responsibility under 'Ali. For a time he had held out against Mu'awiya after al_Hasan's abdication. He had been won over by Mu'awiya through judicious bribery. The biggest bribe that Mu'awiya gave to Ziyad was the offer of paternity. Ziyad was the illegitimate child of a prostitute of Thaqif. What Mu'awiya did was to arrange witnesses to swear that his own father, Abu Sufyan, had been the father of Ziyad and he then recognised Ziyad as his brother3.

Through this offer of legitimacy to Ziyad, he seems to have gained his total support.

During the time of 'Ali, Ziyad and Hujr b. 'Adi had been comrades. When Ziyad came to al_Kufa, he attempted to use that old comradeship which the two men had shared to win over Hujr, at the same time threatening Hujr with dire consequences if there was any opposition from him4.

This seems to have worked while Ziyad was in al_Kufa but when he returned to al_Basra, Hujr and some of the Shi'a began once more to show their opposition to the cursing of 'Ali. Ziyad's deputy sent to him and he quickly returned. He sent a delegation to Hujr to try to win him over but Hujr refused. Ziyad's next act was to send the *shurta*, a kind of police force, to Hujr but he and his friends drove them off. A Shi'a rebellion under Hujr had in effect begun5.

The group with Hujr do not appear to have belonged to the front rank of Arab nobility. Hujr himself had enjoyed a position of some seniority in his tribe under 'Ali, but he owed this status to his position in Islam and his loyalty to 'Ali rather than to any traditional tribal position6.

Another close colleague of Hujr's in the revolt 'Amr b. al_Hamiq alsoappears to have had a similar status7.

Ziyad used the strategy of applying pressure to the traditional tribal leaders8, whose authority seems to have been endorsed by Mu'awiya as a means of reducing the power of the Shi'a. The policy worked and soon the numbers of Hujr's supporters were reduced. Hujr became isolated and had to flee for his life. Ziyad then threatened Hujr's tribe Kinda that unless Hujr surrendered he would execute their leader9. Thus Hujr, deprived of even a tribal base, surrendered. Ziyad sent him to Mu'awiya where he was offered his freedom if he cursed 'Ali. He refused to do this and was executed 10.

- 1. al_Dinawari, al_Akhbar al_tiwal (Leiden 1888) II 235.
- 2. Tabari, II 112_113.
- 3. Tabari, II 81_83.
- 4. Abu 'l_Faraj al_Isfahani Kitab al_aghani (Bulak_Cairo 1285) XVI, 3; Ibn Sa'd al_Tabaqat al_kabir ed. Sachau et al. (Leiden 1879_1901) VI, 152.
- 5. Ibid; Tabari, II 117ff; Kitab al_Aghani XVI, 3_4.
- 6. cf. M. Hinds "Kufan Political Alignments and their Background in the Mid. 7th Century A.D." International Journal of

Middle East Studies (Cambridge, October 1971) 362.

- 7. He is alleged to have been involved in the killing of 'Uthman.
- 8. Tabari, II 117; Kitab al_aghani XVI 3_4.
- 9. Tabari, II 125_6.
- 10. Tabari, II 116.

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.

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1. Tabari, II 220.
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2. Tabari, II 233_5.

Al_Husayn's letter to the Shi'a in al_Basra

The Shi'a in al_Basra also wrote to al_Husayn asking him to lead a revolt against Yazid. In al_Tabari's version of Abu Mikhnaf's account, the text of al_Husayn's reply is preserved. If genuine, it represents a very early record of some of the basic articles of the Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate and as such may be of great value. The letter reads as follows:

"God gave preference to Muhammad from among his creatures. He graced him with prophethood and chose him for His message. After he had warned His servants and informed them of what he had been sent with, God took him unto Himself. We are his family (ahl), those who possess his authority (awliya 'uhu), those who have been entrusted by him (awsiya 'uhu), his inheritors, and the most appropriate of people (to hold) his position among the people. Our people claim the exclusive right of this for us. Yet we have consented (to the rule of Mu'awiya) since we hate disunion and love the well_being (of the community). However we know that we are more entitled to that (the rule) because of the right which is entitled to us, than are those who have seized it. They have been brought honour, prosperity and convenience through (this) right of ours. May God have mercy upon them and forgive us and them. I have sent my messenger to you with this letter. I summon you to the Book of God, the sunna of His Prophet, which has become obsolete while innovation (bida) has become fertile. If you hear my words and obey my command, I will lead you along the path of righteousness" 1.

In this letter we see al_Husayn claiming on behalf of *ahl al_bait* that they hold the *wilaya*, (authority from God), that they are the stipulated successors of the Prophet (*wasiya*) as well as being the rightful inheritors of his authority. Furthermore implicit in al_Husayn's summons to the *sunna* of the Prophet is the idea that *ahl al_bait* know the Prophet's example and how to follow it.

1. Tabari, II 240.

Muslim b. Aqil's Death in al_Kufa

When Muslim arrived in al_Kufa, he went to the house of al_Mukhtar b. Abi Ubaid. There the leaders of the Shi'a assembled to deliver statements of loyalty and sacrifice1.

At that time the governor of al_Kufa was Nu'man b. Bashir. When reports of the activities of the Shi'a reached his ears he spoke in the mosque, denouncing revolution and preaching obedience and submission. However the pro_Umaiyad faction in al_Kufa felt that this action was not enough and they wrote to Yazid to tell him that he needed a strong governor in al_Kufa2.

When Yazid received this information, he sent an urgent message to 'Ubaid Allah b. Ziyad, his governor in al_Basra. He joined al_Kufa and al_Basra together under 'Ubaid Allah's administration, and told him to hurry to al_Kufa to put an end to the trouble3.

'Ubaid Allah left al_Basra but he took with him Sharik b. A'war one of the leaders of the Shi'a in al_Basra. It is reported that the contents of al_Husayn's letter to the Shi'a of al_Basra had already been betrayed to 'Ubaid Allah. Perhaps he was taking Sharik to see if the latter might unwittingly lead him to Muslim.

He entered al_Kufa with a small group accompanying him. He was wearing a black turban and his face was partially covered. The Kufans thought that it was al_Husayn who had come and they gathered around him with cries of welcome4.

They were soon disillusioned. After entering the governor's palace, 'Ubaid Allah called the people to the mosque. He set about finding Muslim by applying pressure to the arifs. He made them write down the names of any strangers in their *'irafa* and any rebellious or suspicious people. He held the arif responsible for what happen in his *'irafa* and threatened him with crucifixion and the cutting off of money from that *'irafa* if any information was withheld from him5.

With the news of 'Ubaid Allah's arrival, it was decided that Muslim should leave al_Mukhtar's house because of his notoriety. He moved to the house of Hani' b. 'Urwa al_Muradi of Madhhij. The wisdom of this move is questionable for we are told that it was the place where Sharik b. A'war, the leader of the Basran Shi'a whom 'Ubaid Allah had brought with him, was staying.6

It seems likely that Muslim's move brought him much closer to the surveillance of 'Ubaid Allah's spies. One of these spies, a *mawla* from Syria, was given 3,000 dirhams and told to buy himself into the Shi'a organisation. The spy only made contact after Muslim's move. He went up to Muslim b. 'Awsaja al_Asadi in the mosque and asked how he could contribute 3,000 dirhams from his people in Syria to the Shi'a cause. The reason he gave for knowing that Muslim b. 'Awsaja was a Shi'a supporter was that he had heard people saying so in the mosque7.

By insisting on giving the money personally to Muslim b. 'Aqil the spy was able to infiltrate right into the heart of the Shi'a organisation. When 'Ubaid Allah thought he had enough information, he decided to act publicly. He pretended to notice that Hani' b. 'Urwa had been absent from his gatherings and he sent three tribal leaders to bring Hani' along as a friend. However when Hani' reached the governor's palace, 'Ubaid Allah accused him of plotting against him. At first Hani' denied this but 'Ubaid Allah summoned the mawla and Hani' knew that he had been exposed. He offered to send Muslim away. However 'Ubaid Allah wanted Hani'to hand Muslim over but this Hani' refused to do. 'Ubaid Allah struck him brutally with a stick and had him imprisoned8.

At this point, it appears that Muslim b. 'Aqil's strength must have been great. 'Ubaid Allah did not try to arrest both men at Hani's house. Obviously the reason was that this would have led to a conflict which 'Ubaid Allah was by no means sure of winning. Before Hani's arrest, Muslim had sent to al_Husayn urging him to come and telling him that affairs were going well in al_Kufa and that he had 18,000 pledges of allegiance9.

By pressing Hani' to hand over Muslim, 'Ubaid Allah was also trying to achieve his purpose by treachery without the use of force.

Two of the leaders who had brought Hani' were shocked at 'Ubaid Allah's deception in the way he had used them. One protested personally and was imprisoned. The other who belonged to Madhhij, the

same clan as Hani', called out his tribesmen, who gathered outside the palace, demanding Hani's release. 'Ubaid Allah sent out the *qadi* Shuraih who assured them that Hani' was al right. Satisfied that nothing was going to be done to one of their tribal leaders, Madhhij departed 10.

When news reached Muslim of what had happened to Hani', he decided to revolt immediately. He sent a messenger around to call out the people11.

The fact that this revolt was a spontaneous reaction to a situation did not augur well for its success. In the organisation of the tribesmen into some form of army the same tribal groupings as were usually used were used again 12.

This clearly indicates that no radical preparation had taken place among the revolutionaries. For their numbers were not spread evenly among the tribes and their organisation should have reflected this.

The mobilized Shi'a forces moved off towards the palace and found its doors locked. There in the square in front of the palace, they remained with their numbers being constantly increased. Inside the palace 'Ubaid Allah had thirty men of the *shurta*, twenty of the tribal leaders and his family. While he was in this position other tribal leaders began to come to him through a side_door to the palace 13.

The fact that the Shi'a forces had not barred all entry and exit to the palace shows the incompetence of the Kufan leadership of the Shi'a and the disorganisation of the ranks.

It seems that 'Ubaid Allah had won over the vast majority of tribal leaders before the revolt had begun. The way he had done this is explained by information al_Husayn received later on his way to al_Kufa. For al_Husayn was told that the bribery of the tribal leaders had been great 14.

Thus it seems that 'Ubaid Allah had even bought the allegiance of those tribal leaders who had leaned towards the Shi'a. He now sum. moned six of the tribal leaders, two of whom had been among those who had written to urge al_Husayn to come to al_Kufa. These six, 'Ubaid Allah sent out to try and bring their followers away from Muslim. But he did not trust the rest of the nobles because he thought the paucity of his support in the palace might encourage them to throw in their lot with Muslim. So he kept them in the palace with him. Not only were these six able to leave the palace, they were also able to return bringing with them what tribal support they could muster 15.

'Ubaid Allah, now having much stronger military strength, used the tactic of assembling the tribal leaders on the palace roof to call to their tribesmen to discourage them from revolt. The major persuasion used was to warn them of the punishment they would receive when the Syrian army came and to make them believe that the Syrian army was not far away. The ploy worked and the leaderless mob began to be afraid and one by one they began to slip away. The false rumours about the approaching Syrians must have spread rapidly through al_Kufa for the women now came out into the streets and urged their men to come away. By evening there were only thirty people left to pray the maghrib prayer with Muslim b. 'Aqil16.

He realised that all was over and there was nothing to do but to make his escape. It is difficult to believe

that Muslim b. 'Aqil was so completely deserted but as no details are given about the deployment of Shi'a forces, we cannot know who was with Muslim and who was not. But it seems probable that Muslim was in command of the forces in front of the palace and the other leaders were spread out through the different districts of al_Kufa. If this was the case, then it is hardly surprising that 'Ubaid Allah's tactics worked; Muslim did not know the men who were with him; he did not know al_Kufa. He was hardly the man to be able to oppose the influence of the tribal leaders. Had there been some of the leaders of the Kufan Shi'a with him, it is not so likely that his support would have dwindled so fast.

With the disintegration of the revolt 'Ubaid Allah took swift action. He ordered the head of his shurta, Husayn b. Tamim of Tamim to control all roads and highways 17.

Muslim took refuge in a house in the Kinda quarter. However his hiding place was betrayed and Muhammad b. al_Ash'ath the leader of Kinda was sent to arrest him. The house where Muslim was hiding was surrounded. Muslim came out to fight to the death but eventually surrendered when Muhammad b. al_Ash'ath offered him a guarantee of security. He asked Muhammad to send a message to al_Husayn telling him that Kufans were liars and that he should not come. Muhammad sent the message 18.

'Ubaid Allah had Muslim tortured and Wanted Muhammad b. al_Ash'ath to execute him. The latter refused but anyway Muslim was executed on the palace roof. Then 'Ubaid Allah ordered the execution of Hani' b. 'Urwa, which took place in the market. Others who had been arrested during the course of the revolt were also executed 19.

In order to hunt down Muslim b. 'Aqil, 'Ubaid Allah had had all the roads of al_Kufa blocked. It seems likely that the controls were continued after Muslim's execution so that no Shi'a supporter could escape to al_Husayn or regroup in al_Kufa itself.

After the executions of Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani' b. 'Urwah, 'Ubaid Allah sent their heads to Yazid together with an account of events in al_Kufa. Yazid wrote back complimenting 'Ubaid Allah on his work and instructing him to keep a careful watch over al_Husayn's approach, but not to fight him20.

'Ubaid Allah sent Husayn b. Tamim to al_Qadisiya to block all approach roads21. Husayn b. Tamim sent al_Hurr b. Yazid al_Tamimi on to watch over al_Husayn22. In the meantime 'Umar b. Sa'd had been made governor of al_Rayy by 'Ubaid Allah and he had been commissioned to recruit an army of 4,000 men. However, 'Ubaid Allah then ordered him to march against al_Husayn. This he was reluctant to do but when 'Ubaid Allah threatened to dismiss him from his new office if he did not go, he agreed23.

- 1. Tabari, II 237.
- 2. Tabari, II 239.
- 3. Tabari, II 239_240.
- 4. Tabari, II 242.
- 5. Tabari, II 246. The arif is the man in charge of the distribution of stipends among a certain group, irafa. M. Hinds op,cit.

349 ays: "At both Kufa and Basra the 'irafa became a unit for the distribution of 100,000 dirhams. In most cases irafas were probably composed of the same clan, but an 'irafa was essentially a group of people with identical Islamic priority."

- 6. Tabari, II 246.
- 7. Tabari, II 247.
- 8. Tabari, II 250_252.
- 9. Tabari, II 264.
- 10. Tabari, II 252_3.
- 11. Tabari, II 253_4.
- 12. Tabari, II 255.
- 13. Tabari, II 256_7.
- 14. Tabari, II 303.
- 15. Tabari, II 257.
- 16. Tabari, II 257-8.
- 17. Tabari, II 260.
- 18. Tabari, II 261-4.
- 19. Tabari, II 264-8.
- 20. Tabari, II 271.
- 21. Tabari, II 288.
- 22. Tabari, II 296.
- 23. Tabari, II 308.

Al_Husayn's journey to al_Kufa and his death

Al_Husayn set out from Mecca shortly after the arrival of Muslim's letter urging him to come. He had with him most of his family and household retainers, some of the Kufan messengers and some pilgrims. On the way he gathered more support mainly from Bedouin tribesmen. Before he left 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas had warned him against going, stressing the fact that the Shi'a had not yet revolted on his behalf. It would be different, he argued, if he was going to a city already under the control of men loyal to him; as it was, he was acting only on a promise of revolt which might not be fulfilled, and which, even if fulfilled might not be successful.

Later, when he saw that al_Husayn was determined to embark on an active policy, he urged him to go to al_Yaman which would be much further from the Syrian forces and where he would have strong support to begin his revolt against Yazid. 'Abd Allah b. al_Zubair, who also had ambitions towards the caliphate, was pleased to see al_Husayn leave as he expected disaster.

On his way, al_Husayn met the poet, Farazdaq, who also warned him against going. 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far b. Abi Talib wrote to him warning him not to go: "If you are destroyed now, the light of the land will be put out. You are the guiding symbol of the rightly_guided, the hope of the believers." A message also came from the Umaiyad governor of Mecca guaranteeing him security if he returned to Mecca 1.

When al_Husayn reached al_Hajir, he sent a message to al_Kufa by Qais b. Mushar alSayyadawi one of the earlier Kufan messengers to him. In it he told the Kufans that he was on his way and they should begin to revolt. However Qais b. Mushar was stopped at al_Qadisiya by Husayn b. Tamim and sent as a prisoner to 'Ubaid Allah. The latter, now in complete control of al_Kufa, wanted to give a further demonstration of his power and he ordered Qais b. Mushar to go up on the *minbar* and curse al_Husayn and 'Ali. Qais went up on the *minbar* but instead of cursing al_Husayn and 'Ali, he said: "O people, al_Husayn b. 'Ali is the best of God's creatures, the son on Fatima, notable in his pro_Umaiyad position. But even he had not wanted to lead the army against al_Husayn and had only accepted the task when 'Ubaid Allah had threatened to dismiss him from his newly_appointed post as governor of al_Rayy2. The real spirit behind 'Umar's army was Shimr b. Dhi Jawshin. When 'Umar began to waver before the battle, it was Shimr who put purpose in him and by using the threat of the authority of 'Ubaid Allah he was able to make 'Umar act3.

Before the Battle of Karbala', al_Husayn and his followers spent the night in prayer and worship. There were few of them. In one passage, it is reported that there were 32 horsemen and 40 foot_soldiers4. They were facing an army of over 4,000. Al-Husayn encouraged all those with him to make good their escape then. But they all stayed with him. On the morning of the battle, they were joined by some of 'Umar's forces. Al_Hurr b. Yazid was not satisfied with the justice of the situation and crossed over to al_Husayn's side5. Each member of al_Husayn's forces bravely took up the battle, went out, fought and was killed.

Finally there was only al_Husayn left. The forces wavered for a moment, hesitant about killing the grandson of the Prophet. However, Shimr b. Dhi Jawshin led a group against him. Zur'a b. Sharik al_Tamimi and Sinan b. Anas al_Nakha'i actually delivered the death blows. It was Sinan who cut off al_Husayn s head. Altogether al_Husayn was stabbed 33 times and struck 34 times. The camp was given over to plunder. Bahr b. Ka'b took al_Husayn's *sarawil;* Qais b. Ash'ath his *qatifa.* The men even took some of the clothes from the women. However they did not harm the women. They also found the sick son of al_Husayn, 'Ali, and wondered whether they should kill him. 'Umar b. Sa'd ordered that he should not be killed nor the women touched6.

He sent the women to al_Kufa under guard. The head of al_Husayn was taken to 'Ubaid Allah and it is reported that he carved on the head with a stick7.

An alternative version makes Yazid do this when al-Husayn's head reached him8.

The heads of all the 72 supporters of al-Husayn were cut off and carried by the tribes.

- 1. Tabari, II 273_281.
- 2. Tabari, II 308.
- 3. Tabari, II 315_6.
- 4. Tabari, II 326.
- 5. Tabari, II 333_5.
- 6. Tabari, II 365_7.

Conclusion

The effects of the brutal murder of al_Husayn have had a profound influence on Islam. To all Muslims it is the most distasteful and abhorrent event in Islamic history. To them and particularly to Shia it represents, even more than that _ the acme of self-denial and sacrifice by the family of the Prophet for the Islamic community.

From the accounts, it is clear that the one concession that al_Husayn was never prepared to make was to pledge allegiance to Yazid. Earlier al_Hasan had warned

Mu'awiya that he would never make al_Husayn pledge allegiance to him. Mu'awiya appears to have heeded this advice and avoided the confrontation that Yazid had precipitated. The death of al_Husayn also marks the beginning of a division within the Shi'a. That group that was later to be known as the Imamis emphasized the spiritual importance of the Imamate and gave up attempts to win political power. This policy may well have been laid down by al_Husayn's son 'Ali after his experiences at Karbala'. However the doctrine of the spiritual importance of the imamate can already be discerned in 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far b. Abi Talib's letter to al_Husayn warning him not to go to al_Kufa:

"If you are destroyed now, the light of the land will be put out. You are the guiding symbol of the rightly_guided, the hope of the believers."

'Ali b. Al_Husayn was to follow the quiescent policy of religious leadership. It may have been him who laid great emphasis in the Shi^li *adhan*, or call to prayer, of the words: *Hayya ala khayr al_amal*, "Come to the best of works"1.

Although these words are included in the Zaidi and Isma'ili *adhan*, it was the Imami_Shi'is in the later years of the first centuries of Islam, who were to give these words their true significance by their deliberate disavowal of political action.

Thus the martyrdom of al_Husayn has had profound effects on the history of Islam and particularly the history of the Shi'a.

1. al_Baihaqi reports a Tradition from 'Ali b. al_Husayn which includes this phrase in the adhan cf. Ibn Hazm al_Muhalla (Cairo 1351 A.H.) III 161 footnote citing al_Baihaqi I 424_5.

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