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The Crisis of the Early Caliphate

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This selection is just before 'Uthman's death. Revolts have broken out in Iraq and Egypt over Uthman's rule. Delegations from both places marched on Medina. Eventually the Egyptian delegation besieged Uthman's house and killed him. This is a reciting of the Egyptian and Iraqi grievances against Uthman and his response to them.

He set out until he came upon the band [of Companions mentioned above], and then he proceeded on.

Now the Egyptians had corresponded with their fellow partisans in Kufah and Basrah, and with all those who had agreed with them to rebel against their governors. They fixed a day when their governors would be away, but save for the Kufans, none of them carried (the scheme) out properly and rose in revolt. In (Kufah) Yazid b. Qays al-Arhabi rebelled and his comrades gathered around him. The military commandant was al-Qa`qa` b. `Amr. He came to (Yazid), and the people surrounded (Yazid's followers) and implored them [to break off their revolt].

[2950]

Then Yazid said to al-Qa`qa`, "What recourse do you have against me and these men? By God, I submit to authority, and I adhere to my Community (*jama`ah*) and to them. However, I and those whom you observe are calling for the termination of Sa`id's governorship. (Al-Qa`qa`) answered, "The elite (*khassah*) seeks to end a state of affairs with which the masses (*`ammah*) are content." He continued, "That is a matter for the Commander of the Faithful." Then he left them and [their] call for [Sa`id's] resignation, while they could proclaim nothing else. They encountered Sa`id and drove him back from al-Jara`ah. The people concurred in Abu Masa [as their next governor] and `Uthman confirmed him in office.

When the governors returned [from their meeting in Mecca], the sect of Ibn Saba' (*al-Saba'iyyah*) had no way to get to the garrison towns. They wrote their adherents in the garrison towns that they should assemble in Medina in order to decide what they meant to do. They pretended that they were simply "commanding the good" and interrogating `Uthman about certain issues. Their aim was for these to circulate among the people and become verified against him.

Thus, they assembled in Medina, and as his envoys `Uthman sent two men, one from the clan of Makhzum and the other from the clan of Zuhr. He said, "Find out what they mean to do and learn all about them." These two men were among those who had won `Uthman's respect by their refined behavior (*adab*); they patiently sought the truth and harbored no malevolence. When (the dissidents) saw them, they revealed their secrets to them and informed them of their aims. (`Uthman's two envoys) said, "Who

among the Medinese supports you against this man [namely, `Uthman]?" "Three persons," they answered. The two men said, "Is there anyone else?" "No," they said. The two (envoys) went on, "So what do you intend to do?" They replied, "We want to mention to (`Uthman) certain misdeeds that we have planted in the hearts of the people. Afterwards we shall go back to them and claim that we compelled him to confess these things, but that he did not abandon them or repent. Then we will set out in the guise of pilgrims until we reach [Medina]. We will surround him and depose him, and if he refuses we will kill him." And so it happened.

[2951]

The two (envoys) returned to `Uthman with the news, and he laughed, saying, "O God, preserve these (enemies of mine), for if You do not preserve them, they will be wretched indeed. As for `Ammar (b. Yasir), he violently assaulted `Abbas b. `Utbah b. Abi Lahab. As for Muhammad b. Abi Bakr, he was highly regarded until he supposed that he was not bound by rights and obligations (*huquq*). As for Ibn Sahlah, he faces trial and tribulation."

Then (`Uthman) sent to the Kufans and Basrans, and summoned them to pray in congregation. They assembled before him at the base of the pulpit, and the Companions of the Messenger of God came and surrounded them. Then (`Uthman) praised and extolled God, and told them the news of this band [of dissidents]. Then the two (former envoys) arose, and all (those present) said, "Kill (the dissidents)! Verily the Messenger of God has said, 'God's curse is on any man who has summoned [others] to join him or anyone else while there is an imam over the people, so put him to death.' And `Umar b. al-Khattab said, 'I permit you only to kill (such a man), and I am your partner [in that deed].'"

Then `Uthman responded, "Nay, but we do our utmost to pardon and accept and enlighten them, and we oppose no one until he violates a divine commandment (*hadd*) or manifests unbelief. Now these (dissidents) have mentioned various matters, concerning which you and they are equally well informed. However, they allege that they are bringing (these matters) to my attention in order to compel me [to respond] to them in the presence of those who remain uninformed."

"They say, 'He has performed the complete prayer rite while traveling [by performing four *rak`ahs* instead of two], when for-

[2952]

merly this was not done."²⁷¹ But in fact I came to a town [namely, Mecca] where my household was residing, [while I had property in al-Ta'if], and on account of these two things I carried out the full rite.²⁷² Is this the case?" (The assembled people) said, "O God, it is so."

"They say, 'You prohibited public use of a grazing reserve.'²⁷³ But by God, (the pasture land) whose use I restricted had already been reserved before me. By God, they [namely, 'Uthman's predecessors] did not forbid grazing rights to anyone. They only reserved (grazing land) that the inhabitants of Medina had usurped, and they prevented no one from pasturing [his animals]. They used it only for the alms taxes²⁷⁴ due from the Muslims, guarding them lest there be a dispute between anyone and the official in charge of (the alms tax). But they neither barred nor ejected anyone from it, save those who offered a dirham.²⁷⁵ I possess no camels save two riding animals; I have no other livestock at all. When I became caliph, I had more camels and sheep than any of the Arabs, and today I have neither sheep nor camels, except for two camels to use for the Pilgrimage. Is this the case?" (The people) said, "O God, it is so."

"(The dissidents) say, 'The Qur'an used to be [preserved in a number of different] written versions (*kutub*), and you have abandoned all but one.' But verily the Qur'an is one, and came through one [man]. In this matter I have only followed these.²⁷⁶ Is this the case?" "Yes," they replied. They sought to have him kill (the dissidents).

"(The dissidents) say that I brought al-Hakam back after the

²⁷¹. A reference to 'Uthman's additions to the rites of prayer at Mina during the Pilgrimage; see above, pp. 38-40 (text, I, 2833-2835, *sub anno* 29), and note 65.

²⁷². The phrase in brackets is supplied in accordance with Pryn's suggestion; see note a.

²⁷³. There is a somewhat fuller parallel account of this dispute in Baladhuri, *Ansab*, V, 38.

²⁷⁴. That is, these taxes (*sadaqat*) had been paid in animals—presumably camels—rather than cash.

²⁷⁵. That is, rich men who tried to gain privileged access to the grazing reserve by bribery. See de Goeje, *Introductio*, cccii.

²⁷⁶. The reference of course is to 'Uthman's decision to establish a single definitive recension of the Qur'an, and to destroy the existing versions with their many discrepancies. "These" presumably refers to the board of editors (headed by Zayd b. Thabit) whom he appointed to carry out the task.

Messenger of God had exiled him. Now al-Hakam was a Meccan; the Messenger of God exiled him from Mecca to al-Ta'if, and then he brought him back. Thus, the Messenger of God both sent him into exile and had him return. Is that the case?" They said, "O God, it is so."

"(The dissidents) say, 'You have appointed youths as governors.' But I only appointed a man who was capable and commanded broad support [namely, 'Abdallah b. 'Amir in Basrah]. These (dissidents) are inhabitants of his province, so pay them no heed regarding him.²⁷⁷ My predecessors appointed younger men than these to office, and people spoke more harshly to the Messenger of God than they have to me in connection with his appointment of Usamah.²⁷⁸ Is that the case?" They responded, "O God, it is so. (These dissidents) denounce to the people things that they leave unexplained."

"(The dissidents) say that I gave to Ibn Abi Sarh the booty that God bestowed upon him [during the campaign in Ifriqiyah].²⁷⁹ But in fact out of the booty that God gave, I only turned over to him one-fifth out of the one-fifth [legally allocated to the caliph]. The amount was 100,000 [dirhams], and Abu Bakr and 'Umar did the same thing. The army claimed to find this reprehensible, and so I have restored to them [the 100,000 dirhams], though it was not really theirs. Is that the case?" They said, "Yes."

"(The dissidents) say that I love my kinsmen and that I make gifts to them [from the public treasury]. As to my love, it has not been turned into wrongdoing for their benefit; on the contrary, it is the weightiest of [my] obligations to them. As to [my] gifts to them, what I give them is drawn from my own property; I do not regard the wealth of the Muslims as lawful for myself or for anyone else among the people. I used to give large and much-coveted gifts from my personal property in the time of the Messenger of God, Abu Bakr, and 'Umar, and at that time I was ava-

[2953]

²⁷⁷ I have emended the text in accordance with Pryn's suggestion, note 1.

²⁷⁸ In 11/632, shortly before his death, Muhammad put the young Usamah b. Zayd b. Harithah in command of a raid into the Balqa' (the district around Karakah east of the Dead Sea) and al-Darum (a fortress just south of Gaza). See Ibn Ishaq, *Sirah*, 776, 970, 999; Guillaume transl., 523, 652, 678. *Al-Darum: Le Strange, Palestine under the Moslems*, 412, 437.

²⁷⁹ On this incident see above, pp. 19-20 (text, I, 2814-2815, *sub anno* 27).

ricious and greedy. Now when I have attained the usual life-span of my family, when my life has reached its end and I have distributed my property among my relatives, do the heretics (*mulhid*) say such things? Indeed, by God, no one can rightfully say that I have had any garrison town surrender [its] surplus revenues, for I have returned (the surpluses) to them.²⁸⁰ I have received only the twenty percent [legally allocated to the caliph], and from this I have allowed nothing for myself. The Muslims have taken charge of registering (these revenues) for the proper recipients with no involvement from me, and not a penny of God's wealth has been diverted. Now what is beyond that and what I use to sustain myself I consume only from my own property."

"(The dissidents) say, 'You have given the land to certain men.' As regards these lands, when they were conquered, the Emigrants and Helpers shared in them with (these men). If a man remained any place within these conquered territories, his family followed his lead. If a man has returned to his family [from the conquered lands], that does not negate [his claim to lands] that God has acquired for him. I determined what should be distributed to them out of (the conquests) that God had bestowed upon them. Then, at their request, I purchased (property of equivalent value) for them from [other] men who owned land in Arabia. Then I transferred their share [of the conquered territories] to (these latter), and it is now in their hands."²⁸¹

'Uthman had divided his wealth and lands among the Banff Umayyah, treating his own children as he did the other recipients. He began with the Banff Abi al-'As, giving the men in the lineage of al-Hakam (b. Abi al-'As) 10,000 [dirhams] each; they [2954]

²⁸⁰ *Wa-inni wa-'llahi ma hamaltu `ala misrin min 'l-amsari fadlan fa-yajuza dhalika liman qalahu wa-laqad radadtuhu `alayhim. See de Goeje, Introductio, cdiv, sub verbo fadl.*

²⁸¹ This passage refers to 'Uthman's grants of estates and villages within the conquered territories (Iraq in particular) to powerful individuals. 'Umar had done the same thing, but 'Uthman was thought to be overly generous in this regard. See Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 241-45. There have been numerous allusions above to this and to the resentment inspired by it. For example, see pp. 58, 59-61, 112-13, 120-21 (text, I, 2852, 2854-2855, 2908, 2916). The last sentence is difficult: *Fa-bi'tuhu lahum bi-amrihim min rijalin ahli `aqarin bi-hiladi 'l-'Arabi fa-naqaltu ilayhim nasibahum fa-huwa fi aydihim duni. See Caetani, Annali, VIII, 203.*

took 100,000 dirhams [altogether]. To his own sons he gave a like amount. (The remainder) was divided among the Banff al-`As, the Banff al-`Is, and the Banff Harb.²⁸²

`Uthman's retinue (*hashiyah*) had dealt leniently with those bands [of dissidents]. The Muslims demanded nothing short of putting them to death, while (`Uthman) insisted on letting them go. Thus, (the dissidents) departed and returned to their own provinces, having agreed to attack him²⁸³ [when they came back] in the guise of pilgrims in the company of [genuine] pilgrims. They corresponded with one another, saying, "Rendezvous in Shawwal at the outskirts of Medina." Thus, in Shawwal of the year 12 [of `Uthman's reign; April 656] they erected tents in the manner of pilgrims and made camp near Medina.

It was transmitted to me in writing by al-Sari—Shu`ayb—Sayf—Muhammad and Talhah and Abu Harithah and Abu `Uthman: In Shawwal of the year 35 (April 656), the Egyptians set out in four companies under the leadership of four commanders. The lowest number cited is six hundred, while the highest is one thousand. Leading the companies were `Abd al-Rahman b. `Udays al-Balawi, Kinanah b. Bishr al-Tujibi,²⁸⁴ Sudan b. Humran al-Sakuni, and Qutayrah b. Fulan al-Sakuni. In command of the whole body of men (*qawm*) was al-Ghafiqi b. Harb al-`Akki. They dared not inform the people that they were setting off to war and went instead in the guise of pilgrims. Accompanying them was Ibn al-Sawda' [that is, `Abdallah b. Saba'].

The Kufans [likewise] set out in four companies, led by Zayd b. Suhan al-`Abdi, al-Ashtar al-Nakha`i, Ziyad b. al-Nadr al-Harithi, and `Abdallah b. al-Asamm, a member of the tribe of `Amir b. Sa`sa`ah. Their numbers were the same as those of the Egyptians, and `Amr b. al-Asamm was in overall command. [2955]

The Basrans set out in four companies, led by Hukaym b. Ja-

²⁸² The lineage of the Umayyad clan—or more strictly, the descendants of `Abd Shams b. `Abd Manaf—is given in Appendix I, adapted from the tables in Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg (680-692)* (Wiesbaden 1982), 253-57.

²⁸³ Reading *yaghzuwahu* rather than *yaghzuwahum*. See de Goeje, *Introductio*, dxxviii.

²⁸⁴ Reading "*al-Tujibi*" instead of "*al-Laythi*." See de Goeje, *Introductio*, dxxviii.

balah al-`Abdi, Dhurayh b. `Abbad al-`Abdi, Bishr b. Shurayh al-Hutam b. Dubay`ah al-Qaysi, and Ibn al-Muharrish b. `Abd `Amr al-Hahafi. Their number was the same as that of the Egyptians, and Hurqus b. Zubayr al-Sa`di was in command over them all, save for those among the people who followed after them.

As for the Egyptians, they yearned for `Ali [as caliph], while the Basrans desired Talhah and the Kufans al-Zubayr. They all set out simultaneously. The people had disparate [aims], and every faction (*firqah*) was certain that it would obtain complete success to the exclusion of the other two. Thus, they proceeded until, three days from Medina, a group of men from among the Basrans went forward and made camp at Dhu Khushub. A section of the Kufans made camp at al-A`was, and a group of Egyptians came to join them, having left the main body of (their compatriots) behind at Dhu al-Marwah.²⁸⁵

Ziyad b. al-Nadr and `Abdallah b. al-Asamm traveled back and forth between the Egyptians and Basrans saying, "Do not be over-hasty or force us to rush, so that we can enter Medina and explore the situation for you. We have in fact heard that (the Medinese) have mobilized their troops against us. By God, if the Medinese fear us and deem it lawful to fight us when they have no solid knowledge about us, they will be even more hostile when they do obtain this, and our movement will fail. On the other hand, if they do not deem it lawful to fight us and we find that what we have heard is false, then we will bring that news back to you." (The Basrans and Egyptians) said, "Go ahead."

[2956]

Thus, the two men entered Medina and met with the wives of the Prophet and with `Ali, Talhah, and al-Zubayr. They said, "We have only come here²⁸⁶ to seek from this ruler [that is, `Uthman] the removal of certain of our governors. We have come only for

²⁸⁵ Dhu Khushub: "A valley lying a night's journey from Medina, often mentioned in hadith and accounts of the Prophet's campaigns" (Yaqt, *Mu`jam al-Buldan*, II, 444—45). Al-A`was: "A locale in the vicinity of Medina, mentioned in accounts of the Prophet's campaigns ... lying a very few miles from Medina" (*Ibid.*, I, 317). Dhu al-Marwah: "A town in the Wadi al-Qura; it is also said to lie between Khushub and the Wadi al-Qura" (*ibid.*, IV, 513). Yaqt's data are laconic, but they do place all three locales immediately to the north of Medina; al-A`was appears to be closest to the city, Dhu al-Marwah the most distant.

²⁸⁶ *Qala: innama na'tammu hadha 'l-bayta wa-nasta'fi hadha 'l-waliya min ba'di 'ummalina.*