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The Assassination of Caliph Uthman and the Civil War I in Islam: A Historical Review

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Abstract

The assassination of the Caliph Hazrat Uthman ibn Affan (RA) is a historic moment in the history of Islam, a turning point of the cohesive leadership and the beginning of the First Fitna. The given study considers the multifaceted interaction of socio-political tensions, administrative discontents, and tribal in-fighting, which finally led to the siege of the Caliph residence in 656 CE. The early twelve years of the reign of Uthman were marked by further growth and prosperity. The second part however, experienced increasing dissatisfaction based on claims of nepotism, namely the placement of Umayyad relatives in major provincial governorships and felt off-balance sheets in the allocation of the Bayt al-Mal (state treasury). These complaints were further enhanced by the emergence of radical groups and the efforts of agitators that used local frustrations in Egypt, Kufa and Basra. The death of the Caliph in Medina sanctuary was brutal and that destroyed the political sanctity of the Caliphate. It caused such devastating disunity that the tragic rule of Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib (RA) ensued. This denial of allegiance by Muawiyah until the assassins were taken to justice resulted in the Battles of Jamal and Siffin which essentially changed the Islamic political structure. This article will provide on the case of historical approaches taken by contemporary historians to conclude that the assassination is not just a local uprising but the trigger of the long-standing sectarian and political separations in the Muslim Ummah.

Keywords: Uthman ibn Affan, Umayyad Caliphate, Battle of the Camel, Battle of Siffin, Muawiyah.

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Introduction

The assassination of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan and the following first civil War (Fitna) in the Islamic history are a very crucial and sad event.¹ This was not just killing of a caliph but the start of the first large scale division in the Muslim Ummah the consequences of which are still to this date. The ruthless killing of Caliph Uthman in Medina in 656 CE was the first significant setback to the building of the Islamic state. The turn of events after this assassination split the Muslim society into two principal camps and resulted into bloody trials including the battle of Jamal and Siffin. Uthman ibn Affan was born in Mecca in the year 576 CE, and he was a member of the Quraysh tribe of Umayyad. He was among the richest and most esteemed people in Mecca. He had converted to Islam at the onset and was one of the first individuals to convert to Islam through Abu Bakr. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) wed two of his daughters to Uthman; first Ruqayyah and subsequently to Umm Kulthum. It was against this reason that he was given the title *Dhun-Nurayn* (Possessor of Two Lights). In his book *Al-Bidaya wan-Nihaya*, Ibn Kathir states that Uthman was a very generous person and devoted his riches to Islam. He gave out his money and camels in large numbers during the battle of Tabuk and this was of great essence to the Muslim army. Uthman was elected as caliph after the martyrdom of Caliph Umar in 644 CE. Prior to his death, Umar established a six member consultative council (Shura) that comprised of Uthman, Ali, Talhah, Zubayr, Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas and Abdur Rahman ibn Awf. Uthman was made the caliph after Abdur Rahman ibn Awf consulted the people of Medina with him in occasion of three days. The procedure of election in this aspect has been illustrated by al-Tabari in his book *Tarikh ar-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*.² He says that Abdur Rahman ibn Awf swore allegiance (bay'ah) to Hazrat Uthman in front of the Muslims in the Mosque of prophet and all Muslims swore loyalty to him. The early half of the Uthman caliphate had been immensely prosperous and peaceful. During that time, there was a massive growth of the Islamic state. The eastern, western and the Cypriot Persian Empire was conquered. During the reign of Muawiyah, a Muslim navy was established and the domination of Muslims in the Mediterranean was achieved. The greatest service in Uthman caliphate was the compilation of the Qur'an. In the instances of confusion which occurred in the recitation of the Qur'an as a result of minor variation in different provinces, he used to prepare a standardized Mushaf which he sent to all the provinces. This is referred to as Jam'al-Qur'an (compilation of the Qur'an) and is one of the immortal contributions in

the Islamic history. This research article will examine the caliphate period of Caliph Uthman, claims against him, circumstances surrounding the assassination, turn of events, and civil war in the following paper. This paper has been written based on historical and comparative approach under which authentic documentary of the history of Islam shall be presented and shall be used by the modern researcher in his or her researches.³

Literature Review

The assassination of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan that happened in 656 CE and the events that followed, known as the First Fitna are still widely discussed by people who study Islamic history. When people look into this time period they use sources and new ways of thinking to understand it and they find a lot of interesting information but not everyone agrees on what it means. The book *Tarikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk* by Al-Tabari is the source of information about this time it tells us everything about Uthmans time as caliph the people who rose up against him from Egypt, Kufa and Basra and what happened when Medina was under attack. Ibn Kathir book *Al-Bidayah wa'l-Nihayah* adds details to this story he says that many of the bad things people said about Uthman were not true and that when he died it caused a big problem for the Muslim community that could not be fixed. Many modern researchers like Wilferd Madelung have written about this time in his book *The Succession to Muhammad*, which was published in 1997.⁴ He says that the people who rebelled against Uthman did so because they were unhappy with the way things were being run and because they had problems, not because they had some secret plan, and that Ali ibn Abi Talib was the most rightful person to take over. Hugh Kennedys book *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* says that Uthman problems were because he was not a leader and there were many different groups with different ideas not because of any outside intrusion.⁵ Taha Husayn book *Al-Fitnat al-Kubra* which was published in 1980 says that Uthman government made mistakes but also that many of the things people said about him were just political attacks. On the other hand Muhammad Imarah book *Fitnat Maqtal Uthman*, which was published in 1993 says that there were outside groups, like the Persians and the Jews, who helped to bring Uthman down but this idea is not widely accepted by Western historians. Al-Sallabi book *The Umayyad State*, tries to bring people it says that who were involved acted with good intentions using their own judgment, which is an idea

that is also found in classical Sunni theology like in al-Tahawis book *Al-Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah*.⁶

Objective of the Study

- To examine the causes of rebellion against Caliph Uthman;
- To reconstruct the events of his assassination using classical sources;
- To trace the course of the First Fitna, including the Battles of the Camel and Siffin;
- To compare Sunni, Shia, and Western perspectives on these events.

Research Questions

- What caused the rebellion against Caliph Uthman?
- What were the actual circumstances surrounding his assassination?
- How did the First Fitna unfold through the Battles of the Camel and Siffin?
- How do Sunni, Shia, and Western scholars interpret these events differently?

Research Methodology

The method used in this study is historical-comparative method based on classic sources of the Islamic matter and modern analysis. Primary sources come from the early history of Arabs and Muslims, such as the chronicles of al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir and al-Dhahabi concerning the events of the assassination of the caliph Uthman ibn Affan and the first fitna. The statements of the Prophet (s) about Uthman's caliphate are also brought up from the hadith collections, such as *Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, to understand the context.

Secondary analysis also draws on modern scholarship from both the Western and Islamic academic worlds, for an appreciation of the comparative reading of tribal, administrative and political accounts of the civil war. Examples of key modern works cited are Wilferd Madelung's *The Succession to Muhammad* (1997), Hugh Kennedy's *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* and Taha Husayn's *Al-Fitnat al-Kubra* (1980), and Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi's *The Umayyad State*. The methodology focuses on the critical assessment of the sources rather than taking any source account on face value, evaluating the authors, proximity to events and possible bias. Cautions are given

for contested elements (e.g. historicity of Abdullah ibn Saba), and more than one position is presented with respect to such elements without making a judgment. This way, the study can have a balance between Sunni and Shia and Western academic viewpoints and positions, in contrast to emphasizing the Sunni tradition as the one with the correct vision. This yields a fictionalized history that reflects classical historical writing while at the same time, taking into account the methodological controversies that are still playing out in contemporary historical research on the early Islamic civil war.

Emergence of the Discontent and the Background of Rebellion in the First Phase of the Caliphate

The Caliphate of Hazrat Uthman (R.A.) Numerous accusations started being leveled against him in the final six years of his rule. Historians have categorized these accusations into a number of sections. First, nepotism: Hazrat Uthman promoted his kinsmen and relatives, in particular, the Umayyad clan, to significant posts. In Egypt it was Abdullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh, who was the Governor of Kufa Walid ibn Uqba (later Saad-ibn Abi Waqqas and later others thereafter), and the Governor of Syria, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. According to critics, such appointments were done not according to merit but according to family ties. Second, some historical records state that Hazrat Uthman gave gifts of the Bayt al-Mal (state treasury) to his kinsmen and few of his acquaintances and this is what critics term as unreasonable. Thirdly, governors in certain provinces were accused of oppression and injustice. Specifically, the dissatisfaction of local people occurred in Egypt and in Kufa. Fourth, the exile of certain followers: taking Abu Dharr al-Ghifari back to Medina after visiting Syria and then handing him over to Basra, and issue of contention with the Abdullah ibn Masud on the compilation of the Qur'an were sources of criticism. There have been different explanations to these allegations by the present day researchers. Dr. Taha Husayn wrote in his book *Al-Fitnat al-Kubra* that much of these accusations were further inflated and spread as political agenda.⁷ Still, he also admits that Uthman had some flaws in the policies of his governance and the rebels used it. In his study, Professor Martin Hinds said that Hazrat Uthman did not completely lack sense in appointing his kinsmen.⁸ Hazrat Muawiyah was a very competent administrator and military leader who brought peace and prosperity in Syria. Even so, there are other appointments that had been controversial and consequently, rebellions had started anywhere. These rebels were primarily three provinces of Egypt, Kufa

and Basra. The leader of the Egyptian rebels was Abd al-Rahman ibn Udayis al-Balawi, those rebels in Kufa were lead by Malik al-Ashtar and the rebels in Basra were lead by Hukaym ibn Jabalah. Historical documents indicate that the cause of this rebellion was a Jew by name Abdullah ibn Saba (who later posed as a Muslim) who disseminated different teachings to divide Muslims. However, not all of the contemporary scholars have been convinced of the very existence of Abdullah ibn Saba and are inclined to think that he is a fictional figure. In his book *The Succession to Muhammad*, Dr. Wilferd Madelung cited that the prime reason behind the rebellion was constitutional, economic unrest and that the role of Ibn Saba which was by itself debatable was secondary.⁹

Escalation of the Crisis and Mediation Efforts

During Shawwal 35 Hijri (656 CE), approximately 500 to 1000 rebels from three provinces assembled in Medina. They leveled accusations towards the Caliph and insisted on the governors and reforms. Firstly, Uthman was ready to bargain with them and made few concessions. In his book on history, Al-Tabari said that Uthman had removed the Governor of Egypt, Abdullah ibn Saad and appointed Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr to take his place.¹⁰ This pleased the rebels and they started abandoning Medina. The forged letter is one of the controversial events in history. The rebels asserted on their way home to Medina that they had discovered a letter, with the seal of Uthman, in which the new Governor of Egypt had been instructed to punish the rebels. This letter was supposed to have been acquired through the slave of Uthman Marwan ibn al-Hakam. Uthman was totally ignorant of this letter and said that he had never written such a letter. It was all a forgery as he said that somebody had stolen his seal and written the letter. Historians have opined that the rebels themselves had fabricated this letter as a mean to instill a feeling against the Caliph in the minds of the people. As the situation got serious high profile companions tried to mediate. Hazrat Ali, Talha, Zubayr and Saad ibn Abi Waqqas among others sat with Uthman and urged him to introduce some reforms. Uthman was willing to make certain moves, but Marwan ibn al-Hakam and certain Umayyad rulers attempted to ensure that Uthman did not make such moves. In the book of the chronicles titled *Al-Bidayah wanihayah*, Ibn Kathir stated that Hazrat Ali informed Uthman that the people wished him to either expel the oppressive rulers or resign the Caliphate.¹¹ Uthman responded saying that he will dismiss Marwan but not Muawiyah since he is competent. As regards quitting the caliphate, I

will not take off the mantle that Allah has draped me with. In June, at the start of Dhul-Qa'dah (656 CE. June) the rebels came back to Medina and surrounded the house of Uthman. Besides, they obstructed the passage of foodstuffs and water into his house. In this case as well Uthman did not want to fight with arms and did not want to shed Muslim blood. The siege did take about 40-50 days. In the course of this period, there were companions of Uthman among whom Hazrat Ali also his sons Hasan, Husayn, Abdullah ibn Zubayr and others were on guard before the house of Uthman. But the rebels avoid them and got through the back door.

History of Uthman Assassination

The next day June 17, (656 CE.) the rebels stormed into the house of Hazrat Uthman (RA) and hacked him to pieces when he was reciting the Qur'an. There are different historical records of the assassination though some say that it was done by Kinanah ibn Bishr al-Tujibi, Sawdan ibn Humran and Muhammad ibn Abi Bakar . In their books on history, Al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Kathir talked at length about the fact that one of the rebels plunged a sword into Uthman, as he was reciting Surah al-Baqarah in Qur'an. His wife Nailah bint Farafisa had been wounded attempting to save him and her fingers cut off. Hazrat Uthman (RA) had told Allah will not defile my hands with my blood and I will not draw a sword against my Ummah. In this case, rebels mercilessly murdered him. During the murder, he had the Qur'an on his knees and his blood stained its pages. In *Siyar Alam al-Nubala*, Imam al-Dhahabi stated that Uthman was 82 when he was martyred and he was fasting.¹² The companions were heavily distraught when the news of his martyrdom reached Medina. The rebels did not allow the body of Hazrat Uthman to be buried in three days. At last, he was buried at night in the cemetery of the Jannat al-Baqi by some of his companions such as Zubayr ibn Mutim, Hakim ibn Hizam and Nailah bint Farafisa. But as some say that his burial place was in a cemetery named hash kawkab which came to be a part of Jannat al-Baqi.¹³ There were only 12 to 17 companions at his burial which is very tragic considering that Caliph was lowly. Following the martyrdom of Uthman an anarchical state of affairs arisen in Medina. Ali was requested to become Caliph by rebels and a good number of Medina inhabitants. Hazrat Ali (RA) had first stated that he would not be a caliph but eventually took the caliphate on condition. Hazrat Ali stated that it is preferable that I become your counselor than be Caliph. However, in the case of companions insisted and he was appointed caliph in 656 CE. Even, not

everyone who attended Ali gathered in his bay'ah (pledge of allegiance). The execution of Uthman killers was initially demanded by the companions together with Muawiyah (RA) in Syria. Qisas (retribution) which was also firstly demanded by Aisha, Talha and Zubayr. When Uthman was assassinated the Muslim Ummah was practically split into three camps: firstly, According to them Ali was the rightful Caliph and that the stability of the Islamic state must be put in place first then the killers were to be tried. Secondly, Muawiyah and his followers in Syria: According to them, they wanted first the assassins of Uthman punished, and then a new Caliph be offered bayah. Thirdly, Disinterested companions of Abdullah ibn Umar, Saad ibn Abi Waqqas, Usamah ibn Zayd and the like did not want to be involved in this fitna. In the case of Ali, it was highly complicated to find out and incriminate the murderers of Uthman. Rebels belonged to different tribes and they purported to be the supporters of Ali. Ali had done something about them and they risked civil war but Dr. Muhammad Husayn Haykal in his book *Al-Faruq Umar* said that Ali intended to initiate a gradual judicial process, however the demands of Muawiyah and others in getting qisas made matters worse.¹⁴

The Battle of the Camel

Talha and Hazrat Aisha and Zubayr were going to Basra because they wanted revenge for the death of Hazrat Uthman. They were very angry about what happened to Uthman (RA). They removed the Governor of Basra Uthman ibn Hunaif from his position. Took control of the city, Hazrat Ali tried to talk to Talha, Aisha and Zubayr to find a solution. Then an army led by Hazrat Ali left Kufa to go to Basra.



Figure-1: Ali and Aisha at the Battle of the Camel.¹⁵ (al-Shirazi 1571-1572)

The army led by Ali met Talha and Aisha and Zubayr at Qadisiyyah. They looked into each other's eyes. It was a big confrontation and the time they tried to make peace with each other it was a reconciliation effort for Ali, Talha, Aisha and Zubayr. Historians say that the Battle of Jamal took place on 10 Jumada al-Akhirah, (36 Hijri) which's December 9, (656 CE).¹⁶ The Battle of Jamal got its name because Aisha was riding on a camel. She was sitting in a howdah on top of the camel. The fight was about the camel. People say that both sides had agreed to a truce. The people who killed Uthman who were in both groups and did something terrible. They sneaked out at night. Started the war. These people were responsible for a deal that was the Battle of Jamal. The Battle of Jamal is still talked about today because of what happened with Aisha and the camel. One morning the two groups thought that the other group had broken the peace agreement. The war started and it was a sad day for Muslims then a lot of Muslims around 10,000 to 13,000 were killed in the battle. This is a tragic moment in the history of Islam after Talha and Zubayr were killed when they were leaving the battlefield. Aisha was taken captive when her camel was hurt. Later Ali sent Aisha back to Medina with respect. The Muslims were very sad about what happened to Aisha and the other Muslims. The war was a thing that happened to the Muslims. Ibn Kathir added that afterwards Aisha (RA) would regret that she had participated in this battle and said, "Had I known that it would have become so, I would have remained at home".¹⁷

The Battle of Siffin

Following the battle of Jamal, Hazrat Ali established Kufa as his capital and requested that Hazrat Muawiyah surrender the post of Governor of Syria to him. Muawiyah would not and insisted that those who killed Hazrat Uthman should be first punished. Muawiyah had the blood stained shirt of Uthman and the severed fingers of his wife Nailah hung in the Mosque at Damascus, and this quite angered the people of Syria. He said it was his duty to bring revenge to the blood of Uthman because he was also of the Umayyad tribe and a kinsman. During the month of Safar, 37 Hijri (July 657 CE), Ali marched to Syria along with around 65000 troops and engaged the army of Muawiyah in a battle at a location known as Siffin on the Euphrates River. The army of Muawiyah consisted of about 85000 soldiers. First, both parties tried at negotiations. Ali (RA) made different companions undertake mediation but they could not find a solution. And at the end of the Safar month

confrontations started. The Battle of Siffin was a period of three months and was composed of a number of minor skirmishes.



Figure-2: The Battle of Siffin.¹⁸ (wikipedia, 1516)

The fiercest was the battle on the so called “*Laylat al-Harir*” (the Night of Clamor) when both the parties struggled all night and thousands of Muslims were killed.¹⁹ In the work *Al-Kamil fil-Tarikh*, Ibn al-Athir wrote that the army of Ali (RA) was slowly turning to a winning force. Amr ibn al-As advised Muawiyah to take a strategy when the latter was in a state of defeat. The army of Muawiyah was about to be defeated when the soldiers of the leader hoisted pages of the Qur’an to the ends of their lances and chanted, Let the Book of Allah be the judge between us and you. This was a psychological war strategy. Hazrat Ali realized that it was but a stratagem but a big number of his men and specially those who had memorized the Qur’an demanded that they should accept this offer. They replied that they could not answer the call of the Qur’an. Lastly, arbitration was accepted by the two parties. Abu Musa al-Ash was appointed as an arbiter on behalf of Ali and Amr ibn al-As on behalf of Muawiyah. They were to meet at a spot known as “*Dawmat al-Jandal*” so as to make a decision. But this arbitration was a controversial unsuccessful one.²⁰ In different stories, Amr ibn al-As duped Abu Musa al-Ashari. Abu Musa declared that he had overthrown Ali and Muawiyah but Amr ibn al-As declared that he had ratified Muawiyah Caliph. Due to the arbitration agreement and some part of the army of Hazrat Ali turned against him.²¹ They were called the Khawarij (those who went out) and their motto was chiefly, “*La hukma illa Lillah*” (There is no judgment except Allahs). They thought that by accepting arbitration, Ali did a mistake, as the decision was already affirmed by the Qur’an. Khawarij assembled at Harura and Nahrawan.

Ali attempted to negotiate with them and despatched Abdullah ibn Abbas to them. Even though there was a change of some Khawarij to their camps and majority stood their ground. Ali led an attack on them in 658 CE, when the Khawarij started killing Muslims. The Khawarij were overpowered with almost total defeat in a short but bloody battle at Nahrawan. About 1800 Khawarij were shot and only 400 got away. The Khawarij ideology was not totally eliminated after this defeat. Then they planned to kill Ali, Muawiyah and Amr ibn al-Ash. In 661 CE, Ali was killed by a Kharijite, Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam, who stabbed him with a sword that was dipped in poison in the Fajr prayer in Kufa.²² Two days later Ali was martyred on the 19th of Ramadan. As he martyred, one of the phases of first civil war in Islam had been accomplished. He was made Caliph and a couple of months later he signed an agreement with Muawiyah and handed him over the Caliphate. This is referred to as the Am al-Jama'ah (the Year of Unity).²³ As a result of this civil war the Muslim Ummah was forever divided. This was the planting season of the seeds of the Sunni-Shia divide. Shia believed that Ali was the true heir of the prophet Muhammad and that Caliphate was to be inherited in his family (Ahl al-Bayt). According to the teaching of the Sunni, all the four caliphs were rightfully chosen and they were Rashidun (well-guided) caliphs. The other branch was also established in this period the Kharijite doctrine, though they were still a minority.

Current Research, Analysis and Theological Perspectives

These events have been interpreted by western historians in different ways. In his book *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, Professor Wilferd Madelung maintained that Ali was the most competent caliph and the movements made against him were mainly political.²⁴ In his book titled *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* Professor Hugh Kennedy said the assassination of Hazrat Uthman was an outcome of administrative feeble and factional interests. In his book titled *Al-Dawlat al-Umawiyyah (The Umayyad State)* Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi cited that all factions in this civil war were companions and they were all striving to the right path.²⁵ But things turned out in such a manner that war became an inevitable outcome. Dr. Muhammad Imarah wrote in his book *Fitnat Maqatl Uthman (The Trial of Uthman Assassination)* that this rebellion was due to foreign conspiracies, particularly, the Persian and the Jewish.²⁶ Even, some historians do not agree on this theory. Such historic occurrences are still applicable in the Muslim world now. A lot of the

current argument of Sunni-Shia relations, the idea of caliphate, and the essence of Islamic government can be associated with what happened during this First Civil War. The contemporary researchers stress that these historical events should be studied to learn the lessons but not to support the contemporary divisions. Every companion was worthy of respect and the disputes between them were based on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) rather than corruption. The Sunni tradition doctrine (Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah) states that all companions are worthy of respect and Muslims must not say anything about the controversy among themselves. On mentioning the disputes among the companions Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal replied, be silent. In his book *Al-Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah*, (*The Tahawi Creed*) Imam al-Tahawi said that We do not discuss what occurred in the wars of the companions.²⁷ We recall them all well and think they were all mujtahids (those who reason independently) some right and some wrong but all rewarded. The Shia guideline states that Ali as well as the descendants (Imams) are infallible and they are the true successors. The assassination of Uthman was correct as he was guilty of injustice. The fights of Jamal and Siffin were the moments where Ali was absolutely right and his enemies made wrong steps. However, in the contemporary world there are Shia scholars who are assuming a more conciliatory approach and recognizing that all sides are truthful albeit still giving preference to the role of Ali. This is the opinion of the Ibadis the Khawarij branch of Muslims that Uthman deserved to be deposed since he had gone astray with regard to justice. They differ in their opinions whether his murder was warranted or not. Ali also made a wrong move when he accepted arbitration, and he lost his qualification to continue as caliph.

Analysis of Primary Sources and Historical Evaluation

Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim have a number of hadiths on the martyrdom of Uthman and the events that followed his martyrdom. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said regarding Uthman: Every prophet had an companion in Paradise and my companion is Uthman. (Al- Tirmidhi) The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also said Uthman, Allah has clothed you with this garment (caliphate) and the hypocrites would desire to take off his garment, do not take off his garment.²⁸ The above hadiths reveal that Uthman was aware that he would not resign even though there would be a rebellion in his caliphate. The account of the following events given by Imam al-Tabari in his book *Tarikh al-Rusul wal-Muluk* (History of the Prophets and Kings) is the most elaborate. He gathered the accounts of different

sources some of which contradict each other. But the whole series of events is decipherable out of these multiple narrations. The memory of the executioners of Uthman as given by al-Tabari was a very heterogeneous one, including individuals of Egypt, Kufa and Basra.²⁹ He has detailed the manner in which they stormed into the house of Uthman and assassinated him. Ibn Kathir in his book *Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah* (The beginning and the end) has given an account as well as an explanation of such events. He said that most of the accusations leveled on Uthman were exaggerated and false indeed. Ibn Kathir specifically mentioned that the martyrdom of Uthman was a huge tragic event in the history of the Islamic religion and the schism it brought upon them is still present today.³⁰ The assassination of Uthman and the First Civil War marked a break in the Islamic history. It is through this event and the Umayyad Caliphate started that the Rashidun Caliphate essentially came to an end. The character of Islamic state altered and the caliphate has become a hereditary institution. However, the Islamic civilization went ahead despite these tragic events. During the Umayyad and the Abbasid Caliphates, the Islamic religion was spread over the enormous territories of the world and resulted in the development of a significant civilization. The present Muslim Ummah can learn a lesson out of this history. It is significant in the history development of Sunni-Shia relations, extremism prevention and defining how Muslim governments can work. The contemporary Muslim thinkers insist that the political controversy of the companions should not be reawakened in the contemporary period; it is their sacrifice, sincerity and contribution to Islam that should be recalled.

Limitations

This study has some limited by its dependence on Islamic historical sources compiled well after the events they describe, chiefly al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, and Ibn al-Athir, whose accounts rest on oral transmission chains and were shaped by later religio-political concerns.³¹ Although these literary sources are valuable, modern scholars warn that a methodology is needed which gives greater weight to earlier materials and is skeptical of later consensus materials.³² Al-Tabari's serious problems are exacerbated by his transmission of openly biased accounts, as with Abu Mikhnaaf whose pro-Alid sympathies are well attested, and other regional traditions without the ability to solve the discrepancies between them.³³ A special restrictions were the story of Abdullah ibn Saba, who was essentially quoted from Sayf ibn Umar, a transmitter from Kufa in the eighth-century who is doubted even by

Julius Wellhausen in 1899.³⁴ Some scholars have since re-interpreted his material, however, his contribution to the “conspiracy” theory behind the First Fitna continues to be controversial. Compounding this issue, later compilers openly admitted to omitting material they judged “disgraceful” or likely to “distress certain people,” meaning the surviving textual record is already a filtered account rather than a complete one. Finally, modern scholarship itself offers no consensus on causation, with Western and Muslim historians divided between internal political failure and external conspiracy as explanations for Uthman assassination. This study’s conclusions should therefore be read as a synthesis of contested historiography rather than as a settled factual record.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Conduct comparative textual analysis of early Arabic sources (al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, al-Dhahabi) to identify points of consensus versus divergence in reporting the assassination.
- Investigate the historicity and role of Abdullah ibn Saba through independent historiographical methods rather than relying solely on later polemical sources.
- Undertake deeper socio-economic analysis of the grievances in Egypt, Kufa, and Basra to separate administrative failures from ideological motivations.
- Expand comparative study between classical Sunni, Shia, and Ibadi (Khawarij) interpretations to produce a more balanced, multi-perspective historiography.
- Examine the arbitration at Siffin and its aftermath using conflict-resolution and political science frameworks to better understand its long-term institutional impact.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it could also be concluded that the assassination of Caliph Uthman and the First Fitna is a tragic part of the history of Islam which splited the Muslim Ummah to the extent that the effects are being experienced today. Yet, this historical incident can teach us a great number of things. The best thing is that such events were related to the factors of humanity. The personalities who were involved were nobility who sacrificed themselves at the expense of Islam. They differed in their being Ijtihadi (grounded in reasoning

independent of each other) and they were all earnestly trying to find the right way. We should also treat all of them with respect and forget about their mistakes as Allah Ta'ala will probably forgive. The First Fitna enlightens us that unity of the Muslim Ummah is priceless and we should do our best to maintain it. It also teaches that there might be a difference in politics but this should not result in violence. Non-violent reform and solution of problems by institutional means should be always promoted. The new generations of the Muslim Ummah learn many things from this historic and the main lessons are unity, justice, wisdom and patience, which are equally applicable in today's World.

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