

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Trouble in Basra

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Muawiyah tried to create trouble in Basra in the first instance. After Kufa the main concentration of the Kharijites was in Basra. After the Battle of Nahrawan, the Kharijites had become the bitter enemies of Ali. The game of Muawiyah was to incite the Kharijites of Basra to create trouble for Ali. There were many persons in Basra who were originally pro-Othman, but who had to take the oath of allegiance to Ali after the Battle of the Camel. The plan of Muawiyah was to motivate such people to throw off their allegiance to Ali. The governorship of Basra was held by Abdullah b Abbas, cousin of Ali. Abdullah b Abbas was present at Dumatul Jandal when the umpires gave their verdict. This verdict was a great shock for Ali. Abdullah b Abbas had comforted Ali and had counseled him not to lose heart. He had advised Ali to stick to his office for the decision of the umpires was a farce and therefore not binding.

Thereafter the troubles of Ali continued to multiply. He had to fight against the Kharijites, and though the Battle of Nahrawan was won, it brought further difficulties for Ali. The army that he intended to lead to Syria to settle accounts with Muawiyah refused to cooperate. A great blow fell on Ali when the province of Egypt was lost. The death of Muhammad b Abu Bakr, a ward of Ali greatly distressed and grieved Ali. In order to condole the death of Muhammad b Abu Bakr with Ali, Abdullah b Abbas set out from Basra for Kufa. During his absence the charge of Basra was held by Ziyad b Abihi. Ziyad was the son of a slave girl Samia, and the name of his father was not known. Later Muawiyah acknowledged Ziyad as a son of his father Abu Sufyan from the slave girl Samia. Ziyad was a capable person and at this stage he was very loyal to Ali.

After Abdullah b Abbas had left Basra for Kufa, Muawiyah sent a contingent of 2,000 horse under the command of Abdullah b 'Amr al Hadrami, a cousin of Othman. It was not an expedition of a regular invasion. The strategy adopted was that of peaceful penetration. The idea was to exploit the differences among the tribes in the area, flare up such dissensions and create problems for the administration of Ali. On arrival in Basra, the Syrians became the guests of the Banu Tamim, a tribe known for its sympathy to Othman. Al Hadrami told the Banu Tamim that as a result of the decision of the umpires at Dumatul Jandal, sovereignty had passed on to Muawiyah, and as such they should owe allegiance to Muawiyah. Banu Tamim accordingly took the oath of allegiance to Muawiyah. There was a sizable section of the people of Basra proper who had originally sided with Ayesha, but who were later forced to take the oath of allegiance to Ali. These pro-Othman persons joined the Banu Tamim, and took the oath of allegiance to Muawiyah. These defections weakened the position of the Alid government in Basra. In the circumstances Ziyad in charge of the government of Basra was forced to seek the protection of the Azd tribe, a tribe opposed to Banu Tamim.

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