

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Assessment of Ali by Western Scholars

Charles Mills

In his book, A History of Muhammadanism, Charles Mills assesses Ali as follows: "As the chief of the family of Hashim, and as the cousin and son-in-law of him whom the Arabians respected almost to idolatry it is apparently incredible that Ali was not raised to the Caliphate immediately after the death of Muhammad (peace be on him). In the advantage of his birth and marriage was added the friendship of the Prophet. The son of Abu Talib was one of the first converts to Islam, and Muhammad's favorite appellation of him was, the Aaron of a second Moses. His talents as an orator and his intrepidity as a warrior commended him to a nation in whose judgment courage was virtue, and eloquence was wisdom. But the pride and loftiness of his spirit endured not the caution inseparable from schemes of policy, and continually precipitated him into rashness. His opposition to Abu Bakr would not have ceased if Fatima had lived; but on her death, six months after that of her father, the companions of Muhammad relaxed in their friendship to his family. In the reign of Abu Bakr, Umar and Othman, dignified independence was preserved by Ali. On the invitation of the Caliphs, he assisted in the councils of Madina, but he was principally occupied in the tranquil pursuits of domestic life, and the various duties of his religion. On the murder of Othman, the Egyptians who were at Madina offered him the Caliphate. Indignant that the power of nomination should be usurped by the strangers, Ali declared that the suffrages of the inhabitants of Makkah and Madina alone could be available. The public voice soon echoed the opinion of the murderers, and the scruples of Ali were soon removed. In apprehension of the enmity of Ayesha, his relentless foe, and of the whole family of Muawiyah, he declined to receive in private the preferred allegiance of the chiefs. With his accustomed simplicity, he proceeded to the mosque clad in a cotton gown, a coarse turban on his head, his slippers were in one hand, and a bow instead of a staff, occupied the other".

[View Page](#)

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