

History of the

Umayyad Caliphs

From *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*

by Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī

Translated by T. S. Andersson

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Timeline

Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān	40-60/661-680
Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya Abū Khālīd al-Umawī	60-63/680-683
Mu‘āwiya ibn Yazīd	64/683-4
‘Abd Allāh ibn az-Zubayr	64-73/684-692
‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān	65-86/685-705
Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	86-96/705-15
Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	96-99/715-717
‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz	99-101/717-720
Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	101-105/720-724
Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	105-125 / 724-743
Al-Walīd ibn Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	125-126/743-744
Yazīd ibn al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	126/744
Ibrāhīm ibn al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik	126/744
Marwān ibn Muḥammad ibn Marwān	127-132/744-750

Preface

That was a community which has long since passed away. It has what it earned. You have what you have earned. You will not be questioned about what they did. (Sūrat al-Baqara 2:134)

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “The leaders (imams) are from Quraysh.”¹

Thus *al-Khulafā’ ar-Rāshidūn*, the Umayyads and the ‘Abbāsids were a single seamless Qurayshi dynasty until the Mongols extirpated that line, although a small rump caliphate was to endure in Cairo under the Mamluks until the time of our author, Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūfī, may Allah be merciful to him.

That Quraysh were to succumb for a period to internal rivalries, with the Abbasid revolt against the Umayyads, was inevitable from the perspective of Ibn Khaldūn. That their history has subsequently been interpreted, not least by Abbasid scholars, as two entirely contrary dynasties has not served us well. That it was necessary for them, in order for the Abbasid revolution (*dawla*) to succeed and to endure, to vilify the Umayyads has not made the work of the historian any easier.

In these pages if the reader is of the ‘good men/bad men’ view of the world, he will discover not embodiments of evil, but good men who sometimes did bad things, as well as bad men who sometimes did good things. As to the latter, the Umayyad general al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf is one of the most notorious governors in the history of the

¹ Imām Aḥmad narrated it from Anas as did aḍ-Ḍiyā’. Al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī narrated it from ‘Alī.

Muslims, but he was responsible under the direction of his caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, for the first minting and wide circulation of gold and silver coins in our history and for the vowelling and application of diacritical marks to the written copies of the Qur’ān among other things.

We do find among them men who were sometimes not equal to the challenges they faced, and a few exceptional men who acquitted themselves honourably and well. Only ahistorical people, covert Zoroastrians and people with a defect in their unitary understanding of the Divine decree of good and evil will be satisfied with a childish separation of good and evil into two mutually contending absolute forces.

Why does this history matter? Firstly, it matters because rulership is one of the dynamic transmissions from the last of the Messengers ﷺ, who himself demonstrated how to rule and govern.² *Al-Khulafā’ ar-Rāshidūn* took that from him directly and inherited it from each other in succession, until the fifth of them al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ﷺ passed it legitimately to Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān ﷺ counted by some of the scholars as one of *al-Khulafā’ ar-Rāshidūn*. Ibn Khaldūn wrote:

The state [*dawla*] and history [*akhbār*] of Mu‘āwiya ought to be appended to the states and history of the (*Rāshidūn*) caliphs, for he follows them in virtue, integrity and companionship [*ṣuḥba*]. And no consideration should be taken of the *ḥadīth* that ‘the caliphate after me will last thirty years’, for it is not *ṣaḥīḥ*. In truth, Mu‘āwiya is counted among those caliphs ... Allah forbid that Mu‘āwiya be likened to anyone of those after him. He was one of *al-Khulafā’ ar-Rāshidūn*. Those Marwanid caliphs who come after him in *dīn* and virtue also come after him in rank and likewise the later caliphs of Banū al-‘Abbās.³

2 Shaykh Abdalhaqq Bewley, “The Prophet ﷺ as Ruler”, MFAS Journal Vol.1, no.1, February 2015.

3 Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, Dar al-Fikr 1421 AH/ 2001 CE, Vol.2, p.650;

By slandering the Umayyads in their entirety, we introduce a gap in that transmission in the very early years during the time of the Companions themselves and the generation of the *tābi'īn*, the Followers of the Companions. It calls the whole issue of Islamic governance into question. If two of the best generations that ever lived on Earth were ruled by entirely evil men, what hope is there for the rest of us? Clearly that thesis is untenable.

Secondly, it is clear from the current world situation that humanity in general are succumbing to presentism and are simply losing their history. When that happens we must beware George Orwell's assertion in his dark, visionary novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, that 'who controls the past, controls the future; who controls the present, controls the past'. In other words, we are losing our past to those who control our present, the global financial oligarchy, and, because we have lost the past, we are unable to make our future.

In that sense, it is well to read this text carefully and not with the simple judgemental attitude of those who do not understand power and its predicaments. For that purpose, Ibn Khaldūn is always invaluable since he is that rarity among scholars and philosophers, the man of knowledge who is acquainted with power and its realities.

Even if we concede the existence of this Umayyad sub-dynasty as something separate from the other Qurayshī sub-dynasty, the 'Abbāsids, its first ruler would then have been 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān one of *al-Khulafā' ar-Rāshidūn*, rather than Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, who was nevertheless himself a Companion. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz is also counted without controversy as one of *al-Khulafā' ar-Rāshidūn*. Marwān and his son 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān were caliphs, although people differ about the validity of the former's caliphate since it existed in parallel with the prior caliphate of 'Abd Allāh ibn az-Zubayr . Many of Marwān's and 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān's legal judgements are transmitted by the scholars,

and Mālīk and al-Bukhārī, among others, transmit the hadiths of Marwān. Al-Walīd, Sulaymān and Hishām, three of the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik, were great monarchs who extended the realms of Islam, built up the polity in many ways and did much for the *dīn*. As-Suyūṭī writes about al-Walīd, who he says ‘was a tyrant and an oppressor’:

But al-Walīd undertook *jihād* during his reign and many great conquests took place during his caliphate. He also used to treat orphans well and appoint teachers for them. He appointed people to attend the disabled and to lead the blind. He renovated and enlarged the Prophet’s mosque. He provided for the *fuqahā’*, the weak and the poor, and prevented them from begging by allotting them what would be sufficient. He managed affairs with the most thorough administration.

Ibn Abī ‘Abla said, “May Allah have mercy on al-Walīd. Where is the like of al-Walīd? He conquered India (al-Hind) and Spain (al-Andalus), he built the mosque of Damascus and he used to give me a *ṣā’* of silver, which I shared among the reciters in the mosque of Jerusalem.”

Al-Walīd ruled for ten years. About Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, as-Suyūṭī writes:

One of [Sulaymān’s] merits is that ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was like his deputy and he used to follow his instructions regarding the good. He also deposed al-Ḥajjāj’s governors, released the prisoners in Iraq and restored the prayers to their right times, after Banū Umayya had deadened them by deferment.

Ibn Sīrīn said, “May Allah have mercy on Sulaymān who began his caliphate by restoring the prayers to their times and sealed it by the appointment of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as his successor.”

About Hishām, as-Suyūṭī writes:

Hishām was resolute and intelligent. He did not allow any wealth to enter the treasury until forty people had witnessed on oath that what was due on it had been taken and that everyone due some part of it had received their due.

And he says:

Saḥbal ibn Muḥammad said: I never saw any caliph for whom blood-shedding was harder and more repellent than Hishām.

Hishām ruled for twenty years. Great men of knowledge such as az-Zuhrī frequented his gatherings and counselled him fearlessly, indeed az-Zuhrī put himself in some danger by warning him against appointing his son, the second al-Walīd, a licentious profligate, as his successor.

After the time of as-Suyūfī, the ‘Abbāsids were to hand over the reigns of the caliphate to the Osmanlıs when al-Mutawakkil III surrendered the caliphate to Selim Yavuz in Istanbul in 1517, although the Osmanlıs had long laid claim to the caliphate and the remaining Abbasid caliphs had been little more than prisoners of the Mamluk rulers of Cairo.

About the stipulation that the caliph should be of Quraysh, Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī wrote in his *al-Qawānīn al-fiqhiyya*: “... [among] the pre-conditions of the Imamate are ... that his descent should be from Quraysh, but on this [last] there is a difference of opinion, so that if people agree [on pledging allegiance] to one who does not meet all of the conditions then it is permitted, from fear of causing dissension and sedition.”

Notes

1. This line of caliphs is not the whole story of Islam. A great deal of Muslim life went on far from the central court and the ruling dynasty with often only nominal acknowledgement of the caliph, if that, in a wide variety of kingdoms, amirates, sultanates, even other empires such as the Mughal and occasionally alternative caliphates

such as the Umayyads of Andalus and Shehu Uthman dan Fodio of Nigeria. The Muslims worshipped Allah, collected and distributed the zakat and adjudicated in the legal disputes that arose between them according to the Book of Allah and the Sunna of His Messenger ﷺ, as much as they were able.

2. Although some of the caliphates are known as empires, even those were light and comparatively modest, showing in comparison the heavy-handed, surveilling and policing régimes we have today to be the Orwellian nightmares they really are.

3. None of this is any basis for the modernist totalitarian 'Islamic state' of popular imagination. Islamic governance is qualitatively entirely different from 'the state', which first emerged out of the Westphalian Treaty, later developed through the French Revolution and then spread across the earth, bringing in its trail the genocide and terror that are intrinsic to it.⁴

* * *

It has been a pleasure to encounter this work of as-Suyūṭī again, may Allah be merciful to him, and to read his deft selection and transmission of texts. It has also been a genuine pleasure to work with the translation of T. S. Andersson and his splendid and insightful introduction and study on the author. He has maintained a calm objectivity in tackling the original texts and the historical material that allows the original Arabic meanings to show through his translation, which is accurate, clear and eminently readable.

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4 See MFAS module "The Politics of Power".

Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān

40-60/661-680

Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān ibn Ṣakhr ibn Ḥarb ibn Umayya ibn ‘Abd Shams ibn ‘Abd Manāf ibn Quṣayy al-Umawī, Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān. He accepted Islam with his father on the day of the Opening of Makka [to Islam]. He was present at Ḥunayn and was among those whose hearts were reconciled. Thereafter, his Islam became good and he became one of the scribes of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. It is narrated that he had one hundred and sixty-three *ḥadīths* from the Prophet ﷺ. Among the companions narrating from him were Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn ‘Umar, Ibn az-Zubayr, Abū ad-Dardā’, Jarīr al-Bajalī, Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr and others. Among the followers were Ibn al-Musayyib, Ḥumayd ibn ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān and others.

He was one of those characterised by political finesse (*dahā’*) and forbearance (*ḥilm*). Narrations of his merits have been transmitted, but few of them are well established.

At-Tirmidhī narrated, declaring it good (*ḥasan*), from the companion ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Abī ‘Umayra from the Prophet ﷺ, that he said to Mu‘āwiya, “O Allah, make him guiding and guided.”

Aḥmad narrated in his *Musnad* from al-‘Irbād ibn Sāriya, who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ saying, “O Allah, teach Mu‘āwiya the Book and the reckoning and guard him from the punishment.”

Ibn Abī Shayba narrated in *al-Muṣannaḥ* and at-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr* from ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Umayr that Mu‘āwiya said, “I did not cease to desire the caliphate after the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to

me, ‘Mu‘āwiya, when you rule, do it with excellence.”

Mu‘āwiya was a tall, fair, beautiful and awe-inspiring man. ‘Umar used to look at him and say, “This is the Khusraw of the Arabs.”

It is narrated that ‘Alī said, “Do not be averse to the rule of Mu‘āwiya. If you lose him, you will see heads falling from shoulders.”

Al-Maqbarī said, “You admire the political finesse of Heraclius and Khusraw, yet pass over Mu‘āwiya!”

He was proverbial for his forbearance. Both Ibn Abī ad-Dunya and Abū Bakr ibn Abī ‘Āsim composed works exclusively about his forbearance.

Ibn ‘Awn said: A man said to Mu‘āwiya, “By Allah, be upright with us or we will straighten you up.” He replied, “With what?” He said, “With a wooden stick.” He replied, “Then I will be upright.”

Qabīṣa ibn Jābir said, “I accompanied Mu‘āwiya and I have not seen anyone weightier in forbearance, slower to folly and more deliberate than he.”

When Abū Bakr sent the armies to Syria, Mu‘āwiya went with his brother, Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān. When Yazīd died, he succeeded him over Damascus and ‘Umar confirmed him in his position. Then ‘Uthmān confirmed him and gathered all of Syria for him. He was governor for twenty years and caliph for twenty years.

Ka‘b al-Aḥbār said, “No one will rule this community as Mu‘āwiya will rule.”

Adh-Dhahabī said that Ka‘b died before Mu‘āwiya became caliph and Ka‘b was right in what he narrated; Mu‘āwiya remained caliph for twenty years without anyone on the earth contending for authority with him, unlike others after him. They were all opposed and some dominions went out of their authority. Mu‘āwiya arose against ‘Alī, as previously mentioned, and declared himself caliph. Then he marched against al-Ḥasan, who transferred the caliphate to him. He became firmly established in the caliphate from Rabī‘ al-Ākhir or Jumādā al-Ūlā in year 41/661. This year was called the Year of Community (*‘ām al-jamā’a*), because of the community’s

unification in it under one caliph. In this year, Mu'āwiya appointed Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam over Madina.

In 43/663-4, ar-Rukhkhaj and other lands in Sijistān were conquered, as well as Waddān in Barqa and Kūr in the Land of the Blacks (*bilād as-sūdān*). In it, Mu'āwiya claimed kinship to Ziyād ibn Abīhi and that was the first case in Islam in which the Prophet's ﷺ judgement was altered, as ath-Tha'ālibī and others have mentioned.

In 45/665-6, al-Qīqān was conquered.

In 50/670, Qūhistān was conquered by force. In it, Mu'āwiya called the people of Syria to the oath of allegiance for the succession of his son, Yazīd, and they pledged allegiance to him. He was the first to appoint his son as successor to the caliphate and the first to appoint a successor while in good health. Then he wrote to Marwān in Madina to take the oath of allegiance. Marwān addressed the people, saying, "The Commander of the Believers has decided to appoint his son, Yazīd, as his successor over you, according to the *sunna* of Abū Bakr and 'Umar." 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq stood up and said, "Rather, according to the *sunna* of Khusraw and Caesar; Abū Bakr and 'Umar did not appoint their sons to it, nor anyone from their families."

In 51, Mu'āwiya went on *hajj* and took the oath of allegiance for his son. He sent for Ibn 'Umar, recited the testimony of faith and said, "Now, Ibn 'Umar, you used to tell me that you did not want to spend a dark night without a leader over you. I warn you of breaking the staff of the Muslims and striving to worsen the discord among them." Ibn 'Umar praised Allah and said, "Now, there were caliphs before you with sons and your son is no better than their sons. They did not regard their sons as you regard yours. They chose for the Muslims what they knew to be the best. You warn me of breaking the staff of the Muslims, which I would never do. I am only one of the Muslims and when they agree on a matter, I am one of them." Mu'āwiya replied, "May Allah have mercy on you." Then Ibn 'Umar left.