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When Did Muʿāwiya Become Caliph?*

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> An ignoramus was asked: 'What do you say about Muʿāwiya?' He replied: 'May God have mercy on his soul and be pleased with him.' 'So what do you say about his son Yazīd?' He said: 'I say may God curse him and his parents'[1]

In Islamic history one of the most misrepresented, misunderstood, and misconstrued figures is Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60 A.H./680 C.E.). He has been a controversial figure from the earliest Muslim documentation of Islamic history until the present day. The biggest obstacle to understanding Muʿāwiya is not the man himself, but the fact that he was the son of Abū Sufyān, the leader of the opposition to the Prophet; that he was the father of Yazīd, the caliph ruling during Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī's martyrdom; and even more importantly, that he himself fought ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb in the first civil war. The combination of these factors has rendered the task of extracting the historical figure of Muʿāwiya from his characterization in the sources extremely difficult. This very difficulty will, as we shall see, complicate our attempt to determine when Muʿāwiya became caliph.

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[1] Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir wa-al-dhakhā'ir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī (Beirut, 1988), 5:90.

Brief Biography

Muʿāwiya's life, in brief, goes as follows. He was born, probably, in the beginning of the seventh century. His father was Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb b. Umayya b. ʿAbd al-Shams, the leader of the Umayyad clan and of the Meccan opposition to Muḥammad, and his mother was Hind b. ʿUtba b. Rabīʿā b. ʿAbd al-Shams, whom the stories in the *sīra* (the biography of the Prophet) depict as being even more vociferous than her husband in her opposition to Muḥammad.[2] According to most sources, Muʿāwiya converted at the last possible moment, at the conquest of Mecca (8 A.H./629 C.E.), although some sources say he converted earlier, in the year of Ḥudaybiyya (6 A.H./629 C.E.), but kept it a secret from his parents.[3] He is known to have worked as a scribe for the Prophet but it was later, during the

[2] H. Lammens, "Muʿāwiya," *E.I.*[1]; M. Hinds, "Muʿāwiya," *E.I.*[2].

[3] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1985), 7:406; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, New Ed., Supplement to vol. 7 (Beirut, 1995), 486; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Saʿīd ʿUmar b. Gharāma al-ʿAmrawī (Beirut, 1995–1998), 59:57; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Wiesbaden, 1979), 4:13. (It should be noted in the Balādhurī story that although Muʿāwiya is supposed to have converted before the conquest of Mecca, the exact time is left ambiguous.)

caliphates of Abū Bakr (11–13 A.H./632–634 C.E.) and ʿUmar (13–23 A.H./634–644 C.E.), that his career as a military governor of Syria began. With the assassination of the caliph ʿUthmān in 35 A.H./656 C.E., Muʿāwiya was either thrust or thrust himself (depending on the source) into the leadership of the community of the faithful and embarked upon his struggle against ʿAlī during the first civil war. After the assassination of the caliph ʿAlī in 40 A.H./661 C.E., Muʿāwiya was given the so-called general *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) and was recognized by most of the community as caliph in Rabīʿa 1 or Jumādā 1, 41 A.H./July or September 661 C.E.[4] He ruled for almost twenty years, which is a long time judging by the standards of other caliphs.

There can be no doubt that he actually existed, for Muʿāwiya is one of the few early caliphs that non-Islamic sources mention by name,[5] and the earliest one named in several surviving inscriptions.[6] On the other hand, there is a great divergence of opinion amongst modern scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, on his personality.

Muʿāwiya's Image[7]

Some modern scholars find Muʿāwiya to have been an intelligent, politically astute leader who not only deserved the caliphate but rescued the Islamic empire by his shrewd policies.[8] Others see him as a cowardly usurper who did not deserve the caliphate and debased the Islamic ideals in his takeover of the leadership of the community.[9] The odd thing is that both sets of scholars use the same early Islamic sources to draw these conflicting conclusions.[10] Their conclusions stem from differing assumptions, which cause them to evaluate in disparate ways the different, sometimes diametrically opposed, depictions of Muʿāwiya in the early Muslim narratives.[11] These depictions relate to three distinct periods: before the civil war, the years of the civil war, and after the civil war. What is striking is that Muʿāwiya's character as it is depicted by these sources changes from one period to the next. These changes are profound and, more significantly, contradictory and incompatible. Indeed, were it not for the

[4] Hinds, "Muʿāwiya."

[5] Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, trans., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), esp. 478–501; R. W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool, 1999), 110–12, 144–54, 259–88; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), 136, 138, 217, 219, 618–20, 640, 643, 645–46.

[6] Yizhar Hirschfeld and Giora Solar, "The Roman Thermae at Ḥammat Gader: Preliminary Report of Three Seasons of Excavations," *Israel Exploration Journal* 31 (1981): 197–219; Judith Green and Yoram Tsafrir, "Greek Inscriptions from Ḥammat Gader: A Poem by the Empress Eudocia and Two Building Inscriptions," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32 (1982): 77–96; Isaac Hasson, "Remarques sur l'inscription de l'époque de Muʿāwiya à Ḥammat Gader," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32 (1982): 97–101; Joshua Blau, "The Transcription of Arabic Words and Names in the Inscription of Muʿāwiya from Ḥammat Gader," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32 (1982): 102. For a full list of the inscriptions and coins that bear the name of Muʿāwiya see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 690–91.

[7] For a more thorough study of the depiction of Muʿāwiya in the Islamic sources see K. Keshk, *The Historians' Muʿāwiya: The Depiction of Muʿāwiya in the Early Islamic Sources* (Saarbrücken, 2008).

[8] J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, trans. Margaret Graham Weir (Calcutta, 1927), esp. 1–113; Henri Lammens, *Etudes sur le siècle des Omayyades* (Beirut, 1930); Erling Ladewig Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in Early Arabic Tradition*, trans. P. Lampe Christensen (Odense, 1974). Petersen believes that political shrewdness, among other qualities, won Muʿāwiya the caliphate, see p. 12. See also Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford, 2006), esp. 71–84.

[9] For this view see especially Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1997). Ironically, Madelung falls into the same trap that he accuses other scholars of falling into regarding the understanding of the conflict between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya. Madelung states that earlier scholars have misread the early Islamic sources by attacking the personality of ʿAlī. He himself attacks the personality of Muʿāwiya by accepting the opinion of two sources, Abū Mikhnaf and Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, on the character of Muʿāwiya. He fails to realize that these particular sources are highly biased against Muʿāwiya. In fact, it is more accurate to call these works hagiographies or salvation histories, in the same vein as the histories of the saints/martyrdoms. The weak points of Madelung's argument are best summarized in Michael Morony's review of Madelung's work in *JNES* 59 (2000): 153–56. Morony writes, "In general, Madelung seems more interested in what should have happened than in the significance of what did happen," 156.

[10] I am confining myself, as have other scholars, with the possible exception of Tayeb El-Hibri (see n. 11 below), to non-*ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions) literary sources.

[11] For a more nuanced look at the sources see: Charles Pellat, "Le Culte de Muʿāwiya au III^{e} siècle de l'hégire," *Studia Islamica* 6 (1956): 53–66; Tayeb El-Hibri, "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the ʿAbbāsids," *JNES* 61 (2002): 241–65. Both authors look at the historical context of the ʿAbbāsid era as the main shaper of Muʿāwiya's image. El-Hibri does dedicate a few pages to the image of Muʿāwiya in the *ḥadīth*.

fact that it is Muʿāwiya whom the sources are talking about in each of these periods, it would be very hard to recognize him as the same person from one period to the next. It might be argued that the differences in the three depictions simply reflect three stages in the career or personality of Muʿāwiya. According to this view, Muʿāwiya is an evolving character who ends up being that proverbial Arab shaykh once he becomes the ruler of the new empire. In this he is comparable to other famous personalities in early Islamic history who undergo profound changes, such as the caliph ʿUmar II (99–101 A.H./717–720 C.E.).[12] This parallel might be convincing if in these sources one could see some sort of progression or regression in his character. But, as stated above, these changes are contradictory, and consequently may be attributable only to the point of view of the narrator rather than to any change in the character of Muʿāwiya himself. Muʿāwiya's character evolves in the narrative depictions because of the period of the narrative. Thus, pre–civil war Muʿāwiya and civil war Muʿāwiya appear to have nothing in common but the same name. These changes are depicted as permanent, with no glimpses of the earlier or previews of the future Muʿāwiya.[13]

To put it succinctly, the stories in the sources that deal with "pre–civil war Muʿāwiya" are not unlike stories about other personalities in these very same sources. For the most part, Muʿāwiya is portrayed in this era as an obedient governor of the province of Syria. In these depictions there are references to his great strategy, his bravery, his loyalty, and his piety. The reason for such a positive characterization is that here the stories and the persona of Muʿāwiya are not yet touched by the historical tragedy of the first civil war. Quite contrary to this image is that of "civil war Muʿāwiya." Here Muʿāwiya's character quite suddenly takes on a very negative form. The reason for this change is that most, if not all, of the early Muslim historians were working from a "blueprint," or model, when it came to Muʿāwiya and his war with ʿAlī. Although it might be argued that there was no single model or blueprint, the book *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn* by Naṣr b. Muzāḥim al-Minqarī (d. 212 A.H./827 C.E.) seems to offer a very close facsimile.[14] Later historians, such as Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. 240 A.H./854 C.E.), al-Balādhurī (d. 276 A.H./889 C.E.), Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 572 A.H./1176 C.E.), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 598 A.H./1201 C.E.), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630 A.H./1233 C.E.), al-Dhahabī (d. 748 A.H./1348 C.E.), and Ibn Kathīr (d. 775 A.H./1373 C.E.) all use it as a blueprint for their depiction of the first civil war. None of their depictions seems to stray too far from that found in *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, even among those historians whose point of view is diametrically opposed to that of Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, such as Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ or Ibn ʿAsākir. The only variation is in the tone of the anti-Muʿāwiya language; in the above-mentioned historians' works, that tone is greatly diluted, but the framework as it was first presented in *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn* is very much the same.

It seems that when early narrators such as Naṣr b. Muzāḥim and possibly Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157 A.H./774 C.E.) wrote about the first civil war, they shaped it in the form of "salvation history"[15]—a play, if you will—about the struggle of the rightful *imām* ʿAlī against the usurper Muʿāwiya.[16] This was done in order to make the story resonate within the Islamic community. To do this as effectively as possible, these early narrators, as Marilyn Robinson Waldman argues, tended ". . . to fit the events of a reformer's life into the pattern of Muḥammad's career, regardless of whether the reformer had consciously

[12] On the image of this caliph see A. Borrut, "Entre tradition et histoire: Genèse et diffusion de l'image de ʿUmar II," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 58 (2005), 329–78.

[13] I should qualify this by stating that there are always negative previews of the future Muʿāwiya and never any positive ones.

[14] One can argue that Abū Mikhnaf's narration, on which al-Ṭabarī relies almost exclusively for his depiction of the battle of *Ṣiffīn*, is the real "blueprint" because of its possible earlier date. I mention *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn* because most of the narratives within the text have been used much more by later historians than those of Abū Mikhnaf. For an in-depth critique of these two sources see Stefan Leder, "The Literary Use of the *Khabar*: A Basic Form of Historical Writing," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material,* eds. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, 1992), 277–315.

[15] Those 'saved' are those who followed the rightful imām, ʿAlī, whereas those who are 'damned' are the followers of Muʿāwiya. Wansbrough, among others, has suggested that the Muslim chronicles construct the past to serve as salvation history for the Muslim community: see John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978).

[16] One can say there was an earlier struggle, at least in the minds of Shīʿīs, between ʿAlī and other usurpers such as Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān. Yet the fringing of the Umayyads probably took place much earlier than that of the Rāshidūn, most probably with the help of ʿAbbāsid propaganda. For further on Shīʿī attitudes to the Rāshidūn and the Umayyads see Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and Law in Imami Shīʿīsm* (Vermont, 1991).

done so himself."[17] Although ʿAlī was not a reformer, his struggle with Muʿāwiya was patterned in the above-mentioned way. By using terms that were used earlier against the polytheists in the prophetic story to describe Muʿāwiya, early historians (narrators) were able to get their point across quite effectively. Wadād al-Qāḍī illustrates this point through an example from Islamic literature[18]— a letter from one Bishr b. Abī Kubār al-Balawī to Ibrāhīm b. ʿUbaydallāh al-Ḥajabī, which al-Qāḍī explains ". . . is built on a foundation of intrinsic parallelism between what the letter goes through in terms of real events and personalities, and what the prophetic *sīra* went through in terms of these same things. . . ."[19]

In this same way, but less obviously, the narrators use different terms and events from the *sīra* to illustrate the wrongs of Muʿāwiya in his struggle against ʿAlī. Thus, the depictions of Muʿāwiya during the civil war have to be understood as an effort by the early narrators to create parallels between Muʿāwiya's struggle against ʿAlī and Abū Sufyān's struggle against the Prophet.

As for "post–civil war Muʿāwiya," except for two incidents—the killing of Ḥujr b. ʿAdī al-Kindī[20] and the appointment of his son Yazīd as heir apparent—Muʿāwiya's role and character within the Islamic narratives border on the anecdotal.[21] In these anecdotes, Muʿāwiya becomes the proverbial Arab *shaykh* who is interested in pre-Islamic stories about the Arabs,[22] or is an enlightened despot in whose presence differing opinions are exchanged. The anecdotal stories that depict these sessions usually center around two personalities, each representing a certain prominent family (ʿAlid, ʿAbbasid, Zubayrid, or Umayyad) as they debate before Muʿāwiya. Usually either Muʿāwiya or one of the persons present makes an anti-Hashimite statement, for which he is rebuffed by a person of the Banū Hāshim or by a pious personality, at which point Muʿāwiya agrees, even if it means that Muʿāwiya or the Umayyads are insulted in the process. It is only when Muʿāwiya acts in a Machiavellian manner that the narratives reflect an actual historical situation, rather than being the usual vague moralizing anecdote.[23]

Not only will the successful resolution of when Muʿāwiya became caliph, which this paper hopes to render, help solve an important historical question, it will also uncover the religio-political biases that have up to now inundated this pivotal historical figure. This paper uncovers, in an indirect fashion, an uncomfortable episode in Islamic history that has, because of recent news and events, become even more significant.[24]

Periodization[25]

Although it is generally accepted that Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān was recognized as caliph in 40 A.H./661 C.E., this paper argues that a sizeable number of the Muslim community recognized Muʿāwiya as caliph (*amīr al-muʾminīn*) not later than 37 A.H./657 C.E. and not earlier than 36 A.H./656 C.E.[26] Muʿāwiya seems not to have claimed the caliphate until after the Battle of the Camel because those who later supported Muʿāwiya (and Muʿāwiya himself) saw Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr as more eligible for the position. It was only after their defeat and death that he raised his claim. To be more precise, Muʿāwiya was acting as caliph when he led his army to confront ʿAlī at Ṣiffīn. In fact, it can be argued that Muʿāwiya, contrary to Sunnī and Shīʿī historical redactions, was one of the contenders

[17] Marilyn Robinson Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative* (Columbus, 1980), 9.

[18] Wadād al-Qāḍī, *Bishr ibn abī Kubār al-Balawī: namūdhaj min al-nathr al-fannī al-mubakkir fī al-Yaman* (Beirut, 1985), 175–78.

[19] Ibid., 137.

[20] K. Keshk, "The Historiography of an Execution: The Killing of Ḥujr b. ʿAdī," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19:1 (2008): 1–35.

[21] El-Hibrī, "Redemption."

[22] In al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥiyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut, 1948), 3:40–41, al-Masʿūdī tells us that Muʿāwiya was wont to spend a third of the night listening to stories of the Arabs, the Persians, and other peoples.

[23] Keshk, *Historians' Muʿāwiya*.

[24] One only needs to read the headlines on recent events in the Middle East or to look at the new 'sexy' titles being mass produced on the Sunnī-Shīʿī divide. See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York, 2006) on the sensational, and on the more sober see Werner Ende, *Die Umayyaden im Urteil Arabischer Autoren Des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Beirut, 1977).

[25] On the importance of periodization for the field see: S. D. Goitein, "A Plea for the Periodization of Islamic History," *JAOS* 88:2 (1968): 224–28; Michael G. Morony, "Bayn Al-Fitnatayn: Problems in the Periodization of Early Islamic History," *JNES* 40 (1981): 247–51.

[26] The early date refers to the Battle of the Camel which took place in the year 36 A.H./656 C.E. and the later date is that for the battle of Ṣiffīn which took place in 37 A.H./657 C.E. For more on both see their respective entries "Al-Djamal" and "Ṣiffīn" in the *E.I.*[2].

for the caliphate immediately after ʿUthmān's death, and, furthermore, that ʿAlī was preparing to confront Muʿāwiya immediately after the killing of ʿUthmān, not because he was a recalcitrant governor, but because he was a possible contender.[27] Indeed, it was only after hearing that al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥa had not been 'secured' in their acceptance of the *fait accompli* with regards to his caliphate that ʿAlī changed his plans and headed towards Iraq instead of Syria where Muʿāwiya was waiting.

This article will first examine all the narratives relevant to Muʿāwiya's position and then proceed to establish a more accurate timeline for his recognition as caliph by a sizeable number of Muslims; it will then show how understanding Muʿāwiya's proper position will clarify many of the seemingly incomprehensible events (such as the arbitration incident) that took place during the civil war. First, however, we must take a look at some of the Western scholarship on this issue, which, as will be shown below, accepts the narratives that put Muʿāwiya's accession to the caliphate at a later date.

Secondary Sources

Most Western scholars have agreed that Muʿāwiya became caliph only after the arbitration agreement in 40 A.H./660 C.E.[28] The differences amongst these scholars lie mainly in their reasons for accepting this date. Julius Wellhausen, for example, has argued that Muʿāwiya fought ʿAlī in order to remain governor of Syria and to punish the rebels for the killing of ʿUthmān. In his view, Muʿāwiya did not become caliph until after the arbitration; as he puts it, Muʿāwiya ". . . was not a pretender and made no claim to the Khalifate."[29] Another scholar, Hugh Kennedy, adds that not only did Muʿāwiya not claim the caliphate, but that, in fact, he wanted a *shūrā* (consultative council) to select the next caliph. He writes: "It is certain, however, that by the time the arbitrators met, the question of who was to be caliph was a very open one. Muʿāwiya, while not claiming the office for himself, suggested an appointment of a *shūrā*. . . ."[30] G. R. Hawting agrees in principle with Kennedy but is more specific. He points out that, before the battle of Ṣiffīn, Muʿāwiya never claimed the caliphate for himself; it was only after the battle that he was given the *bayʿa* by the Syrians, around 659 or 660 C.E.[31]

Martin Hinds agrees with Wellhausen and believes the evidence in the sources points to Muʿāwiya not wanting the caliphate in his war with ʿAlī. He simply wanted to be autonomous in Syria. Hinds bases his conclusion on the fact that there was a successful cessation of hostilities at Ṣiffīn. He believes that both sides (Iraqis and Syrians) wanted to be autonomous and not under a centralized system.[32]

Other scholars have agreed that Muʿāwiya did not become caliph until after the arbitration agreement because he could not even have claimed the position of the caliphate, had he desired it, before the failure of the arbitration agreement (Dhūʾl Qaʿda 37 A.H./April–May 658 C.E.). One such scholar, Wilfred Madelung, asserts that Muʿāwiya, along with his allies,

[27] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al rusul wa-al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1960–1970), 4:444–46 [3091/1–3094/1]; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī Volume XVI: The Community Divided*, trans. Adrian Brockett (Albany, 1997), 31–34; M. J. de Goje, ed., *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari* (Leiden, 1879–1901). We shall include the references to the page numbers of the European edition, which are on the margins of the Cairo edition, throughout our paper and on the English translations.

[28] Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām* 10, reprint of 1926 (New York, 1972), 373; Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in Early Arabic Tradition*, 35, 41; Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan*, 21. Although Humphreys repeatedly settles on 660 as the date when Muʿāwiya declared himself caliph, he shows some hesitation on p. 83 when he states, "In July 660, Muʿāwiya took the bold step of having himself proclaimed caliph by his troops. Exactly when he decided to take this momentous step—a major political risk in the circumstances—is uncertain; it was definitely after the results of the arbitration were announced in early 658 but (in my judgment) probably after Nahrawan, when the disintegration of ʿAli's cause had become irreversible." That still would make it too late by my calculations; still Humphreys' judgment might have been influenced by the same evidence I am about to show in this paper. Another important argument is made by Chase F. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford, 2005), 31–35, where he states, with regards to ʿAbd al-Malik, that one is truly a caliph only in the seventh century, when they enjoyed 'real effective power.' In the case of Muʿāwiya that was certainly the case immediately after the assassination of ʿUthmān.

[29] Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, 55–59.

[30] Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphate*, 2nd Ed. (London, 2004), 80.

[31] G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam* (Carbondale, 1987), 28–30.

[32] M. Hinds, "The Ṣiffīn Arbitration Agreement," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972): 93–113.

knew he could not claim the caliphate because of his lack of qualifications.[33]

All these scholars accept a certain reading of the sources while disregarding others. These readings, gathered below, come to the same conclusion: Muʿāwiya did not claim the caliphate anytime before the arbitration meeting, and it was only after the failure of the meeting in Dhūʾl-Qaʿda in the year 37 A.H. that the Syrians gave Muʿāwiya the *bayʿa* for the caliphate.[34] Below is an assessment of these narratives, which are the main sources relied upon by the abovementioned Western scholars.

The "Traditional" Muʿāwiya: "Just Call Me ʿAmīr'"

Most Islamic historical sources agree with the following report on the use of titles: "ʿAlī, peace be upon him, used to be called Commander of the Faithful in Iraq, and Muʿāwiya used to be called Commander in Syria; so when ʿAlī, peace be upon him, got killed, Muʿāwiya was called Commander of the Faithful."[35] The titles used here are *amīr al-mūʾminīn* and *amīr*, respectively. Al-Dhahabī agrees with the above statements, and he also believes that, when Muʿāwiya prepared to go to Ṣiffīn, the Syrians gave him the *bayʿa* as governor (or commander, *amīr*) and not as caliph (i.e., Commander of the Faithful, *amīr al-muʾminīn*).[36]

A number of narratives demonstrate not only that Muʿāwiya was not caliph, but more importantly that he did not want to be caliph, particularly before the arbitration agreement, and that, in fact, he was trying to remain the autonomous governor of Syria with no ambitions for the caliphate. These narratives fit perfectly the Sunnī paradigm of the caliphate.[37] One can even venture to say that these narratives also fit the Shīʿī paradigm since they show not a lack of ambition on the part of Muʿāwiya but rather his lack of legitimacy.[38] Among the evidence for such a conclusion are the many letters Muʿāwiya supposedly authored before the start of the war with ʿAlī. (On the authenticity of such letters please see the note below; it is sufficient to state here that a historian can discern what might be authentic and what might be later fabrication by looking at what letters best fit the later Sunnī and Shīʿī paradigms and what is more than likely a truer reflection of the period in which they were written.)[39] In one of these letters to ʿAlī, Muʿāwiya writes that he will cause no trouble if ʿAlī allows him to have Syria with the stipulation that he

[33] Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad*, 184. These so-called "qualifications" lie mostly within Shīʿī paradigms, and were possibly acquired by Sunnīs during the ʿAbbasid era; see Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 31.

[34] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ*, eds. Muṣṭafā Najīb Fawwāz and Ḥikmat Kathlī Fawwāz (Beirut, 1995), 115; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (1985), 7:406; Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb, *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (Najaf, 1964), 2:179; Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:71 [3360/1]; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 17, The First Civil War*, trans. G. R. Hawting (Albany, N.Y., 1996), 110; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-mulūk wa al-umam*, eds. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafa ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut, 1992), 5:150. Ibn al-Jawzī dates it one year later in 38 A.H.; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1997), 2:684; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-aʿlām*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1989–2000), 3:552. Al-Dhahabī also dates it in the year 38 A.H.

[35] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:161 [4/2–5/2]; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī, vol. 18, Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Muʿāwiya*, trans. Michael G. Morony (Albany, N.Y., 1997), 6; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam* 4:167. The only difference is that in Ibn al-Jawzī the honorific after ʿAlī's name reads "May God be pleased with him."

[36] Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 3:539. The exact words are: "*fa-bā yaʿūh ʿalā dhā lik amīran ghayra khalīfa*." See also Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Beirut, 1990), 82, where Naṣr tells us that the Syrians gave Muʿāwiya the oath of allegiance only to ask for the blood of ʿUthmān and not to seek the caliphate, which they believed should be decided on the basis of a *shūrā*. This is in stark opposition to other narratives found in the same source; see n. 73 below.

[37] Moshe Sharon, "The Development of the Debate around the Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 121–41.

[38] Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad*, 204–310.

[39] On the authenticity of letters in general and their use as evidence, I refer the reader to such excellent scholarship on the subject as Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Early Islamic State Letters: The Question of Authenticity," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I*, 215–75; Gregor Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l'Islam* (Paris, 2002); Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 106–13. I concur with Robinson's assessment that the letters were used by the Umayyads as a way to broadcast their views. On the authenticity issue, it is Qāḍī (p. 220) who says it best: ". . . while this 'authenticity problem' is a very important one, one should perhaps not exaggerate its difficulty, lest one fall into the abyss of nihilism and the barrenness of self-serving skepticism. The fact that we do not now possess earlier sources does not necessarily mean that such sources did not exist."

not be under ʿAlī's suzerainty.[40] In yet another narrative, also in the form of a letter, Muʿāwiya states that he will give the *bayʿa* to ʿAlī in exchange for the governorship of Syria.[41] These letters clearly show that Muʿāwiya did not claim the caliphate but rather wanted his position as governor of Syria to be reaffirmed by ʿAlī, who by virtue of being asked for that confirmation is recognized as the sovereign.

Other letters attributed to Muʿāwiya fit in the above category except that they argue against ʿAlī's attainment of the position of caliph. One such letter, pre-Ṣiffīn, is addressed to the people of Medina. Muʿāwiya states that the caliphate should be taken away from ʿAlī and decided by a consultative council (*shūrā*), following the precedent set by ʿUmar (r. 13–23 A.H./634–644 C.E.).[42] There is also the letter from Muʿāwiya to ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar (son of the above-mentioned caliph), written after his letter to Medina produced no result, in which Muʿāwiya urges ʿAbdullāh to become caliph.[43] What is interesting about these two letters, which supposedly followed each other, is that they fit well in the larger narrative of the civil war. As stated above, Muʿāwiya not only did not want the caliphate but could not claim it as long as such individuals as ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar were alive, who, after all, were more pious and thus more legitimate.

Moreover, even letters that were allegedly fabricated by Muʿāwiya as a misinformation tool against his enemies did not indicate that he thought of himself as caliph. One such example is a letter that Muʿāwiya supposedly fabricated from Qays b. Saʿd, ʿAlī's governor of Egypt, to himself. In this letter Muʿāwiya addresses himself as *al-amīr* Muʿāwiya, even though he is trying to allege that Qays changed loyalty.[44] Before fabricating this letter, Muʿāwiya had written several times to Qays trying, without any success, to persuade him to come to his side. In one of these earlier letters, Muʿāwiya promised Qays and his family positions of power if he would leave ʿAlī and follow Muʿāwiya. Muʿāwiya's word choice is rather peculiar. Muʿāwiya tells Qays that if he aids him in calling for blood vengeance for ʿUthmān, he will give him power (*sulṭān*) over Iraq as long as Muʿāwiya has power (*sulṭān*).[45] It is curious that Muʿāwiya does not use the words *wālī* or *amīr* for the appointment of Qays, nor the words *khalīfa* or *amīr al-mūʾminīn* for himself.

The above examples of Muʿāwiya's lack of ambition, as it is reflected in the titles, are quite bizarre, yet not as bizarre as a letter found in *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*. This letter simply reads: "From ʿAlī to Muʿāwiya ibn Ṣakhr."[46] The lack of title after ʿAlī's name is more curious than the letter's lack of title after Muʿāwiya's name.

In none of the above letters, even the fabricated one, does Muʿāwiya claim, or even ask for, the position of caliph. Instead, Muʿāwiya is portrayed as the stubborn governor who, due to his lack of legitimacy, can allow his ambition to go only as far as the position of governor. The above letters fit well with the Sunnī and Shīʿī paradigm of the first *fitnah*: Muʿāwiya did not want the caliphate when he fought at Ṣiffīn, and, in fact, he would not have had any support even if he had aspired to the position at this early stage. If one accepts this interpretation of Muʿāwiya's position—that he desired only to be the autonomous governor of Syria—many questions remain unanswered regarding ʿAlī's actions throughout the civil war and the arbitration incident. Furthermore, a closer reading of the words supposedly attributed to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī and ʿAmr at the arbitration shows that Muʿāwiya's position differed quite dramatically from the one presented in this section.

Muʿāwiya the Legitimate Candidate: "Call Me ʿAmīr al-Muʾminīn"

If, in contrast to the traditional view just examined, Muʿāwiya is viewed as having been a direct contender for the caliphate from the moment of ʿUthmān's death and recognized by some as caliph after the Battle of

[40] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 3:22. This is a particularly perplexing statement if one tries to explain it within the usual paradigms of the civil war, for how could Muʿāwiya think of ruling independently of the caliph in Medina? Although this is not the particular place for this theory, this author believes that this is indeed the primary cause of the first civil war, the war between the state and the autonomy of the community.

[41] Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 3:539–40.

[42] Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (Ḥaydarābād, 1968–1975), 2:416.

[43] Ibid., 2:419.

[44] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 4:553 [3243/1]; al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 16:185.

[45] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 5:98.

[46] Muzāḥim, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, 57. There is another example of such an address in al-Masʿūdī's history. It is slightly different in that it reads: "from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān." See al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 3:22.

the Camel, then the actions taken by the other important players during the civil war become more understandable. This is certainly the case for ʿAlī. Indeed the sheer amount of literary evidence supporting this portrayal of Muʿāwiya is remarkable, and this evidence can furthermore be found in both Islamic and non-Islamic sources.

ʿAlī's actions towards Muʿāwiya can best be explained by the assumption that he perceived Muʿāwiya's actions as a direct threat to his position as caliph and not simply the behavior of a recalcitrant governor unwilling to give up his post.[47] Shortly after his election, ʿAlī had replaced the governors of various provinces and appointed his own candidates. The only governor to disobey ʿAlī's orders and refuse to leave his office was Muʿāwiya. It was at this point that ʿAlī decided to go to war against Muʿāwiya and prepared his followers to move against Syria.[48] The reason was that Muʿāwiya represented a direct challenge to ʿAlī's caliphate, since all other possible contenders for the caliphate had either acquiesced or retired from politics. Had ʿAlī's aim been simply to remove a recalcitrant governor, he would have sent a subordinate and not prepared to lead the army himself, as he did against the Meccans.

There is one source that depicts quite differently the removal of the governors by the new caliph ʿAlī. In the book *Al-Imāma wa-al-Siyāsa* attributed to Ibn Qutayba,[49] there is a report that ʿAlī wrote to Muʿāwiya not dismissing him, but rather confirming his position as governor of Syria. Muʿāwiya sent back a single line of poetry declaring war. This hostile reaction supports the view that Muʿāwiya's hostility towards ʿAlī had little to do with his position as governor.[50]

Our sources tell us that, upon his accession to the caliphate, ʿAlī and those who elected him, made sure all possible contenders were silenced.[51] This was done by either having them give the *bayʿa* or by exacting a promise that they would not challenge ʿAlī. Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr fall in the first category and ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar in the second. Therefore Muʿāwiya was another contender whose refusal to give the *bayʿa* made it necessary for ʿAlī to take military action against him. This is made more certain by Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr and ʿĀ'isha's open challenge to ʿAlī and their move towards Baṣra. Their actions brought back contenders whom ʿAlī thought he had neutralized and who presented a more serious challenge to ʿAlī's rule than Muʿāwiya. Muʿāwiya had to be put on the back burner while ʿAlī redirected his troops to Iraq instead. This resulted in the Battle of the Camel, where Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr were killed and ʿĀ'isha was forced to retire from politics.

After the Battle of the Camel there are clearer indications that ʿAlī was fighting a rival caliph and not an intractable governor. This is clearly the case with the narratives describing the encounter of ʿAlī's messenger Jarīr b. ʿAbdullāh al-Bajalī with Muʿāwiya. Jarīr was sent to dissuade Muʿāwiya from his position[52] and to urge him to give the oath of allegiance to Muḥammad's cousin. ʿAlī adds that Jarīr should inform Muʿāwiya that, ". . . I will not accept him as a

[47] ʿAbbās Maḥmūd ʿAqqād, *Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān fī al-Mīzān* ([Cairo?], n.d.).

[48] Ibn Qutayba [pseudo.], *Kitāb al-imāma wa-l-siyāsa*, vol. 1–2, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut, 1997), 49–50; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, eds. ʿAbd al-Minʿim ʿĀmir and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1960), 143; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* 4:444–46 (3091/1–3094/1). The whole preparation is spoken of in a long narrative by al-Ṭabarī, but the specific mention of Syria is in one passage, rendered as follows by al-Ṭabarī (*History*, 16:32): "Now the men of Medina wished to learn ʿAlī's opinion about Muʿāwiyah and his rebellion so they could find out what he thought about fighting fellow Muslims. . . . So they secretly made Ziyād b. Ḥanẓalah al-Tamīmī, who was devoted to ʿAlī, go to him to find out. He did so and sat with him for an hour. ʿAlī then said to him, 'Get ready, Ziyād!' 'For What?' 'You are going to attack Syria!' 'Patience and conciliation would be better,' replied Ziyād. . . ."

[49] There have been a number of articles on the authorship of this book. See G. Lecomte, "Ibn Ḳutayba," *E.I.*[2]; Muḥammad Yūsuf Najm, "Kitāb al-imāma wa-l-siyāsa al-mansūb li-Ibn Qutayba-manhuwa mu'allifuhu?," *Al-Abḥāth* 14 (1961), 122–32; Jibrāʾīl Jabbūr, "Kitāb al-imāma wa-l-siyāsa al-mansūb li-Ibn Qutayba-manhuwa mu'allifuhu?: radd ʿalā naqd," *Al-Abḥāth* 14 (1961), 326–41; Joseph Bradin Roberts, "Early Islamic Historiography: Ideology and Methodology" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1986), 94–95.

[50] See Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-imāma*, 1:45. This declaration was made in a line of poetry: "*laysa baynī wa-bayna Qays ʿitāb ghayra ṭaʿn al-kilá wa-ḍarb al-riqāb.*"

[51] Roberts, "Early Islamic Historiography," 99.

[52] What is interesting about this incident and three others like it (but later and involving other personalities) is that we are not quite certain as to what position these people are trying to dissuade Muʿāwiya from. Is Muʿāwiya to give the oath of allegiance as an ordinary citizen; is he to step down from office; or is he to stop asking for the caliphate for himself? See Muzāḥim, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, 187–88, 197–99; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Ḥasan Tamīm (Beirut, 1963–64), 1:749–50, 753–55; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 4:573–75 [3270/1–3273/1]; al-Ṭabarī, *History,* 17:16–19.

governor nor will the public accept him as caliph."[53] It is clear that ʿAlī saw Muʿāwiya's recalcitrance in terms of a move for the caliphate and not, as many modern scholars have suggested, merely an attempt to retain the governorship. This is made more evident from the letter ʿAlī sent with Jarīr to Muʿāwiya. ʿAlī mentions that by law there is no possibility for Muʿāwiya to become caliph because of his being a *Ṭāliq*,[54] that is, a Meccan who became Muslim after the Prophet's conquest of the city in 8 A.H./630 C.E. According to ʿAlī's understanding, a *Ṭāliq* was disqualified from a leadership role. But ʿAlī's statement only makes sense if it is accepted that ʿAlī saw Muʿāwiya as a contender for the position of caliph. Another highly problematic incident is that of the arbitration agreement. Only when we assume that Muʿāwiya was fighting as caliph, and not as governor, does the whole arbitration incident make sense.

The Arbitration Incident

During the battle of Ṣiffīn (37 A.H./657 C.E.), the Syrians (under Muʿāwiya) and the Iraqis (under ʿAlī) fought to a stalemate; finally, after two months of fighting, the Syrians hoisted copies of the Qurʾān on their lances and demanded to resolve the conflict through arbitration. Many in ʿAlī's army appear to have agreed with this idea, and ʿAlī was forced to accept the proposal. After much debate and rancor, it was agreed by both parties that each would nominate a representative to meet at a mutually acceptable location where they would resolve their differences.[55] In due time, the Syrians chose ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ[56] as negotiator, and the Iraqis chose Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī.[57] In the arbitration meeting ʿAmr and Abū Mūsā discussed many things but finally agreed to remove both men from power and have the choice of caliph be decided by a *shūrā*.[58] When presenting their findings, Abū Mūsā went first, duly stating that both men should be removed from power. ʿAmr, however, supposedly went back on his word and only demanded that ʿAlī be dismissed, while confirming Muʿāwiya in his position.[59] Now, the question is in what position did ʿAmr confirm Muʿāwiya? Was it in the caliphate or simply in the governorship of Syria? Were ʿAmr and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī "caliph makers"?

To these questions, a number of answers have been proposed. Al-Masʿūdī certainly believes that ʿAmr was vested with the power to appoint the caliph. He states that, after the agreement, ʿAmr went to Muʿāwiya and told him that he held in his hand the document which removed ʿAlī and gave ʿAmr the right to appoint whomever he wanted. ʿAmr implied that he would take the caliphate for himself, but Muʿāwiya laid a trap (no elaboration given) for ʿAmr in which he forced the *bayʿa* out of him.[60] Thus, for al-Masʿūdī, Muʿāwiya only became caliph after the arbitration which was, in fact, the very means enabling Muʿāwiya to obtain the caliphate.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, however, strongly disagreed with the assessment of al-Masʿūdī.[61] According to al-Jāḥiẓ, Muʿāwiya was not a caliph, nor did the arbitration agreement lead to his attaining the caliphate; in fact, al-Jāḥiẓ dismisses much of the story of the arbitration and, more specifically, the agreement itself. He points

[53] Muzāḥim, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, 28. The terms used are *amīr* and *khalīfah*.

[54] Ibid., 29–30.

[55] Hinds, "Ṣiffīn Arbitration," 93–113.

[56] Many sources attribute the idea of the raising of the Qurʾān to him. He was the person responsible for the conquest (19 A.H./640 C.E.) and subjugation of Egypt (21 A.H./642 C.E.). He was governor there until the caliphate of ʿUthmān (23–35 A.H./644–656 C.E.). After dismissal he retired from politics but reemerged when Muʿāwiya invited him to Syria at the beginning of the civil war. He was known for his shrewdness and was seen as part of the old guard of the Meccans who fought against Muḥammad. For more see the present author's "ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ" *E.I.*[3] (forthcoming).

[57] As his counterpart, he was a Companion of the Prophet, he participated in many conquests, and was appointed governor. But unlike his counterpart he did not take sides during the civil war. He was known for his piety and Qurʾānic recitation and was probably chosen by ʿAlī's partisans because of these very attributes. After the failure of the arbitration, he retired from politics and was said to have died circa 42 A.H./662 C.E. See also L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Al-Ashʿarī, Abū Mūsā," *E.I.*[2].

[58] This is in reference to Caliph ʿUmar's (12–23 A.H./634–644 C.E.) appointment of an elective council (six members of the early Companions), from which they were to choose the next caliph.

[59] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*, 2:179; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:71 [3359/1]; al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 17:109. The exact words are: "*wa anā akhlaʿ ṣāḥibahu kamā khalaʿhu, wa uthabbitu ṣāḥibī Muʿāwiya*."

[60] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:411–12.

[61] It is always risky to use al-Jāḥiẓ especially when trying to discern his true views on the subject of ʿAlī, though I agree with Adrian DeGifis (University of Chicago Ph.D. candidate) who told me he believes that al-Jāḥiẓ was pro–Banū Hāshim, but at the same time anti-Ghulāt.

out that neither Abū Mūsā nor ʿAmr had the power or legitimacy to appoint a caliph, and, in fact, they did not appoint one. He argues that ʿAlī only agreed to these two personalities because any decision reached by them could be easily dismissed if it was contrary to his liking.[62] Al-Jāḥiẓ's idea that ʿAmr could not appoint a caliph is still acceptable if one allows also the premise that Muʿāwiya was already recognized as caliph before the arbitration itself and that ʿAmr did not appoint Muʿāwiya but rather confirmed him in his position. Still, al-Jāḥiẓ rejects the whole possibility of the arbitration taking place for the simple reason that one of its major outcomes was the delegitimization of ʿAlī.

Unlike al-Jāḥiẓ, most early Muslim historians accept the fact of an arbitration agreement. Many also maintain that ʿAmr was simply confirming Muʿāwiya as governor of Syria and not as caliph. One historian nevertheless disagrees with this assessment: Ibn Kathīr believes ʿAmr's action was to confirm Muʿāwiya in the caliphate. In his explanation as to why ʿAmr would not remove Muʿāwiya, he explains: "ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ saw that leaving the people without an *imām* would lead people astray. . . . So he confirmed Muʿāwiya."[63] Notwithstanding the apologetic nature of his view of ʿAmr, Ibn Kathīr's conclusion that ʿAmr was confirming Muʿāwiya in the position of caliph is still the best explanation of the arbitration [dis]agreement. This also explains ʿAlī's problem with the Kharijites and their vociferous anger at the outcome of the arbitration.[64]

There is also other evidence that Muʿāwiya was recognized (by some, at least) as caliph and was contending with ʿAlī over that position, not only during the time of the arbitration itself, but even before the war at Ṣiffīn. For example, in a speech to his followers before Ṣiffīn, Muʿāwiya enumerates the reasons why he should be caliph. He proclaims to his audience that the Syrians are on a par with both the people of Iraq and of the Ḥijāz in deciding the caliphate.[65] He therefore deserves the caliphate since the Syrians had given him the *bayʿa*, much as the people of Iraq and the people of the Ḥijāz had given the *bayʿa* to ʿAlī.[66]

In a totally separate narrative, the same historian, Ibn Aʿtham, states that the people of Mesopotamia were ʿUthmāniyyūn (i.e., pro-ʿUthmān), and thus gave the *bayʿa* to Muʿāwiya, and came under his power.[67] There is no clear indication what Muʿāwiya's position was vis-à-vis the oath of allegiance, nor is it clear what is meant by "under his power."

It is more than likely that in both narratives, especially the first, the oath of allegiance was for the caliphate. This is all the more certain as the governorship of Syria did not include Mesopotamia; thus the Mesopotamians' recognition of Muʿāwiya must have been as caliph, as he would not have been their governor.[68]

Al-Ṭabarī implies something similar when he writes, "in this year—I mean the year 36—ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ gave the *bayʿa* to Muʿāwiya and agreed to fight ʿAlī with him."[69] Now, although we are again not certain for what purpose the *bayʿa* was given, the insertion of the phrase "and agreed to fight ʿAlī with him" implies that there were two actions, the *bayʿa* and the fighting. This implies that the *bayʿa* was for something other than fighting ʿAlī. Adrian Brockett believes it was indeed the *bayʿa* for the caliphate.[70]

Another incident which supposedly took place during the battle of Ṣiffīn requires some analysis. According to this account, ʿAmr suggested to Muʿāwiya during the heat of the battle that he duel with ʿAlī. Muʿāwiya replied: "By God, you know that until now

[62] Al-Jāḥiẓ, "Risāla fī al-ḥakamayn wa taṣwīb amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib fī faʿlih," in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiz: Al-rasāʿil al-siyāsiyya*, ed. ʿAlī Abū Milḥim (Beirut, 1987), 371–76.

[63] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-al-nihāya*, ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Sātir (Beirut, 1985), 7:294.

[64] Whether it was the principle of the arbitration or the outcome of the arbitration itself, the Kharijites were in any case very disappointed with Muʿāwiya being legitimately recognized as a viable contender for the caliphate.

[65] For more on regional electoral legitimacy, see the present author's *The Historians' Muʿāwiya*.

[66] Ibn Aʿtham, *Al-futūḥ* 2:428.

[67] Ibid., 2:350.

[68] Thomson, Howard-Johnston and Greenwood disagree with this assessment. In order to make sense of the regional armies mentioned by Sebeos, they state that ". . . Syrian component which had been governed by Muawiya since 639 and had been enlarged with the addition of Jazira (northern Mesopotamia) late in 646 or early in 647." R. W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos,* 285. Compare this with Arabic sources, such as al-Ṭabarī, who depict the Jazīra as under a separate governor, at least until the assassination of ʿUthmān.

[69] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 4:558 [3249/1–3250/1]; al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 16:191.

[70] Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 16:191, n. 1154.

ʿAlī has never been beaten; you only want me to be killed in order that you may get the caliphate after me!"[71] This last statement implies, of course, that Muʿāwiya thought of himself as caliph at that time. Finally, there are the explicit statements in Naṣr b. Muzāḥim's *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, indicating that Muʿāwiya's partisans indeed referred to him as caliph.

The earliest narrative affirming that Muʿāwiya was recognized as caliph before Ṣiffīn is found in a poem by one Ayman b. Khuraym al-Asadī. In the poem, he laments that Muʿāwiya did not send any help to the Banū Asad when al-Ashtar attacked them before the Syrians and Iraqis met at Ṣiffīn.[72] Ayman addresses Muʿāwiya as "Commander of the Faithful."[73] Even if a later fabrication, it is quite telling that whoever composed this poem thought it historically accurate to call Muʿāwiya caliph before Ṣiffin.

An even clearer indication that Muʿāwiya was recognized as caliph is the story of one al-Ḥajjāj b. Khuzayma.[74] Al-Ḥajjāj, who traveled to Syria immediately after ʿUthmān's assassination, met Muʿāwiya and asked him: "O Commander of the Faithful, do you recognize me?"[75] This story is also repeated in another source but has there a very different purpose and effect. First and foremost, in this other version Muʿāwiya does not recognize the stranger and asks him to identify himself. Al-Ḥajjāj further identifies himself by adding his maternal grandmother's name: Al-Ṣammah. Muʿāwiya's own words also change the purpose of the story: upon hearing Ibn Khuzayma's words, Muʿāwiya is extremely perturbed and asks him, "Who are you? . . . . You have scared me by greeting me with the [title of the] caliphate before I attained it."[76] It is clear that the author of this narration inserted his own understanding of this story—that Muʿāwiya was conspiring to attain the caliphate from the very beginning of the civil war—in an attempt to reconcile the story with the Shīʿī-Sunnī paradigm mentioned above.

It was not only Muslim historians who attempted to reconcile such contradictions, however; non-Muslim sources also attempted to harmonize them.[77] In a Maronite Chronicle documenting events up to 664 C.E., and believed by A. Palmer to have been written before 680/81 C.E., Muʿāwiya is in one part made caliph already in 658 C.E., while in another part he becomes caliph only in 661 C.E.[78] In another chronicle narrating the interim period of the civil war, the chronicler states that the Arabs ". . . were without a leader during the war of Siffin for five and a half years. After this Muʿāwiya reigned for twenty years."[79] This assertion that the Muslims had no ruler for a period could be the result of the chronicler being unfamiliar with the Muslim sources; but that is certainly not the case with another Christian chronicler's list of Muslim rulers. This particular list, according to Palmer, was translated from an Arabic source, yet it also has the interim between ʿUthmān's reign and Muʿāwiya's reign without any ruler.[80] Hoyland believes this chronicle must be ". . . a later compilation that draws on earlier local records."[81] To add to the confusion, in the work attributed to Theophanes,[82] in the entry for Annus Mundi 6147 (654/5 A.D.), the author writes that Muʿāwiya ruled for 24 years. Yet, in subsequent entries, Theophanes discusses several points of the civil war, culminating in the assassination of ʿAlī and in Muʿāwiya becoming "sole ruler" in Annus Mundi 6151 (658/9 A.D.).[83] This contradicts his earlier statement. We may assume Theophanes was simply copying the Muslim chronicles and made his calculations of 24 years based

[71] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-al-nihāya*, 7:274.

[72] Regarding the use of poetry in the Umayyad era, see now Saleh Said Agha and Tarif Khalidi, "Poetry and Identity in the Umayyad Age," *Al-Abḥāth* 50–51 (2002–2003), 55–119.

[73] Muzāḥim, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, 13. The exact words are: "*abligh amīra al-mūʾminīna risā latan min ʿā tibīna masā ʿirin anjā dī.*"

[74] We are not told who this person is or why exactly Muʿāwiya was able to recognize him.

[75] Muzāḥim, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, 77.

[76] Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, 155. The exact words are: "*fa-qad rawwaʿtanī bi-taslīmaka ʿalayya bi-l-khilāfa qabl an anālaha.*"

[77] An important discussion on the sources of the chronicles and some of the motivating factors behind the depiction of the Umayyads by non-Muslim sources can be found in Elizabeth Jeffreys, "Notes Towards A Discussion of the Depiction of the Umayyads in Byzantine Literature," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East VI: Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East,* eds. John Haldon and Lawrence I. Conrad (New Jersey, 2004), 133–47.

[78] Andrew Palmer, trans., *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), 30–31.

[79] Ibid., 43.

[80] Ibid., 49.

[81] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam,* 139.

[82] *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor,* 497, where he states that Muʿāwiya was 'military commander,' i.e., governor, for 20 years and 'emir,' i.e., caliph, for 24 years.

[83] Ibid., 483–85.

on the contradictions discussed above.[84] But it would be more accurate to view the real answer in the term 'sole ruler,' which implies that, in fact, Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī ruled at the same time. This point is made more evident by another non-Islamic source, *The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741*, whose author maintains that Muʿāwiya took the rule right after ʿUthmān's death and ruled for 25 years, five of which were engaged in a civil war.[85]

Conclusion

There is no doubt that only after the abdication of al-Ḥasan in 40 A.H./661 C.E. was Muʿāwiya recognized by the whole Islamic community as sole caliph. Yet, this does not preclude the fact that previous to 40 A.H./661 C.E. he was recognized as caliph by a sizeable number of Muslims. The evidence reviewed in this paper has shown that Muʿāwiya definitely acted as caliph immediately after the Battle of the Camel in 36 A.H./656 C.E. and that Muʿāwiya was certainly regarded (even by his enemies) as a contender for the caliphate immediately after the killing of ʿUthmān.

Above all, the actions of ʿAlī show that Muʿāwiya was a contender for the caliphate immediately after the death of ʿUthmān and was not simply a recalcitrant governor. The sources repeatedly emphasize that ʿAlī was elected by a majority of Muslims who had the right to elect the caliph; at times they are identified as the *Anṣār* and *Muhājirūn*, and at other times it is a regional identification as the people of the Ḥijāz. This, of course, counters any claim or right of the Syrians to elect a caliph. Then there is the idea, emphasized by ʿAlī's letters and messengers, that Muʿāwiya does not qualify to be caliph. There would have been no need for any of these arguments if Muʿāwiya had simply been regarded as an intractable governor.

As for the non-Islamic sources, some have no ruler during the civil war while others attribute 24 or 25 years instead of 20 to Muʿāwiya's reign, which, given Muʿāwiya death in 60 A.H./680 C.E., would mean his reign began in 656 C.E. (24 or 25 lunar years). Regionalism may account for those sources that do not mention ʿAlī, but not those that attribute 24 or 25 years to Muʿāwiya's reign. Had this been simply a reflection of regionalism on the part of non-Islamic Syrian sources, Muʿāwiya's reign would have lasted 45 years—the period he served as governor plus the time he was caliph. This can only be explained if one accepts the above theory as to when Muʿāwiya became caliph.

Finally, one of the main reasons why any attempt at establishing an accurate assessment of Muʿāwiya's career is very difficult, is that he was a key participant in the most traumatic event of the nascent Islamic community. The civil war forever colored the reputation of those involved, particularly the leaders, thus making any extraction of the facts difficult, but not quite impossible:

> ʿAbdullāh b. al-Mubārak was once asked who was better Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān or ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz[86]? He said: 'By God the dust that went in the nose of Muʿāwiya with the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, is better than ʿUmar a thousand times. . . .[87]

[84] On the argument that non-Islamic sources utilize Islamic sources simply for information on the early period, see Lawrence I. Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition: Some Indications of Intercultural Transmission," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990), 1–44. Conrad argues "that historiographical consideration of the *Chronographia* of Theophanes must be revised to take into account the presence in the text of materials that ultimately come from the Arabic tradition of Islam" (p. 43).

[85] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam,* 618.

[86] This is ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (ʿUmar II) who ruled 99–101 A.H./717–20 C.E. He was regarded by all the sects at this time, and later, as the only pious Umayyad.

[87] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbā al-zamān,* ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1972–94), 3:33.