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SUCCESSION OF THE PROPHET AND THE ISSUE OF QIRTAS | SUNNI PERSPECTIVE

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As the Prophet lay on his deathbed with his companions by his side, he tells them “Let me write for you something, after which you never go astray” to which one of the companions, reportedly to be Umar ibn Khattab, replies “The Prophet is delirious (*hajara*), the book of God is enough”. This results in an argument amongst the companions who raise their voices in his presence leading to the Prophet ordering them to leave. This incident known as the incident of the paper (*qirtas*) or the calamitous day of Thursday (*raziyat yawm al khamis*)¹ and is narrated by authentic sources both Shia and Sunni with slight variations². It would be valid to pose the question as to what the Prophet wanted to write down and why some companions did not want him to do so.

For Shaykh Umar Ramadhan, the incident of Qirtas does not undermine the Sunni view of succession to the Prophet. He employed a range of arguments to support his view; linguistic evidence in addition to looking at the chain of narrators and analysing the historical context after this incident. He did point out that there exists a minority opinion amongst Sunni scholars that the companions were wrong in their actions in denying the Prophet his request.

The Shaykh pointed out the main source of this solitary narration (*khobar wāḥid*)³ stemmed from Abdullah bin Abbas and was not free of problems in its chain of narrators. Furthermore, due to conflicting narrations regarding this event it cannot be used as forming a theological view according to Jallaladin al-Suyuti and Imam al-Nawawi. However, the narrative raises contentious issues such as

¹ Known as the calamitous day of Thursday by Ibn Abbas since the Prophet did not get a chance to write down what he wanted to.

² Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari *Volume 7, Book 70, Number 573*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 5, p. 76; Mufid, *al-Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 184.

³ Khabar Wahid is a technical term in hadith studies referring to narrations that have one or a few transmitters at each chain of narrators.



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the companions objecting to the Prophet's direct order and them raising their voices in contradiction to the Quranic verse "do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet"⁴. In addition to this using harsh words against the Prophet such as the term *hajara* (translated by some as delirious) would need a good reason. Quoting the scholars' views on these issues a justification was provided by Shaykh Umar to these objections. The term *hajara* by some Sunni scholars such as Shah Waliyyul has been interpreted in the positive meaning of departing and not delirious⁵. As for the opposition to the Prophet's command and Umar saying the book of God is enough, Sunni scholars consider this to be the *ijtihad* of Umar⁶. Furthermore, the Prophet not challenging Umar's objection, something the Prophet has done in previous instances, was indicative of the Prophet's approval of it, in addition to his silence in the five days after this incident and before his death.

The scholars in the gathering pointed out during the discussion that the term *hajara* (delirious) is quite harsh in reference to the Prophet and alternative interpretations are linguistically far fetched. Furthermore, some Sunni scholars raised the objection that for one to say 'The book of God is enough' whilst opposing the Prophet's command is paradoxical, because the Quran itself orders the believers to follow Allah and the Prophet⁷.

⁴ Quran 49:2

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⁶ Al-AYni

⁷ See 3:32, 4:59 and many such verses.