

The Coins of Victory

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In The Name Of God, The Compassionate, The Merciful

Abdul-Malik was the ruling Khalif. He had leaned back on his throne and was listening to his Vizier. The Vizier was standing to attention and reading out the daily report from a piece of paper. When Vizier's report was over, Abdul-Malik thought to himself for a moment and then ordered the Vizier to hand him the paper so that he could read it himself. As soon as he looked at the piece of paper, his eyes fell upon an emblem imprinted on top of the paper. Abdulmalik stared at the emblem on the top of the paper. He examined the print by looking up and down the paper but couldn't make out anything from it. He had by now forgotten all about the report and was eager to find out the meaning and significance of the emblem. Not being able to make it out, Abdulmalik asked the Vizier, "What does the emblem on top of the paper mean?"

The Vizier, as if it was for the first time he had seen the emblem, replied:

"I do not know, your honour!"

Surprised Abdulmalik inquired: "You mean to say you do not know the meaning of the emblem on top of the paper you read your reports from?!"

The Vizier took another look at the paper, inspected the print and said: "No, your excellency. I'm sorry not!"

Abdulmalik turned to another of his administrators which people called the second vizier and called him near. The second vizier came forward, bowed and took the paper from Abdulmalik, who asked him: "Tell me, "Do you know anything about the emblem?"

The second vizier examined the emblem on top of the paper closely and after a few seconds stepped forward a little and said:

"Blessed be the Khalif! The emblem on top of the paper is imprinted in the Roman language if I am not mistaken. It is definitely not Arabic. With

your permission, let us bring to your presence someone who is familiar with the Roman language."

On the Khalif's orders, several of his men went for the man who knew the Roman language. Soon, the man was brought to the Khalif's court and admitted an audience. Abdulmalik handed over the paper to the man and said: "I hear you know the Roman language! Tell us what you make out of the emblem printed on top of this paper."

The man took the piece of paper from the Khalif and after examining it said:

"Blessed be the Khalif! This is the sign of the christians and engraved on this sign are words expressing the motto and belief of the christianity."

On hearing the man's words, Abdulmalik got furious and ordered his soldiers to take the vizier to the dungeon.

The vizier who had not expected such a harsh reaction from the Khalif kneeled and implored: "O' the great Khalif! what wrong have I done to be deserving such punishment?"

Abdulmalik angrily responded:

"Is there a wrong greater than this that you be my vizier and yet not know that on top of the piece of paper you have written your report on is an emblem disseminating the motto and belief of the christians?"

The poor vizier asked permission and reasoned:

"Your excellency! This is not my wrongdoing. My servants have bought these papers from the market and believe you me. On top of every piece of paper sold in the market of Shâm you will find this emblem. I am a muslim and I am innocent in this regard."

* * *

The truth of the matter was as the vizier had claimed. In those days only the christians of Egypt ran the business of paper-making. The christians in Egypt imitated the Roman christians and would print the same emblem as them. These papers would then be sent from Egypt to all the Islamic lands, as a consequence of which all the papers in the hands of the muslims had the christian Sign on top of it.

* * *

When Abdulmalik learned of the truth, he pondered a while. He did not wish to have these papers in his lands; the papers with the emblem of the foreigners. So, he wrote a letter for the governor of Egypt, ordering him not to allow the paper-makers in the Islamic land to print those signs on top of the papers they produced. He ordered the sentence, "There is no God, but Allah" to be printed instead. On his orders, all the papers containing the emblem and sign of christians were collected and instead the papers with the imprinted, "There is no God, but Allah" replaced them.

The Muslim people became very happy as a result. Abdulmalik too who knew that people did not like him much and suffer from his oppression took the opportunity and introduced himself a great Khalif.

These papers were soon circulated everywhere and little by little some of them found their way into the court of the Romans. The Roman emperor was a christian with much prowess. He always supported the christian paper-makers in Egypt through aids sent to them.

On learning that the emblem of the christians had been removed and an Islamic motto had been replaced instead on Abdulmalik's orders he became furious.

The Roman emperor sent a letter to Abdulmalik. The letter went like this: "The Khalifs before you, all used the papers with the christian emblem printed on top of them. For decades these signs have appeared on top of all the papers printed by christian paper-makers. It would be much better if you do as your predecessors and order the Islamic motto, 'There is no God, but Allah' to be removed from the papers and the previous signs reprinted.

The Roman emperor sent a lot of presents along with the letter.

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The emissary of the Roman emperor entered Abdulmalik's palace with the letter and many valuable presents. The letter and the gifts were presented to Abdulmalik who after reading the Roman emperor's letter said to the emissary:

"The letter you have borne has no reply. Take the presents and return to your land and tell the emperor Abdulmalik accepts no presents."

The emissary left the palace with the presents and returned to Rome. when he arrived in Rome, he related to the emperor Abdulmalik's message. The Roman emperor wrote another letter for Abdulmalik. In this letter too

he reasoned with Abdulmalik to remove the motto "There is no God, but Allah" from the new paper rolls and instead reinstate the previous christian one.

This letter too was sent to Abdulmalik this time with a second emissary. He doubled the presents on this occasion.

This time too as before Abdulmalik refused to accept the Roman emperor's gifts and left his letter unanswered.

The emissary returned to Rome with the presents and the unanswered letter.

Abdulmalik was well aware that the Roman emperor possessed much power and influence; For this very reason that he did not wish to hurt his feelings. But he could also not undermine his decision.

All the people of 'shâm' had learnt about the ordeal. If Abdulmalik gave in and acted according to the whim of the Roman emperor, then he would have lost his dignity and sense of honour.

For a third time, the Roman emperor organized more valuable gifts and sent them to Abdulmalik. This time, however, he sent a threatening letter to the Khalif. The text of the letter went as such: "Twice I have written to you in a friendly manner and sent you some gifts as a sign of good will, but you have ignored my letters and returned the presents. This time I have forwarded a considerable array of presents which I would urge you to accept and issue an order to remove the sign of "There is no God, but Allah" from the top of the papers and reinstall the previous christian emblem as before. In this manner our friendly relationships would continue, but if you fail to comply with our wish, I will issue orders to engrave on the Gold and silver coins in current use, sentences denoting insult and humiliation of your prophet - Muhammed - you well know that in the lands under your rule your subjects do business with the Roman coins. It will be an embarrassing situation to see your people do business with the coins which have engraved on them insults and vows addressed to your prophet."

The last letter of the Roman emperor made Abdulmalik anxious. He had not before then even given a thought to the issue of the coins. The Roman coins were the money of those days in current use. All people did business with these coins. In the pockets, tills and homes of every one Roman coin could be easily found. If the Roman emperor made his threat materialize through issuing orders to imprint on the coins insults on the

prophet, the muslims would inevitably revolt. They needed coins to transact and there was no one in the Islamic lands to know how to make coins to rid people of the need to use Roman coins.

Abdulmalik was totally helpless and knew not what to do. If he allowed the papers to be remade with the christian sign on top of them, he would lose all his influence and validity as a Khalif.

If he did not allow this to happen, he would be confronted with the coins which posed an even a greater threat to the structure of his power and rulership.

Abdulmalik was hesitant this time to send the emissary of the Roman emperor back. Instead he ordered his advisors and the elites to a meeting so that they could make a decision on the matter and respond to the Roman emperor's message.

The elites of shâm and the advisors of the Khaliphate had made a circle round the Khalif.

Abdulmalik let the gathering learn of the recent developments but no one could suggest any feasible solution to the dilemma. The meeting lasted a few days but to no avail. On the last day of the meeting, one of the well-known elites of shâm hesitantly and with some uncertainty stepped forward and respectfully addressed Abdulmalik as:

"I know of someone who will definitely find a solution to your problem. You, too, know him; but I'm not certain if you wish to ask for his advise or not?"

"Who is it?" Abdulmalik inquired.

"He is Imam Muhammed Baqir *(Peace Be Upon Him)*" The man answered.

A heavy silence fell on the meeting hall. All knew that Abdulmalik was the enemy of the Imam.

Everybody knew Imam Muhammed Baqir *(Peace Be Upon Him)*. They knew him to be a great scholar and for this very reason he was nicknamed 'Baqir', meaning 'the resolver of Knowledge,' They were sure that he would find a just solution to the problem.

Abdulmalik pondered. He too was pretty certain that Imam Muhammed Baqir knew the way out of this awkward situation but asking help from Imam was very difficult for him to do. He had many a times before had ordered the governor of Medina to watch over Imam and his aides since he knew he was much loved by people and might have posed a

threat to his rule.

Nevertheless after he thought to himself for a while, he wrote a letter to the governor of Medina ordering him to ask Imam to accept Abdulmalik's invitation and with all due respect send him to Shâm.

This he did and several days later, amidst the joyous welcome of the people of Shâm, Imam entered Shâm. He knew of the problem that had risen.

Not much later and in a good time Abdulmalik acquired audience from the Imam and discussed the matter with him.

After hearing the story to the full Imam said: "The threat of the Roman emperor will not go into effect. Rest assured that the almighty God will not spare him the opportunity to make coins with insults to the prophet of Islam engraved on them and distribute it among people. The solution to the problem is easy.

Bring together all the craftsmen of Shâm so that I could tell them how to make coins."

Very soon the craftsmen of Shâm were brought to the presence of the Imam in a gathering. Imam Muhammed Baqir taught them the necessary skills of making coins. The weight, size and value of coins were calculated and three kinds of coins were produced. On his order the Sura 'Tawhid - i.e. Unity' was engraved on one of the coins and the other two coins had the name of the prophet of Islam engraved on them.

Imam Muhammed Baqir's methods of making coins was soon spread and taken to other Islamic lands for other craftsmen to be learnt. The people would thenafter hand the Roman coins over to the treasury of the governors and instead recieved the Islamic cions. On the coins, the date and the name of the city of its make were also to be found.

Transaction with the Roman coins was regarded as illegal and soon the Islamic coins replaced the Roman coins as the currency of valid use in the transaction of the muslim people.