

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - The Battle of the Camel

The Battle

Before it was day break the two armies had taken the field and engaged in a life and death struggle. The regicides fought most desperately, and their attacks were resisted by the confederates. The battle accordingly took a sanguinary turn. It was a deplorable engagement, when the Muslims cut the throats of Muslims. It appeared that the injunctions of Islam had been forgotten, and the people reverted to the pre-Islamic practice of settling their disputes through the arbitration of the sword. According to chronicles when the opposing sides came together breast to breast with a furious shock the noise that was produced was like the sound of thunder. The forces of the two sides fought with the ferocity of lions and men fell on the battlefield from both the sides like the fall of autumn leaves. Talha fought bravely, and he killed many warriors of the army of Ali. He was however mortally wounded by the arrows that hit him. He was carried in an unconscious state to a house in Basra where he soon expired. By noon the tide of the battle began to turn against the confederates at this stage. Zubair is also reported to have escaped from the battlefield, and taken the road to Makkah. When Ayesha came to know of the state of the battle, she came to the battle seated in a litter on a camel. She exhorted the people to stop fighting. She posted Kaab b Sur the Qazi of Basra in the center of the battlefield with a copy of the Holy Quran on his head. He exhorted the men of the army of Ali to stop fighting in the name of God. Some men of the army of Ali were inclined to listen to the call of Kaab b Sur well known for his piety and learning. The regicides who were in the forefront of the fight cried "He is the man who reported that Talha and Zubair had not taken the oath of allegiance to Ali voluntarily. Kill him." The regicides rained arrows on Kaab b Sur, and he fell dead. The confederates shot arrows in return killing some of the regicides. The frenzy of the combatants appeared to know no bounds the appalling carnage continued unabated, and the dead and the dying lay piled in heaps. Ayesha seated in a litter on a camel became the main target for attack by the forces of Ali. The followers of Ayesha flocked round her camel to protect her. A devoted follower held the reins of the camel, and as any one from the army of Ali advanced to attack the camel, the man holding the reins of the camel cut him with his sword. In such duels many persons fell on both the sides. Over two dozen persons of the army of the confederates lost their heads while holding the bridle of the camel of Ayesha. The casualties in the case of the warriors of the army of Ali who dashed against the camel were much heavier. Ali felt that as long as the camel of Ayesha stood, the battle would continue. In order to end the battle, Ali directed his men to slip behind the camel and cut off its legs. Some warriors of the forces of Ali managed to slip behind the camel and cut off its legs. As the beast fell on the ground dead, it gave such a shriek that made the men shiver in their shoes. Ayesha escaped with her life although the litter in which she had been sitting was pierced with arrows. Ayesha was lifted out of the litter, and borne to a house in Basra.

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