

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Assessment of Ali by Western Scholars

Philip Hitti

In his book history of the Arabs, Professor Hitti assesses the character of Ali as follows: "Valiant in battle, wise in counsel, eloquent in speech, true to his friends, magnanimous to his foes, Ali became both the paragon of Muslim nobility and chivalry, and the Solomon of Arabic tradition around whose name, poems, proverbs, sermonettes and anecdotes innumerable have clustered. He had a swarthy complexion, large black eyes, bald head, thick and long white beard, and was opulent and of medium stature. His saber Dhul Fiqar, wielded by the Prophet on the memorable battlefield of Badr, has been immortalized in the words of the verse found engraved on many medieval Arab records 'No sword can match Dhul Fiqar, and no young warrior can compare with Ali'. The later Fidayan movement which developed ceremonies and insignia savoring of medieval European chivalry and the modern scouts movement, took Ali for its Father and model. Regarded as wise and brave by all the Islamic world, as idealistic and exemplary by many Fidayan and Derwish fraternities, as sinless and infallible by his partisans, and even held to be the incarnation of the deity by the Ghulah (extremists) among them, he whose worldly career was practically a failure, has continued to exert a posthumous influence second only to that of the Holy Prophet himself. The throngs of pilgrims that still stream to his Mashhad at Najaf and to that of his Son Husain, the Shia arch-saint and martyr at nearby Karbala, and the passion-play enacted annually on the tenth of Mohurram throughout the Shia world testify to the possibility that death may avail a Messiah more than life."

[View Page](#)

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