Assessment of Ali (AS) and Muawiyah according to Christian scholars

Maryam Hekmatnia*
Department of Arabic Language and Literature, University of Qom, Qom, Iran
*Corresponding author

Abstract

The confrontation between the Arab World and the West in the contemporary era has brought about positive effects such as awakening of Arab from negligence and seeking their noble culture and civilization. Therefore, Arabs started fighting against the manifestations of the new civilization and defending their noble religious and cultural identity. Following Arabs’ attempts, Arab Christians became familiar with characters like Ali (AS) and considered him as Sidrat al-Munteha\(^1\) and a member of the family of purity and chastity compared to Muawiyah.

Keywords: Ali (AS); Muawiyah; personal characteristics; nobility.

\(^1\) the Lotus Tree of the Extremity
Introduction

After the confrontation between the Arab world and the West, Arabic contemporary age experienced new horizons, and Arabic nations started confronting the manifestation of new civilization that had targeted their religious, cultural, and political identity. This issue that was considered as a highly serious threat to Muslims and Arabs forced them to initiate systematic uprising and combat against such a threat so they woke up from negligence and returned to their past and the legacy of their glorious civilization and culture most of which was achieved through Islam and its teachings. Therefore, they attempted to search and explore their authentic culture and civilization. In so doing, they got to know characters that not only are considered as the honor of Arabs and Islam but they also played a significant role in founding the World Civilization. On top of these lasting figures is Ali (AS) who attracted the attention of Arab scholars both Muslim and Christian through his incomparable brilliance. Therefore, numerous studies have been carried out on his mysterious character. During such studies, researcher have familiarized with negative characters of the history of Arabs. One of these evil characters is Muawiyah who has been compared against the personality and state of Ali (AS) by Christian scholars.

In the present study, library- and sometimes dialog-based methods were employed in order to investigate the works of Christian writers and scholars and compare the personalities of Ali (AS) and Muawiyah. Not only were the personality of Ali (AS) and Muawiyah compared but also their family, lineage, and ancestors were compared as well.

The difference between Ali (AS) and Muawiyah in terms of their nobility and ancestors

One of the criteria that Christian scholars made use of in order to compare Ali (AS) and Muawiyah is family and nobility because they believe in heredity and consider it as the strongest factor affecting the evolution of Ali’s (AS) and Muawiyah’s personality. Therefore, they have made a great deal of attempts to understand historical issues and truths and examine hereditary issues. In this hereditary assessment, Ali (AS) has been compared to a tree whose roots are in purity and chastity while Muawiyah’s are in corruption and debauchery.

Among Christian scholars who have investigated the ancestors of Ali (AS) and Muawiyah, Paul Salama has dealt with this issue more than any other scholar. In the beginning, Salama mentions Ali’s (AS) ancestors and the birth of Hashim and Abdul-Shams, “Hashim and Abdul-Shams were twins. Hashim was born first, followed by Abdul-Shams while his heel was touching Hashim’s forehead” (Ya’ghubi, 2003: 311). Salama compared Hashim to Abel and talked about his virtues. He was named Hashim because of his abundant forgiveness and goodness; therefore, Abdul-Sham and his nephew Umayyah were always jealous of him. About Hashim’s virtues, Salama states:
Hashim helps those who are in need and gives up the rest of his belongings to predatory eagles.

His hands rush toward forgiveness before women fancy about Hatim al-Tai.

Salama (1423: 20)

He also refers to Hashim’s role in the development and prosperity of business in Mecca because he connected the business markets of Yemen and Levant, from which summer and winter journeys of Qurai began, as the Holy Quran refers to: “For the security of Quraish. Their security during winter and summer journeys.”2 (106/1-2).

Salama also compared Hashim to a strong mountain while his brother Umayyah to a jealous wolf:

Umayyah was jealous of him and burned in his jealousy, just like wolf that is jealous of lion.

Hashim is stable like a mountain and does not shake with the sound of rooster or deer.

(Salama, 1423: 21)

Afterwards, he describes Hashim as Seyed al-Batah while Umayyah as someone jealous and envious who became an idiom who pretended forgiveness and wanted to fight against his uncle. As a results of his fight, “Umayyah had to return to Levant with disgrace and stay there for 10 years” (Ibn Sa’d: 71).

Hashim, the ruler of the lands and plain and Umayyah’s folly were not comparable at all. They are very different. Umayyah pretends forgiveness and generosity while Hashim is really generous.

Umayyah started fighting against his uncle and defeated and faded away just like mirage in someone’s eyes.

(Ibid, 21)

After mentioning Hashim’s virtues, Salama talks about his son Abdul-Muttalib as the praised sheikh (Shaybah al-Hamd) because of his good deeds and being praised by people. Like his father, Abdul-Muttalib was the chieftain and the shelter for Quraish. Salama describes Abdul-Muttalib this way: his forehead is shining, and when the conditions are getting worse, he is still generous and kind. Like his father, Umayyah’s son was also jealous of Abdul-Muttalib:

Umayyah’s son Harb is an idiot and black-faced, his father is the source of evil and his heart is full of hatred while Abdul-Muttalib has a bright face. When the heavens are angry and against him, Abdul-Muttalib is cheerful and smiling.

(Ibid, 22)

By mentioning these cases, Salama refers to enmity and competition between Umayyah and Hashim. As mentioned in the history, there was a competition between Hashim and Umayyah, and the one who loses should sacrifice 50 black-eyed camels in Haj season. Finally Umayyah lost the competition and returned to Levant, this was the beginning of the first enmity between Hashim and Umayyah, as stated by Paul Salama (Halabi, 1400: 71).

2 ﴿إِيَافُهُمْ رِحلةَ الشِّتاءِ وَ الصَّيْفِ﴾

http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index
Then, Salama writes about the Prophet (AS) and Umayyah’s countless feuds such as the enmity of Harb bin-Umayyah’s daughter, the prophet’s uncle Abu-Lahab’s wife, the enmity of Abu-Muawiya and Abu-Sufyan with the prophet, and the enmity of Sakhr and Hind with the prophet.

In an epic form, Salama writes about historical events and depicts the identity and the background of the families of Ali (AS) and Muawiya and praises Ali (AS) and his ancestors and followers while reproaches Muawiya and his ancestors, children and followers.

Antwon Bara is another author that has depicted the difference between the nobility of Ali (AS) and Muawiya. He has described Hosseini epic and attributed the conflict between Imam Hossein (AS) and his enemies to the ancient conflict between Hashim and Umayyah, which continued until the time of the prophet and Abu-Sufyan and reached the time of Ali (AS) and Muawiya. Finally, this conflict continued in the time of Imam Hossein (AS) and Yazid. After investigating the roots of the conflict between these two families, as cited by Bin Addi, Antwan Bara described the situation as follow:

Your father (Umayyah) is a debauchee due to his exceeding companion with women, but his father (Hashim) is chaste and virtuous.
(Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1999: 207)

Bara also has drawn a distinction line between the two families and considered Bani-Hashim as the religious leaders who were responsible for commercial and political affairs.

Another Christian writer George Jordac has carried out investigations into the families of Ali (AS) and Muawiya. In an analytical way, he attributed the conflict between the two families to their opposing ideas about the concept of power and governance and stated, “Their conflict has roots in numerous differences between the two families. They differed in origin, education, and practice; they also differ in understanding concepts and the actuality of objects. Therefore, the two families have numerous differences in regard with their virtues and ethics, policy, and practices” (Jordac, 1323: 600).

According to Jordan and other historians; therefore, Bani-Hashim had the following characteristics:

- Not following the past religions and idolatry
- Having sincerity in faith and practice, such as Abdul-Muttalib’s willing to sacrifice his son for God
- Having sincerity in their beliefs and helping those in need (Jordac: 599-605)

Jordac also writes, “Hashim family especially Abu Talib’s family and ancestors delight mankind even if we return two or even five generations before Islam. They are real depictions of their ancestors in terms of brevity and manhood, sincerity and honesty, accomplishment,
eloquence, and kindness. If this family did not have noble ethics and strong personality, its children would never be the pioneers for righteousness in an era when selfishness, flattery, and moral deviation were widespread while deviation is much easier than consistence; however, Abi-Talib chose consistence” (Ibid: 601).

On the other hand, Jorac describes Bani-Umayyah’s family as follow:
- Companions
- Business and politics and avarice
- Oppression and speculation and hypocrisy
- Turning away from helping the oppressed

Therefore, Jordac believes that Umayyad Islam was aimed at profit making, and their intention is called, “Umayyad Motivation”.

**Ali (AS) and Muawiyah**

After examining the nobility and the roots of Ali’s (AS) and Muawiyah’s families, Christian writers investigate Ali (AS) and Muawiyah themselves.

Jordac counts Muawiyah as the most outstanding figure of Umayyad family; therefore, he cannot find any trace of Islam and Muslim’s behaviors in him. After comparing Muawiyah and Ali (AS), Jordac writes about Muawaih’s role in assassinating Ottoman and his deceptions and states that he is not a Muslim not only in his practice but also in his mood and temperament.

Jordac considers Ali (AS) as a unique personality and the symbol of brevity and manhood but Muawiyah as the agent of domination, politics, and deception. He writes that Ali’s (AS) motto is, “I never deceit anyone in my religion and do not do any basement in my work” (Nafseh: 613) while Muawiyah’s motto is, “God has soldiers that are made of honey” (Ibid, 613) and he mixes them with poison and kill his enemies with.

In one of his letters, Imam Ali (AS) writes to his agent in Ahwaz, “I swear to God, which is the rightest swear, if I am informed that you have betrayed in Muslim’s properties, I will be so strict on you will run into the ground and lose whatever you possess” (Ibid, 63).

However, Muawiyah told his agent, “The Earth belongs to God, and I am His Caliph, so whatever I take from God’s property is mine, and I am allowed to quit whatever I like” (Ibid, 613-631).

In one of his odes which is 180 lines, Paul Salama blames and criticizes Muawiyah and depicts his attempts along with 'Amr ibn al-'As, Mughira ibn Shu'ba, and Ziyad Ibn Abihi to ascend to the throne and associated Muawiyah with stigma and shame because he descended from Zanji. Salma reproaches him as follow:

It is no surprise that you are so vile and ignoble because when you have grown up in the dirt of your family.
Salama also blames Muawiyah for choosing evil followers and his devil deeds like killing Imam Hossein (AS), Malik al-Ashtar, and Rahman, Khalid ibn al-Walid’s son. According to Salama, Muawiyah is the father of lies, deception, and fraud; he is evil like carrion rotten corpse and his followers are as wicked and wild as himself.

Jordac states that after Ali (AS), circumstances became more appropriate for Muawiyah’s reign so he could ascend the throne and start an oppressive government. As a result, oppression and cruelty developed, and corruption and deception took the place of justice in his period. Jordac believes that cruelty and ignorance of Muawiyah’s period were more than in the Age of Ignorance because the idols were made of stone and could not move while Muawiyah could, idols had one face while Muawiyah had thousands and his sins are countless:

Hind’s son is the father of all lies. He is worldly-minded and unscrupulous.  
Oh, Hind’s son, if he hits the stone sword to the ground, so he is martyr for faith, justice, and fairness.  
A martyr that refuses to insult Ali (AS) will be given the Heaven twice as his reward.  
Oh, Hind’s son, do you defame Ali (AS) for malice after each prayer?  
You necessitate cursing Ali (AS) and consider it as a part of your prayers and murmur your insult in the end.  
Who can be guilty of cursing the prophet’s family? How do you expect God to forgive you?  
This is a sin that carries away God’s mercifullness and generosity.  
Even looting the property of the orphan is a smaller sin than cursing the Prophet’s (AS) family.  
This sin is so big that even pulpits will be annoyed and cry 70 years for Islam, Ali (AS) and his family.  
(Ibid, 201)

As opposed to Jordac that has compared Ali (AS) and Muawiyah from economic and political views, Salama focused on their differences in terms of ethics and faith and stated that Muawiyah had no morality and conscience and believed that since Umayyad used to insult the Prophet’s (AS) family, the Heaven is cursing Umayyad every moment:

Whoever insults the Prophet’s (AS) family, the Heaven will curses them at once.  
(Salama, 1423: 203)

In his book, “Comparing Ali (AS) and Muawiyah”, Nasri Sahlab is another Christian writer compares Ali (AS) and Muawiyah in terms of their nobility and ideology:

– Ali (AS) is the student of the Holy Quran which is God’s speech; therefore, Ali (AS) is God’s student. And Muawiyah is Satan’s student, and Satan is an angel who
rebelling against God and preferred the Earth to the Heavens and the World to the Day of Judgment, so he was expelled from the Heaven.

- Ali (AS) acquired the language of truth and honor and attempted to develop the Kingdom of God on the Earth and talked to mankind in the Heaven language while Muawiyah learned the language of deception and tried to establish his own kingdom on the Earth and talked to people in the language of the Hell.

- Ali (AS) believed that lie is the worst so he never said anything other than truth, but Muawiyah believed that the best speech is the one that brings profit for the speaker and the worst is the one that causes fine or loss to him.

- Ali (AS) never let hatred in his heart while Muawiyah was full of hatred and deception.

- Ali (AS) stepped into the way of patience and perseverance in honesty which is the most difficult and risky way while Muawiyah chose the easy and cunning way. Therefore, all the world laughed at Muawiyah while Ali (AS) gained the Hereafter (Nasri, 391-398).

Sahlab refers to these differences and concludes that Ali (AS) is the son of the Heaven while Muawiyah is the son of the Earth.

In fact, Jordac, Salama, Sahlab, and other Christian writers tried to depict Ali’s (AS) and Muawiyah’s personality, and as we know personality is completely different from the person and his appearance. Personality is a set of intellectual, behavioral, and practical latent features that are affected by factors heredity, environment, education, and acquisition. There is an outstanding difference between Ali’s (AS) and Muawiyah’s personalities. Muawiyah’s actions were more aimed at mundane goals and Ali’s for the sake of God. Muawiyah reached his goals through abuses and oppression while Ali (AS) through faith and justice. Muawiyah advised his children to debauchery, rebellion, and murder of their opponents while Ali (AS) invited his children to piety, good deeds, and virtues as he was the symbol of ethical virtues.

Results

In addition to individual features, nobility and origin have been utilized by Christian writers as criteria of assessing persons. They compared Ali (AS) to purity and chastity tree while Muawiyah to vice and debauchery tree.

- George Jordac compared Ali (AS) and Muawiyah from economic and political perspectives. He considered Muawiyah as the most outstanding figure of Umayyad family whose reign was full of deception and imposture and had a mundane goal. Muawiyah utilized abuses and oppression to reach his goals. On the opposite, Ali’s (AS) reign was based on justice and reached his goals through faith and justice.

- Salama compared Ali (AS) and Muawiyah from the perspectives of morality and faith. He introduced Muawiyah as someone who did not have morality or conscience and
was the symbol of lies, deception, and oppression while Ali (AS) was the symbol of justice and manhood.

−Personality has an essential difference with appearance. Personality is a set of intellectual, behavioral, and practical latent features that are affected by factors heredity, environment, education, and acquisition. Jordac, Salama, and Sahlab attempted to depict Ali’s (AS) and Muawiyah’s personality.
References


The Holy Quran