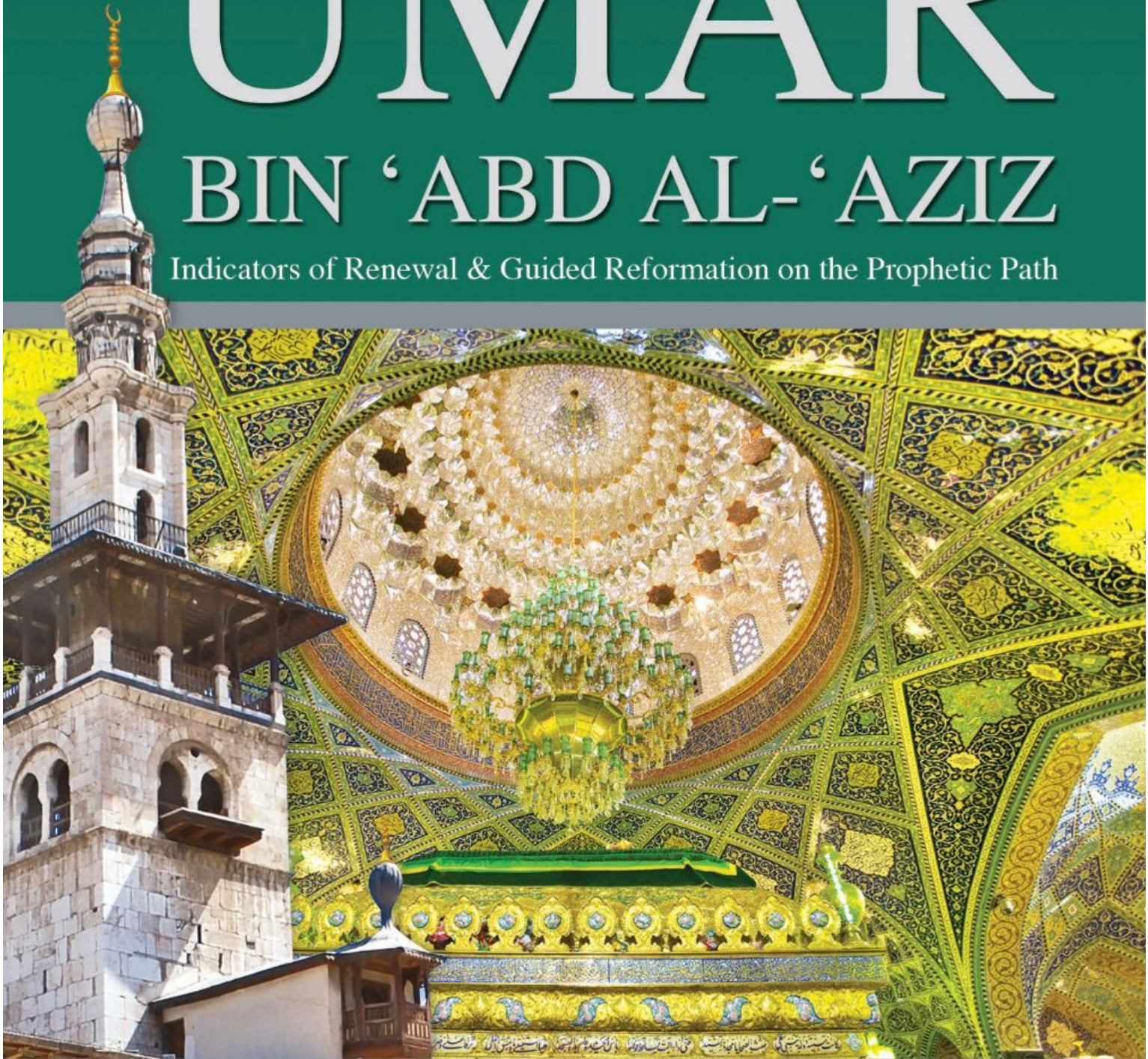


The Rightly-Guided Caliph & Great Reviver

‘UMAR BIN ‘ABD AL-‘AZIZ

Indicators of Renewal & Guided Reformation on the Prophetic Path



Dr. Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi



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Biography Of Umar Bin Abdul Aziz

(May Allah Be Pleased With Him)

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Translator's Foreword

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful and Master of the Day of Judgment. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship save Allah Alone Who has no partner, the Lord of the Universe and the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. I bear witness that Muhammad, upon whom be peace, is His servant and Messenger, who was sent as a mercy for mankind and a proof for those traversing the path to Allah.

It has been a great pleasure and delight to render the biography of such a righteous and virtuous character as 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz into English, while I recognise that doing it justice is probably almost impossible. As-Sallabi's extensive efforts are certainly commendable given that 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz made it his life's work to reform his State and revive Islam by administering truth and justice in all aspects of his personal, religious and political life, which this book proves he did with great success, by the will of Allah. For this reason alone, it is no exaggeration to say that English readers have long been deprived of the life story of this outstanding Islamic hero and exemplar. While there are some short and scattered accounts about his general life, this is the first book to deal specifically with 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's reforms, which is surprising given that he has been attributed the title of Mujaddid (Reformer; Reviver) within Islamic scholarship, in great detail.

As-Sallabi covers a wide range of content matter: from religious treatise, doctrines and sermons, to political manifestos and edicts, to poems, eulogies and prayers. Since much of the texts he refers to are classical, translating them has required the consultation of specialist sources, such as reference books, classical dictionaries, Shuyukh (religious leaders), poets and specialists in classical Islamic history to ensure correct understanding. Whilst the same cannot be said of many authors, as-Sallabi adopts a proper referencing system throughout the book that makes locating the original works for the purposes of background research and cross-referencing so much easier. As a translator, this labour on the part of the author never goes unappreciated!

Translations from the Qur'an were taken from Dr. Muhammad Taq-ud-Din al-Hillal and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan's Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language (2007), Riyadh: Darussalam. All authentic Ahadith have been translated according to approved English translations of Ahadith Sahihah where their sources have been provided, while all other Ahadith not attributed to these sources have been sourced elsewhere, whenever possible; otherwise translations are my own.

Islamic terms have been loosely translated, as literal translation would often result unfavourably and probably incomprehensibly. Some terms have been transliterated, such as Sunnah or Bayt al-Mal; these appear in italicized format and glosses have been included in the body of the text as well as in a glossary as a means of introducing specific Islamic terms and concepts to the reader and preserving the Arabic and Islamic authenticity of the original text. Another reason for keeping some of the terms in transliterated Arabic was that these words often deal with culture-specific or religion-specific concepts that need to be understood with their details intact and with their full meanings, which might have been lost in translation by attempting to offer equivalent terms in English. For example, the Bayt al-Mal, literally "The House of Money" and loosely rendered "Public Treasury", served as a royal treasury for the caliphs in the sense of managing finance and government expenditures as a treasury most commonly does, but it also administered distributions of Zakat (Prescribed Alms) revenues for public works. Because of the added function specific to the role of the treasury in an Islamic State, I found it more appropriate to use the transliterated term throughout the book so as to imply this difference. A clear transliteration system has been adopted (see transliteration table) that would facilitate back-transliteration if necessary (such as in the case of proper names).

All good comes from Allah, while all mistakes are from myself. May Allah reward the author for his efforts, Darussalam publishers for their commitment to making such works available and I ask that

Allah accepts this translation as a benefit to the Ummah and amongst my good deeds on the Day of Judgment – Amin.

Safina Naser

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About the Author

Born in the city of Benghazi, Libya, in 1963.

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Obtained a PhD in Islamic Studies awarded by Umm Durman Islamic University in 1999 with a thesis entitled: ‘The Establishment of Jurisprudence in the Holy Qur’an’.

He has published numerous works, including:

‘The Creed of Muslims based on the Attributes of the Lord of the Worlds’

‘Moderation in the Holy Qur’an’

The series: ‘Pages from Islamic History in North Africa’

‘The Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties and the Emergence of the Kharijites’

‘The Rafidite ‘Abidiyyah (Fatimid) State’

‘The Jurisprudence of Empowerment in the Murabitun State’

‘The Almohad Dynasty’

‘The Ottoman Empire: Factors Behind its Rise and Reasons for its Decline’

‘The Conqueror of Constantinople: Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih’

‘Shi’ite and Kharijite Thought from the Perspective of the Ahl as-Sunnah and Jama’ah (People of Prophetic Tradition and its Communities)’

‘The Senussi Movement in Libya’:

‘Imam Muhammad bin ‘Ali as-Senussi and His Method of Establishment’

‘Muhammad al-Mahdi as-Senussi and Ahmad ash-Sharif’

‘Idris as-Senussi and ‘Umar Mukhtar’

‘The Jurisprudence of Empowerment in the Holy Qur’an’

‘The Prophetic Biography: An exposé of its facts and an analysis of its events’

‘The Uplifting Biography of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq: His Personality and Rule’

‘The Section on Speech in the Biography of Amir al-Mu’minin (Commander of the Faithful) ‘Umar bin al-Khattab’

‘The Generous Beneficence of ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan: His Personality and Rule’

‘The Highest Demands in the Biography of ‘Ali bin Abi Talib: His Personality and Rule’

‘The Biography of the Amir al-Mu’minin and the Fifth Rightly Guided, Al-Hasan bin ‘Ali bin Abi Talib: His Personality and Rule’

‘The Umayyad Dynasty: Factors for its Success and Causes of its Decline’

‘Mu‘awiyah bin Abi Sufyan: His Personality and Rule’

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz: Indicators of Renewal and Guided Reformation on the Prophetic Path.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to every Muslim who is eager to show pride in the Religion of Allah and I ask the Almighty by His Beautiful Names and Attributes to make it purely for His sake. Allah, the Sublime, says: “So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord.] (al-Kahf, 18:110)

Preface

Indeed all praise is for Allah. We praise Him, seek His help and ask for His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from our own evils and bad deeds. Whosoever Allah guides will not go astray and whomever He leads astray will not be guided. I declare that there is no god worthy of worship other than Allah Alone without any partner and I declare that Muhammad is His servant and messenger [O you who believe! Fear Allah (by doing all that He has ordered and by abstaining from all that He has forbidden) as He should be feared. (Obey Him, be thankful to Him, and remember Him always) and die not except in state of Islam [as Muslims (with complete submission to Allah. (Al-‘Imran, 3:102).

“O Mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Hawwa) Eve, and from them both He created many men and women; and fear Allah from whom you demand (your mutual rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship).” (an-Nisa’, 4:1)

“O you who believe! Keep your duty to Allah and fear Him, and speak (always) the truth! He will direct you to do righteous good deeds and will forgive you your sins. And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), he has indeed achieved a great achievement (i.e. he will be saved from the Hellfire and admitted to Paradise).” (al-Ahzab, 33:70-1)

O Allah! All praise belongs to You as befits Your Majesty and Your great Might. You are praised until You are pleased and if You are pleased all praise still belongs to You after that. To proceed:

This book constitutes one section from the work entitled: ‘The Umayyad Dynasty: Factors for its Success and Causes of its Decline’, itself a more detailed description of a period of significant reform and the famous Mujaddid (reviver or one who renews the Religion of the Ummah), ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. It is a biographical account of his life story, his quest for knowledge, his most prominent achievements during al-Walid and Sulayman’s caliphates, as well as his own caliphate, his accession of the seat of power and the administration of his state. He would go on to restore importance to the principles of Shura (consultation) and justice, exhort his governors to abolish all unjust ordinances and dismiss all repressive subordinates from their ranks. He ordered the governors in his administration to return to the owners and the Ahl adh-Dhimma (Non-Muslims living under Muslim rule) what had been confiscated from them under the rule of the former Caliphs. He administered justice for the people of Samarkand and he succeeded in reviving the spirit of freedom in his state, such as the freedom of thought, ideological, political and personal freedoms, and the freedom of trade and welfare. Attention is also afforded to his outstanding qualities, such as his profound fear of Allah, the Sublime, his asceticism, humility and piety, his clemency and ability to forgive and pardon others, his patience and forbearance, and as an ardent worshipper, he would earnestly supplicate to Allah and implore for his prayers to be answered. The book takes a further look at the characteristics of renewal executed by ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, such as the adoption of Shura (consultation), the transparency and integrity of his leadership, uprightness in the selection of trustees, and his revival of the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil, as well as the principle of justice.

Among the criteria of a Mujaddid (reviver or one who renews the Religion of the Ummah) is that his ‘Aqidah (doctrine of faith) must be manifestly pure, his practices sound, he must be a diligent scholar, and his renewal and reformation is to prevail over the intellectual and behavioural status quo. Another section of the book looks at how ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz led a campaign in the interests of the creed of the Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah (People of Prophetic Example and its Communities), the Oneness of Allah, His Most Beautiful Names and Sublime Attributes, the concept of Iman (Faith), faith in the Akhirah (Hereafter), belief in the Ghayb (Unseen), such as the existence of bliss and punishment of the grave, Resurrection, the Balance of the Scales on the Day of Judgement, the Hawdh (Pool where the Prophet will quench the thirst of the believers on the Day of Judgement), the Sirat (Bridge” on the Day of Judgement), Jannah (Paradise), an-Nar (Hellfire) and that the believers will see their Lord in Paradise where they will be called to adhere to the Book (i.e. the Qur’an), the Prophetic Sunnah

(Tradition) and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. His stance in dealing with the Sahabah (Companions of the Prophet) and the discord that had ensued between them, in addition to his position with the Ahl al-Bayt (Family of the Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is detailed herein, along with the strategies he employed to resolve complex matters involving the emergent Kharijite, Shi'ite and Qadariyyah sects.

A closer study of his personal life depicts his treatment of outsiders within the social realm, the attitude he had in the upbringing of his children and family, in terms of his choice of tutors and righteous mentors to supervise their education, which he determined in accordance with a strict programme of training and upbringing. In this manner, he specified the teaching methods that he wanted to be used and prioritised the subject matter to be taught, the effects of which proved to have a significant and fruitful impact on his son, 'Abd al-Malik.

On a social level, accounts of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's interaction with the people and his interest in public welfare are related, for example, how he would take it upon himself to remind the masses to be mindful of the Akhirah (Hereafter) and to correct false beliefs and misconceptions that had become prevalent, such as his rejection of tribalism. He further recognised the rights of creditors and therefore paid off the debts of the insolvent in a bid to settle matters. In a similar manner, he offered ransom for Muslim prisoners of war, gave to the needy, authorised for marital dowries to be paid from the Bayt al-Mal (Public Treasury), and by making changes of this sort, he attempted to narrow the disparities between the social classes. He proved to be distinct in his attitude towards poets and the great importance he placed on the active participation of scholars in the process of reform, so much so that he immediately appointed a consultative body or Shura council to remain close by his side for the purpose of keeping a watchful eye over him and his subordinates in the administration of state affairs.

Another notable feature related to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's life story are the schools of knowledge that were established during his reign and under the Umayyad dynasty, among which were the schools of ash-Sham (the Levant), al-Hijaz, Iraq, Egypt etc. Collectively, these schools followed the teachings of the Tabi'in (second and third generations of pious followers) centred on the science of Qur'anic exegesis and exerted great effort to enforce the Sunnah (Prophetic Tradition), of which 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz played a fundamental role in its codification. At the heart of the school curriculums were the teachings of purification and emulating the conduct of the Tabi'in, as in the case of Al-Hasan al-Basri's school which will be looked at in greater detail. Thus the book talks about his school, its students, among who was the likes of Ayyub as-Sukhtiyani, Malik bin Dinar and Muhammad bin Wasi', and of how Al-Hasan al-Basri requested permission to retire from his post. It further notes his relationship with 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz and the letters he sent to him, which serve to depict the just attitude of the leader who complied with his wishes.

Of interest is 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's political stance and his reasons for lifting the siege of Constantinople, which was due to his insistence on comprehensive Da'wah (calling to Islam; preaching), the institutionalisation of scholars and the dissemination of knowledge directed at the masses. To this end, he dispatched earnest scholars to the shores of North Africa and elsewhere to educate the people and teach them the Book (i.e. Qur'an) and Sunnah (Prophetic Tradition), in addition to sending messengers bearing invitations to Islam to the kings of India and other distant lands. Driven by his commitment to inculcate true values, he further believed that reform had to affect fiscal policy also, which is evident from his economic mandate that aimed to remove injustice through the redistribution of income and wealth in a sustainable manner towards the achievement of social well-being and prosperity. The book tells of the realization of these objectives as creating a viable atmosphere for development, the restitution of rights, liberation, a thriving economy and the enactment of a new agricultural policy that would prohibit the sale of foreign land, protect the interests of farmers and relieve them of the heavy taxes formerly imposed on them. It was on such a broad scale and through means of the above that 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz advocated reform, improvement, the recovery of destitute land and the initiation of infrastructural projects. His policies on public expenditure, for example, the provision of a social security welfare system, rationalising spending in the interests of the state, such as slashing the special privileges enjoyed by the Caliph and

Umayyad generals, on top of his capping administration and military funds, are stated. Another notable feature that is given due attention is the judicial institution under his rule and some of the independent rulings that were reached in the field of jurisprudence, such as his view on giving gifts to governors of state, his negation of rulings that went against religious legal texts and so forth.

In terms of administration, the book looks at his management policies and some of the most popular governors and subordinates within it, the likes of whom he selected based on his eagerness to depend on and delegate personnel from good, righteous backgrounds. Characteristic of his leadership style was his direct supervision of state matters, his capacity to manage, plan and organise affairs, the strategies he employed to combat administrative corruption, such as reprieving delegates of their livelihood, and his commitment to eradicating dishonesty and deceit. Likewise, he banned the acceptance of gifts or donations for fear of falling into bribery and he put a stop to extravagance and excess. Workers and delegates were further prohibited from engaging in trade and it was he who opened up the channels of communication between officials and their subjects. Remarkably, he accounted for money that had been wrongly deposited from the Bayt al-Mal (Public Treasury) by those in power before him. Foundations for the management concepts of centralisation and decentralisation were first laid under ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s administration, who equally underlined the need for flexibility. He divided his own time between the service of the state and its citizens, while exercising the principle of delegating the responsibly of running it.

As the title would suggest, the book exhibits ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s dedication to reform and renewal – whether fiscal, political, administrative or otherwise -- and his commitment to implement the precepts of Islamic law upon the state and nation, and upon societies and individuals. In doing so, he demonstrated the effects of holding fast to the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah (Prophetic Tradition) and that a righteous Caliph means guidance, security and stability for his state, not to mention the victory, conquest, glory, honour and blissful existence lived by this great reformer until his death.

It can certainly be said that the emergence of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz on the scene at this precise stage in history constituted a decisive turning point in the history of the Ummah (Community of the Faithful), whereupon he assiduously took pains to return life to the regulation of Islamic law and for the prospects of the rightly guided Caliphate to be dedicated to the precepts of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Of course, the manifestation of this unique phenomenon was not merely down to the heroism of the leader but ultimately on the capacity of Islam itself to revert political, legal and social life back to stability and bringing it in line with its basic principles. In fact, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s Caliphate provides historical proof against those to continue to claim that a state based on the teachings and legal rulings of Islam is prone to disaster and evident failure. On the contrary, the idea has not been dreamt up and history itself defies those who argue against it. Let it be said to them: [Produce your proof if you are truthful.] (al-Baqarah, 2:111)

By adopting the methodologies of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and taking him as his role model, Nur ad-Din Zangi (died 568 AH) made reformations that became the fruit of the nation, contributed to its advancement, revived its consciousness, beat its enemies, the Crusaders, who were purged from the Bayt a-Muqaddas (Holy House”, i.e. Jerusalem) at the hands of his disciple, the most honourable leader and heroic commando, Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi (may Allah enhance the likes of him in our own generation).

Reformation – as understood by honest Muslims and not what is propagated by the enemies of Islam – is realised by Allah’s sending of messengers to the people, just as Shu‘ayb (peace be upon him) said to his nation who were steeped in error and corruption in both belief and conduct: “He said: ‘O my people! Tell me if I have a clear evidence from my Lord and He has given me a good sustenance from Himself (shall I corrupt it by mixing it with unlawfully earned money). I wish not, in contradiction to you, to do that which I forbid you. I only desire reform to the best of my power. And my guidance cannot come except from Allah, in Him I trust and to Him I repent.” (Hud, 11:88)

To have undertaken the task of reform, after the greatest of all human reformers, Muhammad (prayers of Allah and peace be upon him), on the Prophetic path were his rightly guided successors and the pious scholars of the Ummah (Community of the Faithful), such as ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. Due to having been afflicted by backwardness, waywardness, dispersion, weakness and degradation, today’s societies are definitely in most need of the guidance practiced by these early reformers as derived from the example of the Holy Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

If truth be told, the jurisprudence of the Islamic historical movement guides us to the factors that lie behind its many successes and at the foundations that form the root of its staggering triumph. Most importantly, there existed purity of creed, clarity of approach, the application of Allah’s law within the state, righteous leadership that looked to the Light of Allah for guidance and who enacted the Sunan (Traditions; Laws; Ways) of Allah in the nurturing and education of communities. Knowledge of the ills and conditions of societies and nations, the secrets of history, the schemes and ploys of the enemy – whether that was the Crusaders, Jews, atheists, false cults or innovated sects – enabled the righteous government to act with them accordingly and whereby every party was granted its inalienable rights. As a devout Muslim, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was not only graciously tolerant to the members of other creeds but also solicitous towards them. Hence, cases of revival jurisprudence and renaissance initiatives prove to constitute a well-nested, long-established, complex history that cannot be absorbed only by understanding the Book of Allah, the Almighty and the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), which is connected to the preserved, guided jurisprudence of our great forebears. Rather, knowledge of revival phenomena comes from knowing its manifestations, its features and characteristics, the reasons for its existence, causes for its removal and how it has been a benefit within Islamic history and in the revival experience.

It is without doubt that this nation has not only become uprooted because of the relegation of God and His Messenger (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but the occurrence of defeat on so many levels expresses such relegation as a fatal culture. In terms of the “correct culture”, then, this is built on the Muslim identity – the Muslim family, Muslim society and Muslim State – based on the strong precepts of the Book of Allah, the Sunnah of His Messenger (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and on the guidance of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The one who follows this way is on the straight path and it goes without saying that the genius of establishing the “correct” civilisation is in preserving unadulterated Islam till this present day with the help and will of God.

The biography of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz offers us insight into the correct concept of the term “reformation”, that is, the original Qur’anic concept as it is properly understood and applied by our reformist ‘Ulama’ (scholars), not in the modern Western sense that had been coined in the minds of some political thinkers who then spread their false ideas to unfortunately receive some acceptance from certain Muslim imitators of the West. Today, the idea of revolution refers to broader, more comprehensive and deeper reformation that consists of gradual, non-violent, small changes, although it has somehow been rendered synonymous by the West with sudden, radical upheaval that is both violent and sporadic. However, this fails to encapsulate the correct meaning that is derived from the Holy Qur’an, which implies a more comprehensive, greater revolution, which is always directed at the greater good, whilst the revolutions of others might conversely be in the interests of the already corrupt, or for the purpose of disposing one authority for another, or a governor for another governor, etc.

As for he who longs to tread the Prophetic path and the course of the Caliphate upon having declared the sincerity of his reformation mission to Allah, the Sublime, then Allah will facilitate his success and loosen the people’s tongues to profusely praise and commend him, just as the Libyan poet, Ahmad Rafi al-Mahdawi, wrote:

“When God loves the heart of His servant,

The Gifts of the Opener are bestowed upon him;

When God refines the intention of a reformer,

The souls of His slaves incline towards Him.”

I ask Allah, the Sublime, to make this work purely for his sake, of benefit to His servants and a source of reward for me and my brothers who helped towards the publishing of this work by His good grace and generosity. I humbly request for every Muslim who takes up this book not to forget this poor slave when supplicating to his Lord for His forgiveness, mercy and pleasure. “My Lord! Grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your Favours which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds that will please You, and admit me by Your Mercy among Your righteous slaves.” (an-Naml, 27:19). Allah, the Sublime, says: “Whatever of mercy (i.e. of good), Allah may grant to mankind, none can withhold it; and whatever He may withhold, none can grant it thereafter. And He is the Almighty, the All-Wise.” (Fatir, 35:2).

Peace and blessings of Allah be on our Master, Muhammad, and on his family and Companions.

Glory and Praise be to Allah. I declare that there is no god worthy of worship other than You. In You I seek forgiveness and unto You I repent. To conclude, we invoke all praise for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

A poor servant in pursuit of his Lord’s forgiveness, mercy and pleasure,

‘Ali Muhammad Muhammad as-Sallabi

The Era of the Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz From Birth to Caliphate

His Name, Title, Epithet and Family:

His name was 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz bin Marwan bin al-Hakm bin Abi 'al-'As bin Umayyah bin 'Abd Shams bin 'Abd Manaf, the eminent Imam (leader), Mujtahid (issuer of independent legal rulings), Hafiz (one who has committed the entire Qur'an to memory) ascetic and slave, the true Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful), Abu Hafs, the Qurayshi Umayyad, al-Madani (from al-Madinah) and later al-Masri (from Egypt), the rightly guided, pious Caliph and "Ashajj" (the Mark; Scar) of the Umayyad tribe.

He was one of the Imams of Ijtihad (the process of independent law-making based on the Islamic Shari'ah and other legal sources) and one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. He was a person of outstanding morals and ethics, well-rounded, refined, diplomatic and politically-minded who showed a keen interest and passion for justice whenever possible. He possessed extensive knowledge as an acclaimed Faqih (jurist) of unadulterated intelligence and understanding. He was devoutly repentant, consciously God-fearing and upright in his obedience to Allah. Despite holding the seat of the Caliphate, he remained an ascetic who pronounced the truth with firm conviction to those around him, including the many governors who detested his inquisitions of them, or his deducting their salaries, or repossession of their illegitimate acquisitions. He relentlessly discouraged and punished laxity of morals. In fact, they did not cease to hate him up until the moment he was poisoned, upon which he gained conviction and happiness, not counting his high ranking as one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs in the view of the people of knowledge. As for his speech (may Allah have mercy on him) it was nothing other than eloquent and articulate.

His Father:

His name was 'Abd al-'Aziz bin Marwan bin al-Hakm, a name that acquired a status as one of the finest Umayyad leaders. Courageous and generous, he held the position of Governor of Egypt for more than twenty years. His qualities of piety and righteousness were so resolved that when he wanted to marry, he said to his assistant: "Collect four-hundred Dinar (coins; units of account) of my good money for I want to marry from a household that possesses goodness." He would later marry Umm 'Asim, the daughter of 'Asim bin 'Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), i.e. the granddaughter of the Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Umar bin al-Khattab, whose name it is said was Layla. It is noteworthy to mention here that his marrying into the family of 'Umar bin al-Khattab would not have been so, were it not for his upstanding reputation and virtuous character.

Even as a youth, he possessed a remarkably good character as regards his dedication to pursue knowledge and his obvious interest in the Prophetic Ahadith (sayings). In favour of his own merit, he once sat in the company of Abu Hurayrah and others among the Sahabah (Companions), his study of the Ahadith continued to excel even after his appointment as Governor of Egypt. Thereupon, he would habitually appeal to ash-Sham (the Levant) to send him what they had been informed pertaining to the sayings of the Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) apart from what had been narrated by Abu Hurayrah, since he was already familiar with those. Nevertheless, 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's father was the type of person who was accustomed to addressing important matters, both before and after he became the Governor of Egypt. From the time he entered Egypt, he longed to rule over it and for that reason, he exerted great effort from then onwards to one day meet his aspirations, which he did; in actuality, not only did he assume this position but became one of the finest and most generous Umayyad Governors. Every day, a thousand dishes would be prepared and placed around his house, in addition to a further one hundred dishes brought round by the tribes. On the subject of his generosity, he used to say: "If a man allows me to

give him something knowing that it is from me, then whatever I have of his is greater than what he has of mine.”

Many a historian has commended his distinct munificence, a quality that was coupled with certainty of faith in the fact that Allah, the Sublime, bestows sustenance on whosoever He wills. Concerning this he would say: “How strange it is that a Mu’min (believer) believes that Allah provides sustenance to whosoever He wills yet he keeps his money locked away at the expense of great reward and commendation!” In the same manner, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was a God-fearing man, which is evident from the last words he uttered while on his deathbed: “I wish I were of no importance. If only I were this free-flowing water or plant in the land of the Hijaz!”

His Mother:

She was known by the epithet Umm ‘Asim, the daughter of ‘Asim bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). Her father, ‘Asim bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattab, the Faqih (jurist) and nobleman, also known as Abu ‘Amr, the Qurashi of the ‘Adwi tribe, was born during the days of Prophethood and related traditions from his father and mother, Jamilah bint Thabit bin Abi al-Aqlah, a woman from the Ansar (Helpers). Her father, Thabit bin Abi al-Aqlah, was tall in stature and from nobility. He was devout, righteous and charitable, and as far as his speech was concerned, he was a talented and lucid poet. This was the character of Caliph ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s grandfather from his mother’s side. He died in the seventieth year and was eulogised by his brother, Ibn ‘Umar, in the words:

“Had only the fate of death left ‘Asim alone,

So that we might come and go together.”

As for the person of his maternal grandmother, she held a special status with ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). On the authority of ‘Abdullah bin az-Zubayr bin Aslam, on the authority of his father who reported it from his grandfather, Aslam, he said: “While I was with ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) in al-Madinah during one of his frequent journeys in disguise to survey the condition of his people, we overheard a milkmaid refusing to obey her mother’s orders to sell adulterated milk by diluting it with water. When her mother insisted that ‘Umar would be none the wiser, the girl replied: “O mother! By Allah! I would never obey him in public and disobey him in private. For if ‘Umar will not come to know of it, the Lord of ‘Umar surely knows!” Upon hearing every word, ‘Umar then gave instructions for the door of their house to be marked.

The following morning, ‘Umar said: ‘O Aslam, pass by that house and purchase milk from the girl to see if she kept her resolve’, and so he did to learn that the milk was unadulterated as she had vowed. ‘Umar summoned the girl and her mother to his court and told them what he had heard. As a reward, he offered to marry the girl to his son ‘Asim. She accepted, and from this union was born a girl named Layla that would in due course become the mother of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz.” It is reported that ‘Umar bin al-Khattab had a vision in his dream, after which he used to say: “I wish I knew the man from my offspring bearing a mark on his face who will fill the earth with justice just as it was filled with injustice and oppression.” ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar used to say that when the al-Khattab family saw that Bilal bin ‘Abdullah had a mole on his face they took it as a direct sign of his appointment, until Allah brought them ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz.

Birthdate and place (61 AH, al-Madinah):

Historians have shown some discrepancy about the exact year in which he was born, although the majority suggest that it was in 61 AH, a date that coincides with the fact that he died at the age of forty in the year 101 AH. Some sources mention that he was born in Egypt; however, this is hardly plausible given that his father, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin Marwan bin al-Hakm, became the Governor of Egypt in 65 AH after authority had been wrested by Marwan bin al-Hakm from the then standing

governor, ‘Abdullah bin az-Zubayr (may Allah be pleased with them). Thereafter, Marwan’s son, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, became his successor over it but prior to which there is nothing to indicate that ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin Marwan had ever resided in Egypt. On the contrary, he and the Bani Marwan (tribe) were based in al-Madinah. The acclaimed adh-Dhahabi mentions that he was born in al-Madinah during Yazid’s era.

“The Mark of the Umayyad Tribe”:

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was known by the agnomen “Ashajj” (Mark) or “Ashajj Bani Marwan” (the Mark of the Marwan Tribe), a name which stems from an incident that took place during his childhood. One day, at a time when his father was the Governor of Egypt, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz went into one of his father’s stables in order to see the horses when a horse suddenly hit him in the face and caused him to sustain a head-wound. As his father was wiping away the blood, he said to ‘Umar: “If you were to be the one with the scar, then you would be the happiest of all the Umayyads.” Upon seeing the mark from the blow to his head, al-Asbagh, his brother, remarked: “Allah is the Greatest! This is the one who holds the title of “the Scar of the Marwan Tribe!” ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) used to say: “There will be among my offspring a man with a scar on his face who will fill the earth with justice just as it was filled with injustice and oppression.” Reportedly, al-Faruq (The Distinguisher of Truth from Falsehood, i.e. ‘Umar bin al-Khattab), once had a vision that also pointed to this, as did numerous other people to the extent that it became common knowledge and substantiated the claim made by ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s father and brother regarding the mark on his face being a sign that he would be the one who would fill the land with justice.

Siblings:

‘Umar’s father, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin Marwan, had ten sons named ‘Umar, ‘Abu Bakr, Muhammad, ‘Asim, all of whom were to Layla bint ‘Asim bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattab, in addition to six more children by other women and these were called al-Asbagh, Suhl, Suhayl, Umm al-Hakm, Zayyan and Umm al-Banin. ‘Asim was the name ascribed to his mother’s kunya (epithet), meaning that she known as Umm ‘Asim (the Mother of ‘Asim).

Children:

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (may Allah have mercy on him) had fourteen sons named ‘Abd al-Malik, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, ‘Abdullah, Ibrahim, Ishaq, Ya‘qub, Bakr, Walid, Musa, ‘Asim, Yazid, Zayyan and ‘Abdullah. He also had three girls called Aminah, Umm ‘Ammar and Umm ‘Abdullah. In fact, accounts vary concerning the number of children ‘Umar had. While some give a total number of fourteen boys, which is in agreement with Ibn Qutaybah’s account, others state twelve boys and six girls, such as Ibn al-Jawzi; the general consensus, however, is that he had twelve sons. It is a well-known fact that when ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz departed from this world, he left behind no money to his children apart from an insignificant sum of nineteen Dirhams, compared to Hisham bin ‘Abd al-Malik who bequeathed a grand sum of one million Dirhams to his sons. Nevertheless, it was but a few years on that one of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s sons was seen donating one hundred horses for the sake of Allah in one day, whilst people were said to have witnessed one of Hisham bin ‘Abd al-Malik’s sons receiving charity. Therefore, glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!

Wives:

‘Umar grew up in al-Madinah and naturally acquired the etiquettes of its people. He was influenced by its scholars and dedicated himself to the pursuit of knowledge from its Shuyukh (religious leaders). He was accustomed to sitting in the company of Quraysh’s elders in favour of being with his peers, a habit which stuck with him even after he attained prominence. Upon his father’s death, his paternal uncle, the Amir al-Mu‘minin , ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, became his guardian and so ‘Umar became

like one of his own children but whom ‘Abd al-Malik very much favoured so much so that he married him to his daughter, Fatimah bint ‘Abd al-Malik. A pious and virtuous woman, she was significantly influenced by ‘Umar, which even extended to what she owned of the luxuries of this world. As poet succinctly said about her:

“The daughter of the Caliph and the Caliph was her grandfather,

The sister of the Caliphs and the Caliph is her husband.”

More specifically, the above verse alludes to her relationship as the daughter of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, the granddaughter of Marwan bin al-Hakm, the sister of al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik, Sulayman bin ‘Abd al-Malik, Yazid bin ‘Abd al-Malik and Hishim bin ‘Abd al-Malik, and the wife of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (may Allah be pleased with him). Her special status has led some to believe that there has not been a woman like her until today. She bore ‘Umar’s three sons, Ishaq, Ya‘qub and Musa. As for his wife, Lamas bint ‘Ail bin al-Hadith, she bore his children, ‘Abdullah, Bakr and Umm ‘Ammar, and his wife, Umm ‘Othman bint Shu‘ayb bin Mayan, bore his son, Ibrahim. The rest of ‘Umar’s children, namely, ‘Abd al-Malik, al-Walid, ‘Asim, Yazid, ‘Abdullah, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, Zayyan, Aminah, and Umm ‘Abdullah, were bore by his wife, Umm Waleed.

Physical Features:

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was dark in complexion, slim-faced, small in stature and heavyset. He had hollow eyes and at the front of his head he had a quiff of hair that had a grey streak running through it. Regarding his appearance, it has otherwise been said: “He was fair-skinned with a slim face. He was handsome and slim.” Another description states: “He was fair-skinned with a slim face, handsome, slim and he had a nice beard.”

Factors that Contributed to Shaping ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s Personality:

Family Life:

‘Umar grew up al-Madinah. Once he had reached maturity, which was at such a young age, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattab would go to his mother to ask about his whereabouts. Upon returning home, ‘Umar would say to his mother: “I hope to be like my maternal uncle” (referring to ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattab). At that point, she would tell him: “There is no doubt that you are like him”, and she would repeat herself more than once. When he grew up, his father, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin Marwan, travelled to Egypt to occupy the office of Governor, but it was not before long that he wrote to his wife, Umm ‘Asim, instructing her to make her way to him there. Startled by his proposal, she immediately sought advice from her paternal uncle, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar, informing him that she had received a letter from her husband, to which he remarked: “O my niece! He is your husband. You should catch up with him.” However, as she was about to leave, he said: “Leave the young boy (meaning ‘Umar) with us, for he most resembles us, the Ahl al-Bayt (Family of the Prophet) of you all”, and so, she left him behind. When she arrived in the presence of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, he began to look around for his son, although when he could not see him, he asked: “Where is ‘Umar?” She then informed him of what happened with ‘Abdullah and that he had asked her to leave ‘Umar behind in order that he resembled the Ahl al-Bayt. Upon hearing this, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was delighted and so he wrote to his brother, ‘Abd al-Malik, to tell him, who in reply stated that he should send ‘Umar one thousand Dinar on a monthly basis. ‘Umar would later go to his father in Egypt as an upstanding Muslim, which wholly reflected his upbringing in al-Madinah between his maternal uncles from the family of ‘Umar bin al-Khattab, all of whom, along with the society of Sahaba (Companions), were undoubtedly instrumental in shaping his personality.

His Early Dedication to the Pursuit of Knowledge and Memorisation of the Holy Qur’an:

A childhood love for the pursuit of knowledge, studying and reading distinguished ‘Umar from an early age, as did his eagerness to remain in the scholarly gatherings of al-Madinah. In those days, al-Madinah represented a beacon of knowledge and righteousness, given that it was full of scholars, jurists and virtuous people. One of the first manifestations of ‘Umar’s guidance was his evident longing to become a learned scholar during his childhood, a path which he began to pursue by devoting his time to studying literature and the sciences. He was able to prove this dedication when he collected together the entire manuscript of the Qur’an, which was not only a great accomplishment in itself but it also facilitated his memorisation of it, self-purification and his ability to apply the knowledge he had gained. From that point onwards, his outlook was deeply shaped by what the Qur’an taught with respect to Allah the Almighty, life, the universe, Heaven and Hell, Decree and Fate, and the reality of death. It is said that he would cry at the mention of death irrespective of his age. Upon hearing about this, his mother wrote to him and asked: “What makes you cry?” He answered: “The remembrance of death”, a response which caused his mother to weep when she heard it. There is no exaggeration to say that ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz lived his entire life by the Book of Allah, the Sublime, whether in contemplation of it or in exercising its injunctions. Among the stances he took in accordance with the Holy Qur’an were:

On the authority of Ibn Abi Dhabī who said: “I was informed by someone who witnessed ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, at the time when he was the commander of al-Madinah, reciting the following Verse to a man: [And when they shall be thrown into a narrow place thereof, chained together, they shall exclaim therein for destruction] (al-Furqan, 25:13), at which point ‘Umar began to sob so overwhelmingly that he stood up from his gathering and entered his house, after which the people dispersed.” The meaning of the Verse is that when those liars will be put into the tight constraints of the Hellfire with the reckoning of the Hour, their hands will be shackled to their necks in chains.

"They shall therein exclaim for destruction", wherein "destruction" here refers to the people crying out in regret of their disobedience to Allah in this world and for not believing in what was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as they face their punishment.

According to Abi Mawdud who said: "I was informed that 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz read one day: "Neither you (O Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him) do any deed nor recite any portion of the Qur'an, nor you (mankind) do any deed (good or evil) but We are witness thereof when you are doing it" (Yunus, 10:61). He then began to cry so hysterically even the people in the house heard him. At that point, Fatimah (his wife) went in but started to cry at seeing him crying, which caused everyone in the house to cry too. 'Abd al-Malik happened to enter the house and when he saw them in that state, he inquired: "O father! What are you crying for?" He replied: "It is fine, my son. Your father only wishes that he neither knew the world nor it knew him. By Allah, O son! I fear for your family. By Allah! I fear that I will be among the people of the Hellfire." The meaning of this Verse is that Allah, the Sublime, informed his Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that He knows all his conditions and states, as well as those of his Ummah (Community of the Faithful) and all creation, every second of every minute of every hour. Not so much as a mustard seed, however miniscule or insignificant, in the entire heavens and earth escapes His Knowledge or Sight, and there is nothing too big or too small except that it has been recorded down. As He says: "And with Him are the keys of the 'Ghayb' (all that is hidden), none knows them but He. And He knows whatever there is in the land and the sea; not a leaf falls but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry, but is written in a Clear Record." (al-An 'am, 6:59). Thus, Allah informs us that He knows the movement of the trees and all other inanimate fixed objects, just as He knows the swift movements of creatures, about which He says: "There is not a moving (living) creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book, then to their Lord they shall all be gathered" (al-'An 'am, 6: 38). Allah, the Sublime, also says: [And no moving (living) creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah." (Hud, 11:6). And so, Allah knows the movements of such things, just as He says He knows when worship is being observed: "And put your trust in the All-Mighty, the Most Merciful, Who sees you (O Muhammad, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when you stand up (alone at night for prayer). And your movements among those who fall prostrate (to Allah in the prayers)] (ash-Shu'ara", 26:217-19). Thus, Allah is saying that when one undertakes an action, He sees and hears it.

According to 'Abd al-'Ala bin Abi 'Abdullah al-'Atari who said: "I saw 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz coming out on the day of Jumu'ah (Friday congregational prayer) wearing a grubby garment and there was an Ethiopian man walking behind him. When he reached the people, the Ethiopian went back, then 'Umar went up to two men and said: "May Allah have mercy on you both", at which point he ascended the Minbar (pulpit) and began to deliver the sermon, reciting the Verse: "When the sun shall be wound round and its light is lost and overthrown." (at-Takwir, 81:1). He then said: "And what is the affair of the sun?" He went on: "And when the stars shall fall" (ibid:2) up to the Verses: "And when Hellfire shall be set ablaze. And when Paradise shall be brought near" (ibid: 12-13). At that point he began to cry, as did the people in the Masjid (mosque) until it began to shake and its walls wept with them." This Verse depicts a description of the events on the Day of Judgement when hearts will be full of anguish, violent fear will seize them and anxiety will prevail therein. This is the Day for which people of understanding prepare, on which nobody will evade blame and accountability, about which the Salaf (Pious Forebears) would say: "Whoever wants to see the Day of Judgment as if with his very own eyes, let him contemplate on the Surah (Chapter) "When the sun shall be wound round and its light is lost and overthrown" (at-Takwir, 81) In a Hadith Marfu' (narration that is traced back directly to the Prophet, (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on the authority of Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever secretly wants to see the Day of Judgment as if with his naked eye, let him recite (the chapters): "When the sun shall be wound round and its light is lost and overthrown" (at-Takwir, 81); "When the heaven shall be cleft asunder" (al-Infitar, 82); and "When the heaven shall be split asunder" (al-Inshiqaq, 84)."

Maymun bin Mahran is reported to have said: "Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz recited the Verse: "The mutual rivalry (for piling up world things) diverts you." (at-Takathur, 102:1) and began to cry. He then said: "'Until you visit the graves" (ibid: 2), while the graves are but a visiting place and one must return to either al-Jannah (Paradise) or to an-Nar (Hellfire)'. Some of the positions that illustrate the type of influence the Holy Qur'an had on 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's personality include:

i. Social Environment:

One's surrounding social environment plays a decisive role in shaping men and building their characters and in this respect 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz lived in an era wherein Taqwa (God-consciousness), Salah (goodness), a thirst for acquiring knowledge and applying the Book (i.e. the Qur'an) and the Sunnah (Prophetic Example) prevailed. A number of the Sahabah (Companions of the Prophet, (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were still in al-Madinah, which allowed him to narrate ahadith (Prophetic sayings) from the likes of 'Abdullah bin Ja'far bin Abi Talib, as-Sa'ib bin Yazid and Suhail bin Sa'ad who gave him a cup which the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had drunk from. As for Anas bin Malik, he said: "I never saw anyone imitate the prayer of the Messenger (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) like this young man", in reference to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz. In this manner, residing in al-Madinah as part of that society had an enormous impact on his temperament, his sense of faith and his spiritual adherence in making the eminent and intellectual person 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz become.

ii. His Learning at the Hands of al-Madinah's Senior Fuqaha' (Jurists) and Scholars:

'Umar's father, 'Abd al-'Aziz, entrusted him to the care of Salih bin Kisan who was one of the most learned and pious men of al-Madinah. 'Umar received his education under the supervision of Salih, who was very particular about his role in disciplining 'Umar. For instance, he made it incumbent upon 'Umar to pray every prayer with the congregation in the masjid (mosque), but when 'Umar turned up late one day, the congregation informed Salih who questioned him about it, asking: "What business were you engaged in?" 'Umar replied: "I was sorting out my hair", to which Salih remarked: "You love yourself that much that you would let it influence your prayers?!" He immediately wrote to 'Abd al-'Aziz informing him about it, at which instant his father sent a delegate to 'Umar who was instructed to not speak a word before shaving his son's head completely. From then on, 'Umar desired to imitate the manner in which the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed: ardently and meticulously. In keeping with that, he would prolong his bowing and prostrating and lighten his standing and sitting, and as the authentic narration states: "He would glorify Allah ten times in each bow and prostration."

When his father performed the Hajj pilgrimage, passing through al-Madinah on his way, he enquired to Salih bin Kisan about his son and Salih's response to him was: "Allah is not known in the heart of anyone more than this boy's." Among the Shuyukh (religious elders) who had an influence on 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz was 'Ubaydullah bin 'Abdullah bin 'Utbah bin Mas'ud who 'Umar highly revered and had a great thirst for his knowledge and etiquettes so much so that he would continue to frequent him even when he was the Amir (Governor) of al-Madinah. 'Umar would express his admiration for his Shaykh and thereby frequented his sittings more and more. On one occasion, he said to a gathering for the blind: "'Ubaydullah bin 'Abdullah bin 'Utbah bin Mas'ud is more beloved to me than a thousand Dinars (gold coins; units of account). During 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz's Caliphate he would acknowledge his Shaykh's knowledge by making such statements as: "Were 'Ubaydullah alive, no legal opinion other than his would be issued", "I wish I could have just one day with 'Ubaydullah" and so forth. 'Ubaydullah was in fact the Mufti (the title given to the official issuer of legal rulings) of al-Madinah during his time and one of the seven Fuqaha' (jurists), about whom az-Zuhri said: "'Ubaydullah bin 'Abdullah was a sea among the seas of knowledge." A writer of poetry, Ibn Mas'ud wrote the following verses to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz:

“In the name of He Who sent down the verses from Him,
If you only knew what is to come about,
Therefore be on your guard that you might benefit from cautiousness;
And be patient in the face of sure fate and be grounded in it,
Should an undesirable fate befall you;
What is the class of a man living in ease,
Except that it shall one day be followed by trouble?”

He died later this year (98/99 AH).

Another of ‘Umar’s Shuyukh (religious elders) was Said bin al-Musayyib, the biographical account of whom was related during ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan’s era, who would not see any of the governors except for ‘Umar. Salim bin ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattab was also his Shaykh, about whom Sa’id bin al-Musayyib would say: “‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar most resembles his father and Salim most resembles his father.” Ibn ‘Umar used to love his son Salim, for which he would get blamed, and he would say:

“They blame me concerning Salim and I blame them;

While Salim is the skin between the eyes and nose.”

Salim’s mother’s epithet was Umm Walad (Mother of a Boy) supposedly in reference to Ibn Abi az-Zinad. The people of al-Madinah used to hate the idea of taking on women to bear children until the likes of ‘Ali bin al-Husayn, al-Qasim bin Muhammad and Salim bin ‘Abdullah emerged who caused the people of al-Madinah to excel in knowledge, devotion, worship and piety and which caused their contemporaries to be awe of concubines. Imam Malik says: “None of Salim’s peers resembled the righteous forebears in asceticism, virtue and lifestyle like him. He would wear a thawb (long dress-like garment worn by men) worth just two Dirham (coins; units of currency) and he would buy with his left hand in order that it may bear the burden.” Upon witnessing his nice appearance, Sulayman bin ‘Abd al-Malik asked Salim: “Do you eat anything in particular?” He answered: “Bread and oil, and if there is any meat I eat that too.” So ‘Umar said to him: “Do you like eating that?” He replied: “If I do not desire to eat it then I leave it until I do.” On one particular day, Salim bin ‘Abdullah entered upon Sulayman bin ‘Abd al-Malik wearing ragged, rough clothes but nevertheless Sulayman welcomed him all the same and even took him up and seated him by his side, while ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was sitting with the gathering. A man belonging to an outside tribe therefore asked ‘Umar: “Can your maternal uncle not wear something more dignified than this to enter upon the Amir al-Mu’minin (Commander of the Believers)? It is upon the speaker to wear something of value.” ‘Umar therefore said to him: “I do not see these clothes worn by my uncle putting him in your place nor do I see the clothes you wear raising you to his status.”

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was mentored and educated under many scholars and Fuqaha’ (jurists), numbering at least thirty-three, eight of whom were honourable Sahabah (Companions) and the other twenty-five were Tabi’un (second and third generation followers). Thus, he acquired their knowledge and manners and devotedly attended their sittings until this nurturing and discipline notably influenced his character and behaviour. He was distinct regarding the firmness of his personality, his earnestness in dealing with matters, resoluteness, intellectual assiduity, perpetual consideration of the Qur’an, strong will and great disdain for idle talk and joking. In fact, these factors were the main contributors shaping his character, along with the lessons he drew from those devout scholars who carried on their shoulders the great responsibility of giving attention to the children of the governors,

judges and high-ranking officials, since their righteousness was for the greater good of the Islamic Ummah (Community of the Faithful).

iii. Knowledgeable Status:

Translators agree that he was “The Imam (Muslim Leader) of His Era”, a name that was given to him by both Imam Malik and Imam Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah. About him, Mujahid said: “We would tell him what we knew and we would not leave until we had learned from him.” Maymun bin Mahran said: “Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was the teacher of scholars.” Adh-Dhahabi says: “He was an Imam (Leader), a Faqih (jurist) and a Mujtahid (one who issues independent legal opinions). He was well informed of the Sunan (traditions), knowledgeable on important matters, a Hafiz (one who has committed the entire Qur’an to memory), obedient to Allah and extremely conscious of good conduct and acting fairly, in likeness to his grandfather from his mother’s side. He was equal to Al-Hasan al-Basri in asceticism and to az-Zuhri in knowledge. His words and actions were requested by the Fuqaha’ (jurists) and scholars, like when Imam al-Layth bin Sa‘ad wrote a short letter to Imam Malik bin Anas (may Allah be pleased with them) in which al-Layth stated he needed – numerous times – a sound opinion, which is why Imam Malik went to ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz concerning some of his questions. Thus, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz is mentioned in the books of Fiqh (jurisprudence) pertaining to all four schools of thought because of his need to follow the school he thought was necessary, such as his concluding of Hanafi rulings in reference to his actions and deeds, a stance that distinguished ‘Umar as the grandson of ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), according to al-Qurashi in al-Jawahir al-Ma‘di‘ah [The Dazzling Jewels]. However, it is worth mentioning that he would also conform to other opinions, which some have failed to acknowledge in an attempt to convey him as the popular Caliph and Imam.

His name appears recurrently in the books of the Shafi‘i authors and has therefore been rendered by an-Nawawi who refined their names and language, which he states at the beginning of his work were repetitive and needed shortening. As for the adherents of the Maliki school, their books contain copious reference to ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, far more than all others, given that Malik was the Imam of the school who required the legal rulings and statements of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in many areas, as mentioned in Malik’s al-Muwatta’ [The Well-Trodden Path].

Regarding Hanbali works, ‘Umar is given ample mention as the one about whom Imam Ahmad said: “I do not know of any speech of the Tabi‘in (second and third generation of followers) that constitutes proof except for the speech of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz which is sufficient in itself.” The following statement of Imam Ahmad is sufficient enough for us too: “If you see a man who loves ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and says good things about him, then know that behind that lies good, if Allah wills.” Whoever wants to delve deeply into ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s knowledge and discern his knowledgeable status, let him refer to the following books: Al-Athar al-Waridah ‘an ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz [The Mark of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz] by Prof. Hayat Muhammad Jabar, which is an intellectual treatise comprising over two volumes; Fiqh ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz [The Jurisprudence of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz] by Dr Muhammad Sa‘ad Shaqir, which is an intellectual treatise presented at doctorate level; and Mawsu‘ah Fiqh ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz [An Encyclopaedia of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s Jurisprudence] by Muhammad Rawas Qal‘aji. By the permission of Allah, we will herein get to see ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s Fiqh (jurisprudence) at play in relation to doctrine, worship, Shari‘ah policy, administration of the state, financial management, judicial execution, Islamic preaching and his observance of the Book (i.e. the Qur’an), the Sunnah (Prophetic Example) and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs in his footsteps and lifestyle.

‘Umar during the Caliphate of al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik:

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz enjoys the status of those scholars who were close to the Caliphs and imparted considerable bearing on them through their advice and directed their policies based on their opinions and consultation. ‘Umar occupied an eminent position in the Umayyad household, which is clear from ‘Abd al-Malik’s veneration of him and his amazement at ‘Umar’s brilliance during his youth, so much so that he favoured him over many of his own sons and even married him to his daughter. In spite of this, ‘Umar did not make any contributions of this sort during ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule due to his young age and his preoccupation with the pursuit of knowledge in al-Madinah. However, Ibn al-Jawzi maintains that he once wrote to ‘Abd al-Malik reminding him of the responsibility he bore on his shoulders, in which he said: “To proceed: You are a shepherd and responsible for everyone in your flock. Anas bin Malik informed us that he heard the Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: ‘Everyone is a shepherd and responsible for his (or her) flock’. "Allah! None has the right to be worshipped but He. Surely, He will gather you together on the Day of Resurrection about which there is no doubt. And who is truer in statement than Allah?" (an-Nisa’, 4:87)

It is said that ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was appointed by his paternal uncle, ‘Abd al-Malik, over Khanasser (the city of Anasarth located in western Syria) in order to become practiced in the tasks of leadership at an early age. Alternatively, some believe it was ‘Umar’s cousin, Sulayman bin ‘Abd al-Malik, who appointed him over Khanasser. With his uncle’s death, ‘Umar was deeply saddened by his loss and so he wrote to his uncle’s other son, Maslamah bin ‘Abd al-Malik, saying: “O Maslamah! I attended your father’s burial and my eyes had to bear the sight of his grave. His banner has been left to the affair of Allah. I was dismayed and struck with terror, which is why I vowed to Allah that if I were to assume power, I would not do as he did; I will make sure of that!”

His Governorship of al-Madinah:

In the month of Rabi‘ al-Awwal (the third Islamic calendar month) of 87 AD, Caliph al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik appointed ‘Umar over the province of al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, and later extended his office to include Ta’if in 91 AH, thereby making him the governor of the entire Hijaz region. Before taking over, ‘Umar laid down three conditions for assuming office, which were: 1) to deal with the people with truth and justice without oppressing anyone or depriving anyone of their rights to the Bayt al-Mal (Public Treasury). In keeping with this, any money obtained by the Caliph therefrom would be declared; (2) He would be permitted to perform the Hajj pilgrimage at the beginning of the year, as he had not already done so; and (3) He would be permitted to make donations to the people of al-Madinah . Accordingly, al-Walid complied with these conditions and so ‘Umar gladly began to administer al-Madinah to the extreme delight of the people.

The Shura (Consultation) Council of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz: A Committee of the Ten Jurists of al-Madinah:

Immediately on arrival in al-Madinah, ‘Umar formed an advisory council of ten eminent jurists and notables of the holy city, unlike the other autocratic governors. When the people turned up to greet the new Caliph and pray behind him, he summoned the ten Fuqaha’ (jurists), namely, ‘Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, ‘Ubaydullah bin ‘Abdullah bin ‘Utbah, Abu Bakr bin ‘Abd ar-Rahman bin al-Harith bin Hisham, Abu Bakr bin Sulayman bin Abi Khaythamah, Sulayman bin Yasar, al-Qasim bin Muhammad, Salim bin ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amir bin Rabi‘ah and Kharijah bin Zayd bin Thabit.

They came to him, entered his place, and sat down. He praised Allah all the due praise and said: I have called you for a matter that will help you earn reward and also enable you to be supporters of the truth. I shall not decide on a matter unless I take your opinion into consideration. If you see someone violating the boundaries, or if you hear of any injustice on the part of my workers, I ask you by the

Majestic, Allah, to inform me about that.” He also said: “Rulers usually appoint people to watch over their subjects. I appoint you a watcher over me and my behaviour. If you find me at fault in a word or action, guide me and stop me from doing it.” This short statement was the constitution and the straightforward methodology that he put in place for his rule.

It was a well-known fact that ‘Umar bin al-Khattab had assembled a council to deal with the affairs that were about to ensue and thereby saw the need for Shura (consultation) in that regard. As for ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, he was the great grandson of ‘Umar bin al-Khattab who also created a council and in doing so endorsed its authority in two respects:

Its members were bearers of the truth in issuing opinions and that he would not take any action without first consulting them. In doing so, the Amir (Commander) passed on his function to the council that came to be known as “the Council of Ten.”

He made them inspectors of deeds and watchers over behaviour such that should one of them witness some misconduct or come to know of it, it was then their duty to inform him, or else their silence would be left to Allah. Here, we notice that this course of action consisted on two factors: 1) That the Amir, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, did not assign some form of compensation or wage to the Council of Ten, since they were people to whom a tender was due and because they were Fuqaha’ (jurists). He therefore did not commission to his aid anyone who was stubborn and obstinate in nature.

Had ‘Umar supposed that the absence of one of the council members was an excuse for not administering to matters, he would have stipulated that all members had to be present; however, he did not do this, which is why he said “or the opinions of those present.” In actual reality, this council was consulted on every issue without exception. This infers the importance of the devout scholars and their high standing, given that he loved to have them near to him and at hand to take counsel with in relation to matters affecting his subjects. Similarly, it is the duty of the scholars to surround those executing decisions for the benefit of attaining as much good as possible and diminishing corruption wherever possible. For this reason, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz did not completely restrict taking counsel with only them; on the contrary, he would seek advice from other scholars in al-Madinah, such as ‘Sa‘id bin al-Musayyib, az-Zuhri and so on. In fact, he would not give a verdict on a case without asking Sa‘id about it first.

‘Umar made his high esteem and respect for the scholars apparent. It so happened that he once sent a messenger to Sa‘id bin al-Musayyib to enquire about an issue, while Sa‘id would never visit any of the governors or Caliphs, but the messenger made a mistake by saying to him: “The Leader summons you”, upon which Sa‘id put on his sandals and paid him a visit. However, when ‘Umar saw him, he said: “I urge you, O Abu Muhammad, to return to your council and our messenger will come to seek your resolve there. We did not send him to summon you; he made a mistake. We only wanted to ask you about a matter.”

During his short time as the Governor of al-Madinah, he repaired and extended the Prophet’s Mosque (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) under the orders of al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik to make it two-hundred by two-hundred Dhira’ [cubits; units of measure], as well as embellishing it also in accordance with al-Walid’s instructions. However, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz personally despised the beautification of Masajid (mosques) but he was compelled to comply with the Commander’s orders since he was his superior and even though he was not content with doing it, he considered his serving as Governor to be of greater interest in other respects.

During his governorship of al-Madinah in 91 AH, the Caliph, al-Walid, embarked on the Hajj pilgrimage and he was met by ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz with the best of receptions. It was during this visit to al-Madinah that al-Walid witnessed with his own eyes the magnificent advancements that had been accomplished by ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in the holy city.

The Unfortunate Incident of ‘Umar’s Governorship:

In his biography, the scholars say: “Khubayb bin ‘Abdullah bin az-Zubayr reported that the Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Thirty men will arrive at the Banu Abi al-‘As (tribe) and seize the servants of Allah and the wealth of Allah’s State.’” However, this was a weak narration and so al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik sent word to ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz – his Governor of al-Madinah – commanding him to flog Khubayb one hundred lashes and imprison him. Accordingly, ‘Umar flogged him and then poured a cold vessel of water over him and made him stand outside on a cold evening, which caused him to catch pneumonia and die. ‘Umar released Khubayb from prison when his suffering became severe and ‘Umar began to deeply regret what he had done to the point he felt extremely troubled by his death.

Mus‘ab bin ‘Abdullah narrated on the authority of Mus‘ab bin ‘Uthman that they moved Khubayb to the house of ‘Umar bin Mus‘ab bin az-Zubayr on az-Zubayr’s patch of land and gathered around him until he died. As they were sitting there, al-Majishun turned up and sought permission to enter as Khubayb was lying there in his thawb (long dress-like garment worn by men). Al-Majishun was an official of al-Madinah under ‘Umar’s administration and so ‘Abdullah bin ‘Urwah said: “Let him in.” Upon entering al-Majishun said: “If your friend is in doubt about his death, reveal it to him”, and so they told him he was going to die. He then looked at al-Majishun who turned around and left. Al-Majishun said: “After that I went to Marwan’s house where I tapped on the door and entered to find ‘Umar who was standing and sitting in such a way he looked like a woman suffering from labour pains. He then said to me: “How did you get on?” I replied: “The man died.” At that point he fell to the ground in a state of panic and every time he lifted his head he uttered the words: “To Allah we belong and to Him we shall return!” Following that incident, ‘Umar resigned from his post in al-Madinah and refrained from governorship altogether. From then onwards, whenever it was said to him: “You have done such and such a thing, so rejoice at it”, he would say: “What about Khubayb?” He did not stop remembering or picturing this incident in his mind to the point of death.

Proof of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s righteousness exhibited during his time as Governor of al-Madinah can be seen in many instances, but just one example lies in what Abu ‘Umar, the slave of Asma’ bint Abi Bakr, related when he said: “I went to his gathering in which he prayed Fajr (Dawn Prayer) and the Mus-haf (Arabic manuscript of the Qur‘an) was on his lap while tears were flowing down his beard.” Ibn Abi az-Zinad narrated from his father: “When ‘Umar wanted to give during his time as the leader of al-Madinah, he would say: ‘Fulfill a household of its needs.’”

The Lesson of Mazahim for ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz:

‘Umar imprisoned a man in al-Madinah and it happened that the man had served more time than he deserved and so ‘Umar went to speak to him regarding his release, saying: “I am not the one getting out, yet I am more cautious about the sentence having overrun.” Enraged, the man said: “O ‘Umar! I warn you of a night that will give rise to the Resurrection and whose morning will establish the Hour! O ‘Umar! I begged that I might forget what I heard of your prestige: the Commander, the Commander, the Commander!” ‘Umar said: “The first time that this was ever brought to my attention was with the Mazahim affair and, by Allah, when he said that to me it was as if he lifted a cover from my face.” This story illustrates to us the importance of righteousness, integrity and sincerity that remind one of Allah in times of negligence.

The Ordeal between ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf during al-Walid’s Caliphate:

Ibn al-Jawzi mentions that ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz had resigned from al-Madinah for the aforementioned reasons, however, others have stated that he was in fact dismissed from his post. These accounts assert that in the year 92 AH, Caliph al-Walid officially entrusted the Hajj (Major Pilgrimage) banner to al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf ath-Thaqafi to hold the capacity of leader of the Hajj

pilgrimage. Once ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz learned of this, he instantly wrote to the Caliph urging him to instruct al-Hajjaj to bypass al-Madinah, given that ‘Umar loathed al-Hajjaj and could not stand the sight of him ever since al-Hajjaj had wronged him. Accordingly, al-Walid complied with his request and therefore wrote to al-Hajjaj: “Verily, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz wrote to me to request that you take a detour and avoid seeing him. Since it is not upon you to visit someone who hates you, stay away from al-Madinah.”

When ‘Umar was Governor of al-Madinah, he had written to al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik to inform him of the complaints he had received concerning the harsh, oppressive and unbearable conditions of the people of ‘Iraq at the hands of the tyrant al-Hajjaj. In addition, many people emigrated from al-Madinah from ‘Iraq seeking refuge from their harsh governor, which angered al-Hajjaj who consequently retaliated against ‘Umar by pressing al-Walid to remove ‘Umar. Al-Hajjaj wrote to al-Walid: “It had become apparent that the people of ‘Iraq and Thaqaf are fleeing from ‘Iraq and seeking refuge in al-Madinah and Makkah.” Therein al-Hajjaj further advised him to appoint ‘Uthman bin Habban and Khalid bin ‘Abdullah instead. To the dismay of ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, al-Walid bowed to the pressure and he was dismissed. Al-Walid’s political inclinations towards the strict regime of al-Hajjaj who exhibited a lot of control over the provinces he governed were apparent, as unfortunately usually is the case to ensure the stability of a vast state. The conflicting views of ‘Umar and al-Hajjaj were so, although it later came to light that adopting ‘Umar’s advice as opposed that of al-Hajjaj would have been more favourable following ‘Umar’s ascent to the Caliphate and his implementation of what he had advocated in the first place.

‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s Return to Damascus:

Crying and in the company of his attendant, Mazahim, ‘Umar left al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, upon which he turned to Mazahim and said: “O Mazahim! I fear that we are being banished from al-Madinah.” By this, ‘Umar was alluding to the statement of the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who said: “Al-Madinah is like the blacksmith’s furnace. It removes impurities and purifies the good. The Hour will not be established until all evil is expelled from al-Madinah like a blacksmith removes impurities from iron.” Al-Mazahim said: “When ‘Umar left al-Madinah, I looked up at the sky and the moon was in the phase of Dabran (when the star between Pleiades and Orion follows Pleiades); it was as if it were pessimistic about what was happening. However, I hated the thought of saying that to ‘Umar so instead I said: ‘Have you seen how perfect the moon is tonight?!’” ‘Umar replied: “O Mazahim! It is as if you wanted to show me that the moon is in the phase of Dabran. O Mazahim! We are not leaving because of the Sun or the Moon but we are leaving because of Allah, the One, the Subduer.” ‘Umar continued to embark on his journey until he reached Swayda’, a city in Syria, where he had a house and farm. He decided to remain there for some time while he observed the situation from a distance, to conclude later that the welfare of the Muslims required his being stationed in Damascus in proximity to the Caliph. Due to the fact that ‘Umar was not in complete agreement with al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik, his establishment in Damascus was not free from problems, particularly since al-Walid executed his rule through the use of powerful and staunch governors who were only interested in subjugating the people through force, which was naturally accompanied by great injustice. ‘Umar, on the other hand, believed that the administration of justice between people rested on the stability of the sovereign and their consultation with one another under the command of authority. He would say (may Allah have mercy on him): “Al-Walid is in the Sham (the Levant), al-Hajjaj is in ‘Iraq, Muhammad bin Yusuf, al-Hajjaj’s brother, is in the Yemen, ‘Uthman bin Hayyan is in the Hijaz and Qurrah bin Shurayk is in Egypt. By Allah, the earth had become filled with injustice!”

‘Umar’s Advice to al-Walid to Restrain the Killing Power of His Officials:

‘Umar took various courses of action to rectify the situation, one of which was to write to al-Walid advising him to put an end to the killing carried out by his officials. Initially, his appeal to al-Walid was somewhat successful when the latter agreed to issue a resolution prohibiting any governor from