

The *Rashidun* Caliphate and the Orientalist Narrative: A Critique of Philip K. Hitti's *History of the Arabs*

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Abstract

This research paper presents a critical Muslim response to Philip Khuri Hitti's portrayal of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* (Rightly Guided Caliphs) in his influential work *History of the Arabs*. While Hitti's narrative has shaped much of the Western academic perspective on early Islamic history, it reflects methodological flaws and Orientalist biases that marginalize the deeper ethical, spiritual, and theological dimensions of the *Rashidun* era. From an Islamic perspective, this period represents not merely a phase of political administration but a continuation of the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)—embodying justice (*al-ʿAdālah*), equality (*al-Musāwah*), and God-conscious governance (*Taqwa*). This paper critiques Hitti's depictions of early Muslim conquests, interfaith relations, and especially the charge of nepotism against Caliph ʿUthmān Ibn ʿAffān (RA), highlighting how such views often overlook the Qurʾanic and Prophetic framework that shaped *Rashidun* leadership. Rather than reducing these caliphs to political or military figures, the study reasserts their role as spiritual heirs to the Prophet (SAW), guided by principles such as *Shura* (consultation) and *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* (higher objectives of Islamic law). Drawing on classical Islamic sources and modern Muslim scholarship, the study challenges dominant Western narratives and contributes to the broader project of decolonizing Islamic historiography through a more holistic and faithful representation of early Islamic governance.

Keywords: *Rashidun* Caliphate, Philip K. Hitti; *History of the Arabs*; Early Islamic Conquests; Expulsion of Jews and Christians.

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1. Introduction

The period immediately following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)¹ in 632 CE marks a foundational epoch in Islamic history, commonly referred to as the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*)². This era, spanning the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (RA), Umar Ibn al-Khattab (RA)³, Uthman Ibn 'Affan (RA), and Ali Ibn Abi Talib (RA), holds profound significance not only for its historical consequences but also for its enduring legacy as a model of Islamic governance. These four leaders are revered within Islamic tradition for their adherence to the principles of justice, consultation (*Shūrā*), accountability, and devotion to the collective welfare of the Muslim community (*Ummah*). Their governance is seen as a continuation of the prophetic mission, rooted in both spiritual integrity and pragmatic statecraft.

During this dynamic phase, the early Islamic state underwent rapid transformation. Abu Bakr (RA) faced immediate challenges in the form of the *Ridda*⁴ Wars, successfully consolidating the Arabian Peninsula under a unified Islamic polity. Under Umar's leadership, the Islamic empire expanded dramatically, defeating the Sassanid Empire and significantly reducing Byzantine influence in the Levant and Egypt.⁵ The administration during this period introduced systems of governance, taxation, and justice that would shape Islamic civilization for centuries. Uthman's (RA) era saw further expansion but also increasing socio-political discontent, particularly over issues of provincial governance and nepotism. This unrest culminated in his assassination in 656 CE. Ali's caliphate, though marked by integrity and piety, was plagued by internal divisions and conflict, leading to the First *Fitna* (civil war)⁶, which exposed the fragility of the rapidly expanding empire and introduced deep fissures within the Muslim community.

While Muslim historians and scholars have long regarded the Rashidun period as a golden age of Islamic rule, Western academic interpretations have varied considerably. Among the early and influential voices in this field was Philip K. Hitti, a prominent Lebanese-American historian. His landmark work, *The History of the Arabs*, published in the early 20th century, has played a crucial role in shaping Western perspectives on Arab and Islamic history. Though scholarly in tone and rich in detail, Hitti's narrative often reflects the epistemological framework of Orientalism, wherein Islamic civilization is analyzed through Eurocentric lenses that may overlook or misrepresent indigenous perspectives and theological motivations.

Hitti's interpretation of the Rashidun Caliphate, while widely referenced, merits critical scrutiny. His emphasis on tribal dynamics, political intrigue, and economic

motives often overshadows the spiritual and ideological foundations of early Islamic governance. This tendency, and characteristic of Orientalist historiography, has contributed to a partial and sometimes distorted understanding of the formative years of the Islamic state.

This study seeks to undertake a critical engagement with Hitti's portrayal of the Rashidun era. By examining selected passages from *The History of the Arabs*, and juxtaposing them with primary Islamic sources — including the Qur'an, Hadith literature, and classical Islamic historiography — as well as contemporary Muslim scholarship, the study aims to reassess and contextualize the *Rashidun* Caliphate through and indepth examination of classical and modern historiographical sources. The objective is to present a more meticulous, balanced, and historically grounded interpretation that does justice to the complexity and significance of this formative period in Islamic history.

2. Objectives

The following are the primary objectives of this study:

- To critically analyze Philip K. Hitti's portrayal of the Rashidun Caliphate in *History of the Arabs*.
- To assess the historical accuracy and objectivity of Hitti's account in light of primary Islamic sources.
- To reconstruct an alternative historiographical account of the Rashidun Caliphate based on Islamic epistemological and historiographical principles.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to evaluate critically and comparatively Philip K. Hitti's portrayal of the Rashidun Caliphate in his famous work, *History of the Arabs*. It uses four key methods: textual analysis to compare Hitti's account with classical Islamic and modern Muslim sources; Orientalist discourse analysis, informed by Edward Said, to uncover Eurocentric biases; thematic content analysis to assess recurring themes like leadership and internal conflict; and a reconstruction of the Rashidun narrative rooted in Islamic values and historiography. The study seeks to offer a more balanced account that emphasizes the spiritual, ethical, and communal foundations of early Islamic governance often neglected in Western narratives.

4. The *Al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* Era: An Exemplar of Early Islamic Leadership

The Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) are replete with injunctions on the institution of the (*Khilāfah*) Caliphate in general and the (*al-Khilāfah al-Rashidah*) rightly guided Caliphate in particular. The Qur'ān enjoins that:

*Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will certainly make them (His) vicegerents in the land, as He made those before them, and will certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and will certainly give them peace in place of fear in which they were before; (provided that) they worship Me, ascribing no partner to Me. And those who turn infidel after that are the transgressors.*⁷

The period commonly referred to as *Al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*, or the “Rightly Guided Caliphs,” designates the foundational thirty years of Islamic governance following the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).⁸ This era is characterized by the leadership of four eminent Companions of the Prophet: Hadhrat Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (RA)⁹, Hadhrat ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab (RA)¹⁰, Hadhrat ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affan (RA)¹¹, and Hadhrat ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib (RA)¹². These caliphs were selected through a consultative process (*Shūrā*) and collective consensus among the Prophet’s closest companions, based not merely on political considerations but on their exemplary moral character, devout piety, leadership capabilities, and commitment to the newly established Muslim community.

The designation “Rightly Guided Caliphs” (*al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*)¹³ transcends a mere historical classification and holds profound theological and normative significance within Islamic tradition. This is especially evident in the corpus of Hadith literature, where the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) explicitly instructs the Muslim community to adhere steadfastly to his own Sunnah as well as the Sunnah practiced by these caliphs.¹⁴ A notable reference is found in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, where the Prophet (SAW) states:

*Hold firmly to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs after me. Bite onto it with your molars.*¹⁵

This metaphorical exhortation conveys a compelling imperative, emphasizing the depth of adherence required. It does not merely recommend following the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), but it elevates the governance and jurisprudential decisions of these caliphs to a normative and binding standard for the Muslim community. The vivid imagery of “biting with your molars”¹⁶ suggests a tenacious and

unyielding commitment, thereby affirming the caliphs' rulings and conduct as a legitimate continuation of Prophetic guidance.

The epithet “rightly guided” (*al-Rāshidūn*) itself denotes the Prophet's affirmation that the caliphs' leadership was underpinned by divine guidance (*Tawfīq*), reflective of the core Islamic principles of justice (*ʿAdālah*), mutual consultation (*Shūrā*), humility (*Tawāḍuʿ*), and ethical governance. Their decisions were not merely pragmatic political maneuvers but were deeply rooted in a sincere commitment to the values and teachings promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).¹⁷ This theological endorsement bestowed upon these four leaders a distinctive religious and moral authority that distinguished their tenure from that of later caliphs and rulers.

Within Islamic thought, the era of the *Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn* is widely regarded as a paradigmatic golden age of Islamic governance. Their period is often idealized as the embodiment of authentic Islamic leadership, combining spiritual integrity with administrative efficacy.¹⁸ As a result, the lives, policies, and governance models of these caliphs are extensively studied—not merely as historical phenomena—but as enduring exemplars of Islamic leadership, embodying a synthesis of devotion, justice, and pragmatism.

The historical significance of this era lies not only in its spiritual and moral dimensions but also in its tangible contributions to the consolidation of the Islamic state. Under the stewardship of these caliphs, the Islamic polity witnessed rapid territorial expansion, and foundational institutions of Islamic jurisprudence, administration, and social justice were established. They navigated complex social and political challenges precipitated by the exponential growth and diversification of the Muslim community, consistently striving to implement the Prophet's vision of a just and ethical society.

Crucially, what distinguishes the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs is their unwavering commitment to preserving the prophetic legacy in both spirit and praxis. Despite the dynamic and evolving nature of the early Muslim *Ummah*, these leaders endeavored to uphold the core principles of justice, collective consultation, simplicity, and piety.¹⁹ Their governance represents a conscious effort to sustain the Prophet's model society as a living reality, ensuring that the nascent Islamic polity remained anchored in divine guidance and ethical integrity.

5. Framing the Narrative: Orientalism and Western Historiography of Islam

Western historiography of Islam, particularly during the colonial and post-Enlightenment eras, was profoundly influenced by Orientalism—a framework that tended to exoticize, simplify, and distort Islamic civilization.²⁰ Scholars such as Edward Said have shown how this tradition functioned not merely as academic inquiry but as a political and cultural enterprise. Within this intellectual milieu, Muslim societies were often depicted as stagnant, despotic, and antithetical to Western modernity.

P.K. Hitti, though notably more appreciative of Arab culture than many earlier scholars, still worked within the overarching framework of the Orientalist tradition. His *History of the Arabs*²¹ reflects many assumptions of its time: a secular lens of analysis, an overemphasis on political pragmatism, and a tendency to view Islamic history through a Eurocentric lens. Hitti often separates the spiritual and ethical from the political, thereby framing Islamic history in reductionist terms. This section lays the foundation for understanding how Hitti's work is situated within a wider historiographical context that demands critical interrogation.

5.1. *Jihad Fī Sabīlillāh* or Economic Gain? A Critical Response to Philip K. Hitti's Narrative on Early Muslim Conquests

The early Islamic conquests of the 7th century, which swiftly expanded the Muslim polity across vast regions, have been interpreted in various ways by historians. Among Western scholars, Philip K. Hitti offers a distinctly economic perspective. In his renowned work *History of the Arabs*, Hitti argues that these conquests were motivated more by material gains than by religious zeal, suggesting that early Muslims were driven primarily by economic necessity rather than spiritual commitment. For example, he writes:

*The 'clerical' interpretation of the Islamic movement, emphasized in Arabic sources, makes it entirely or primarily a religious movement and lays no stress on the underlying economic causes.*²²

Hitti further writes:

Not fanaticism but economic necessity drove the Bedouin hordes, and most of the armies of conquest were recruited from the Bedouins, beyond the confines of their arid abode to the fair lands of the north. The passion to go to heaven in the next life may have been operative with some, but the desire for the comforts and luxuries of

the civilized regions of the Fertile Crescent was just as strong in the case of many."²³

This study, therefore challenges the Orientalist claim—particularly by Philip K. Hitti—that early Muslim conquests were driven by economic motives. It argues instead that the primary motivation was sincere religious commitment and that *Jihad* was undertaken solely for the sake of Allah, reflecting the deep spiritual consciousness of the early Muslim community.

5.2. Understanding the Context of Hitti's Claim

To fairly assess Hitti's claim, it is essential to situate it within the broader intellectual climate of Orientalist historiography in the early 20th century. Scholars such as Hitti, Gibb, and Caetani approached Islamic history through a secular and often materialist lens. As a result, religious motivations—central in Islamic sources—were frequently dismissed as superficial or as post-facto justifications for more “realistic” goals such as wealth, power, or land acquisition.

In Hitti's framework, the Arab conquests are viewed through the prism of the harsh Bedouin environment. He reasons that economic scarcity in the Arabian Peninsula led tribes to seek fertile and resource-rich lands in the north. This material deprivation, he claims, outweighed religious conviction. The supposed allure of the *comforts and luxuries of the Fertile Crescent*,²⁴ as Hitti puts it, allegedly drew Arabs toward conquest.

However, this interpretation is reductive. While environmental factors may have played some role, to posit them as the primary objective of the Islamic conquests ignores a wealth of historical evidence—especially from Islamic sources—that foregrounds the centrality of Islamic faith, doctrine, and the obligation of *Jihad* in the life of the early Muslim community.

5.3. Islam as the Catalyst: Fred McGraw Donner's Perspective

In stark contrast to Hitti, historian Fred McGraw Donner presents a more balanced and faith-sensitive perspective. In his seminal work *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Donner emphasizes that Islam was not merely a background element but the core ideology unifying the Arabs into a disciplined and purpose-driven force. He writes:

The Muslims succeeded, then, primarily because they were able to organize an effective conquest movement, and in this context, the impact of the new religion of Islam, which provided the ideological underpinnings for this remarkable

*breakthrough in social organization, can be more fully appreciated. In this sense, the conquests were truly an Islamic movement. For it was Islam - the set of religious beliefs preached by Muhammad (SAW), with its social and political ramifications-that ultimately sparked the whole integration process and hence was the ultimate cause of the conquests' success.*²⁵

Donner's view in comparison to Hitti, captures a critical reality: that Islam was a transformative force. It was not just a spiritual faith but a comprehensive worldview that gave rise to a new social, political, and military order. The idea of *Jihad Fi Sabilillah* played a central role in mobilizing and motivating early Muslims. Far from being impoverished tribes looking for loot, many early Muslims were willing to risk their lives against numerically and technologically superior enemies purely for the sake of advancing the message of Islam.

6. Material Disadvantage: A Counter to Economic Motivation

A powerful rebuttal to Hitti's economic thesis lies in the stark material disadvantages faced by early Muslim armies. In key battles—such as Badr, where 313 Muslims defeated a force of 1000 Makkans—Muslims lacked superior numbers, weaponry, or wealth.²⁶ Similarly, in the campaigns against the Byzantine and Sassanid empires, Muslim forces confronted far stronger and wealthier adversaries. If material gain were the primary motive, engaging in such perilous and unequal battles would have been strategically irrational. The only plausible explanation is that early Muslims were motivated by sincere religious conviction and a yearning for divine reward, not economic necessity.

This is supported by the historical record. The early Muslim soldiers often viewed martyrdom (*Shahadah*) as the highest honour and sought not worldly riches but the pleasure of Allah.²⁷ The Caliphs and commanders of Muslim armies continuously reminded their troops of this spiritual goal. The *Kitāb al-Jihād*²⁸ genre in Islamic literature, including numerous sermons, speeches, and letters from the time, attest to the prominence of this religious ideal.

6.1 The Commanders' Call to Faith

Statements and actions of early Muslim commanders offer compelling evidence against Hitti's materialist interpretation of the Islamic conquests. Renowned leaders like Abu Bakr (RA), Khalid Ibn al-Walid (RA), Abu Ubaydah Ibn al-Jarrah (RA), and Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas (RA) consistently exhorted their soldiers to act with sincerity, fear Allah, and remain mindful of the Hereafter. These campaigns were

not driven by the desire for power or wealth, but by a sincere commitment to *Da'wah*—inviting people to *Tawḥid* (monotheism), justice, and divine mercy.

A striking example is the instructions given by Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) to the army of Usamah Ibn Zayd (RA), which forbade treachery, looting, mutilation, destruction of nature, and harming non-combatants, including monks and the elderly.²⁹ These guidelines reveal that the goal was not territorial or economic conquest, but the ethical and spiritual mission of *Jihad fī Sabīlillāh*—striving for the pleasure of Allah and the establishment of divine justice.³⁰

Such principles directly contradict the notion that early Muslim conquests were motivated by material incentives. Instead, they highlight the profound moral and spiritual foundation of these campaigns, centered on faith, righteousness, and the higher objectives of Islam.

6.2 The Testimony of Rabi' Ibn 'Amir (RA)

One of the most powerful illustrations of Islamic motivations in the early conquests is the statement of Rabi' Ibn 'Amir (RA), a Muslim envoy who spoke before the Sassanid general Rustam. According to Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari, Rustam asked Rabi' (RA) what brought the Muslims to Persian lands. Rabi' (RA) replied:

*Allah has sent us and guided us here to lead those He wills—from the worship of man to the worship of Allah alone; from the confines and hardships of this world to the vastness and blessings of the Hereafter; and from the injustice of false religions to the justice of Islam. He has entrusted us with His religion to deliver His message, calling His creation to Him.*³¹

This statement encapsulates the moral and spiritual compass of the early Muslim armies. Far from seeking luxuries, they viewed themselves as bearers of divine guidance, entrusted with liberating people spiritually and morally. Rabi's statement shows a consciousness that is deeply religious, revolutionary, and altruistic.

6.3 The Spiritual Ethos of the Early Community

The entire socio-political ethos of early Islam was profoundly grounded in the centrality of the *Ākhirah* (Afterlife). Far from being a secondary concern, the Hereafter served as the moral compass and driving force behind individual and collective action in the formative period of the Islamic community. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW), over the course of twenty-three years of divine instruction and

prophetic leadership, cultivated a generation of believers whose hearts were firmly oriented toward the eternal life to come, rather than the fleeting allure of the *Dunyā* (worldly life).³² This eschatological worldview was not merely personal or pietistic in nature; it permeated the foundational structures of the early Islamic state, shaping its governance, social norms, economic policies, and even military engagement.

In particular, the military ethos of the early Muslims was deeply infused with this spiritual orientation. The goal of warfare, as understood within the framework of Islamic revelation, was not conquest for its own sake or the accumulation of material wealth, but the establishment of divine justice and the dissemination of the truth of Islam.³³ The military campaigns were undertaken as acts of obedience to Allah, with the ultimate objective being His pleasure and the reward of Paradise.

This paradigm is powerfully encapsulated in the words of Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA), who, upon learning that some soldiers had begun to covet land and engage in worldly pursuits during the conquests, sternly reminded them by saying that

*We are a people whom Allah has honoured through Islam; if we seek honour in anything else, Allah will humiliate us.*³⁴

This statement is more than a moral reprimand—it is a profound articulation of Islamic civilization’s foundational principle that dignity (*‘Izzah*) and success are granted only through faith and submission to Allah. When diverted toward worldly aims, even the most powerful community risks divine chastisement.

The Qur’an itself reinforces this spiritual worldview, especially in its exhortations regarding *Jihād*. One of the most striking examples is found in the Qur’an:

*Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for Paradise...*³⁵

This verse presents a divine transaction—a metaphorical sale in which the believer willingly gives up their most prized possessions (life and wealth) not for worldly compensation, but for the eternal reward of Paradise. This framing of *Jihād* as a spiritual covenant reveals its essence: it is not an act of aggression or expansionism, but an expression of faith, submission, and ultimate trust in Allah’s promise.

6.4 The Role of Islamic Missionary Zeal

One of the most critical aspects neglected in Philip K. Hitti's portrayal of the early Islamic conquests is the profound missionary zeal that animated the Muslim community. Hitti's emphasis on material and political motives reflects a secular historiographical bias that fails to appreciate the deeply religious and ethical foundations of early Islamic expansion. Far from being a mere campaign of territorial aggrandizement or economic exploitation, the conquests undertaken by the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) were fundamentally driven by an unwavering commitment to the propagation of divine guidance and the realization of a just social order under the sovereignty of Allah.

From the earliest stages of the Islamic mission, the believers understood their role not merely as conquerors but as bearers of a universal message entrusted to them by divine revelation. The Qur'anic ethos commands believers to "*invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel*"³⁶ underscoring the civilizational and reformative intent behind their endeavors. The objective was to rescue humanity from the moral anarchy and spiritual ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*) that had engulfed much of the world, and to establish a polity grounded in *Tawhīd* (the oneness of God), justice (*ʿAdl*), and moral responsibility.

This religious and moral vision was not limited to theological doctrines but was manifest in the practical administration of the territories that came under Muslim rule. The early caliphs, following the Prophetic model, established institutions that prioritized justice, equity, and compassion. The protection of non-Muslim communities under the covenant of *Dhimma*³⁷ exemplifies this commitment. Jews and Christians were granted religious autonomy and communal security in exchange for the *Jizyah*,³⁸ a tax that served as compensation for exemption from military service and as a means of integrating them into the Islamic polity without coercion or forced conversion. Such policies starkly contrast with the exploitative systems of many contemporary empires, and reflect the Islamic emphasis on principled governance.

Furthermore, the economic policies introduced during *Rashidah Caliphate*—such as *Kharāj*³⁹ (land tax) and *Jizyah* (tax on non-Muslim citizens)—were not random or unjust measures. Rather, they were carefully organized systems intended to ensure fairness in taxation and support the general welfare of society. The revenue collected through these taxes was used for essential public services, including the maintenance of infrastructure, assistance to the poor and needy, and the defense of the state. These taxes were applied with consistency and oversight, making sure

they did not become a source of oppression but served the broader goal of justice and social stability.

6.5 Reassessing Hitti's Framework

In light of the foregoing analysis, it is clear that Philip K. Hitti's economically driven interpretation of the early Muslim conquests is both inadequate and reductive. By attributing Islamic expansion primarily to material motives, Hitti neglects the deeper religious, ethical, and theological motivations that inspired the early Muslim community. While economic factors may have had a minor role, the conquests were fundamentally driven by a God-centered worldview rooted in *Tawhīd*, *Jihād fi Sabīlillāh*, and the hope of eternal salvation.⁴⁰

Hitti's reliance on secular, materialist assumptions leads to a flawed understanding of a profoundly spiritual movement. His anachronistic approach misrepresents the intentions and experiences of early Muslims, whose actions were shaped by Qur'anic ideals of justice, divine guidance, and the moral obligation to convey the truth. Understanding the early Islamic expansion demands a framework that recognizes the sincerity of its religious mission—a mission that far transcended the mere pursuit of wealth or territory.

7. Expulsion of Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula: Political Necessity or Disregard of Earlier Treaties? A Critique of P.K. Hitti's Narrative

The early Islamic governance of the Arabian Peninsula involved complex socio-political and religious dynamics, particularly in its interactions with non-Muslim communities. One debated issue is the expulsion of Jews and Christians during the caliphate of Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA). Orientalist historian Philip K. Hitti portrays this policy as an act of religious intolerance and a violation of prior treaties, citing the removal of Jews from Khaybar and Christians from Najran.⁴¹ However, a deeper analysis of historical sources suggests otherwise. The expulsions were not rooted in religious bigotry but were strategic responses to political threats and breaches of trust by these communities, highlighting the necessity of ensuring stability and security within the nascent Islamic state.

7.1 Hitti's Assertion and the Orientalist Perspective

Philip K. Hitti, in his seminal work *History of the Arabs*, presents the expulsion of Jews and Christians under Caliph 'Umar (RA) as a fundamental shift towards exclusivist Muslim rule in the Arabian Peninsula. According to Hitti:

*Umar made his starting point the theory that in the peninsula itself none but the Moslem religion should ever be tolerated. To this end and in utter disregard of earlier treaties, he expelled... the Jews of Khaybar... as well as the Christians of Najran.*⁴²

Hitti's claim suggests that the early Islamic state abandoned its prior commitments and engaged in a systematic policy of religious intolerance. From this perspective, the expulsion was a blatant violation of earlier treaties that guaranteed protection and rights to non-Muslim communities in the region. This assertion reflects a broader Orientalist critique that frames Islamic expansion and governance as inherently coercive and intolerant. It also assumes that the treaties in question were exalted and inviolable regardless of the political realities of the time. However, such a perspective risks overlooking the nuanced political context in which these events unfolded and the specific actions of the expelled groups that precipitated the caliph's decision.

7.2 Historical Context: Treaties, Loyalty, and Security

To understand the rationale behind the expulsion, it is essential to analyze the political and security challenges facing the Islamic state under Caliph 'Umar (RA). The Arabian Peninsula was a complex mosaic of tribal, religious, and ethnic groups, many of whom had prior agreements with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the early Muslim community.⁴³ These agreements often included clauses of mutual defense, peaceful coexistence, and protection of religious freedoms.

However, these treaties were contingent on good faith and loyalty. If a party violated the terms or acted in a manner that threatened the security of the state, the leadership had to reassess its policies to safeguard the Muslim community and maintain stability. The Jewish tribes of Khaybar and the Christian community of Najran are notable cases where tensions escalated due to acts perceived as hostile or conspiratorial.

7.3 The Case of the Jews of Khaybar

Khaybar was a fortified Jewish oasis north of Medina that had been conquered by the Muslims during the Prophet Muhammad's campaigns. The Jewish inhabitants of Khaybar entered into a treaty with the Muslim state that allowed them to remain in their lands under certain conditions, including paying tribute and maintaining peaceful relations.

However, historical sources, including Islamic historians such as Allama Shibli Numani, indicate that the relationship between the Khaybar Jews and the Muslim state became increasingly strained during ‘Umar’s caliphate. Numani writes in *Al-Farooq*:

As to the expulsion of Jews and Christians from Arabia, it is a fact that Jews had never been really friendly towards the Muslims. The Jews of Khaybar had been told on the conquest of the city that they would be turned out whenever the state thought it necessary to do so. Their enmity towards the state became more open in the reign of ‘Umar (RA). They threw his son ‘Abdullah from the roof of a house injuring his arm thereby. At last, ‘Umar (RA) read out the whole catalogue of their rascalities in public assembly and ordered their expulsion.⁴⁴

Therefore, Shibli Numani provides a meticulous account of the expulsion of Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula during the caliphate of ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA), challenging claims of religious intolerance. He argues that the decision was not arbitrary or faith-based, but a justified response to repeated acts of betrayal and hostility—particularly by certain Jewish tribes.⁴⁵ The Jews of Khaybar, allowed to remain after its conquest under clear conditions, violated their agreement over time. A notable incident involved an alleged assassination attempt on ‘Umar’s son, ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar (RA)⁴⁶, which underscored the threat posed by these communities.

In light of such actions, ‘Umar (RA) convened a public assembly and presented evidence of their treachery before ordering their expulsion. Numani presents this policy as a rational and necessary move to ensure the security and stability of the Islamic state, not an act of religious persecution. The expulsion, he argues, was rooted in political necessity and justice, aimed at preserving peace and order, and not in intolerance toward other faiths. Peaceful coexistence, according to Numani, depended on mutual respect and loyalty to the state, principles these groups were seen to have violated.

7.4 The Christians of Najran and Their Expulsion

Shibli Numani offers a balanced account of Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s policy toward the Christian community of Najran, countering claims of religious intolerance. Initially, the Christians lived peacefully under Muslim rule in Yemen, enjoying autonomy and protection as per their treaty agreements. However, as Numani notes, they later began secretly amassing weapons and horses, suggesting preparations for rebellion.⁴⁷ This shift transformed the issue from a matter of religious coexistence to a political threat.

In response, Umar (RA) acted prudently and without violence. Rather than punishing them harshly, he ordered their relocation to Iraq—still under Muslim rule—where they could be monitored and no longer pose a security risk. This move preserved their religious freedom while neutralizing the threat to state stability.

Numani frames this action as a pragmatic and just political decision, not an act of persecution. It reflects Umar's dedication to safeguarding the Muslim state and ensuring peace, while still allowing religious minorities to live and practice their faith—so long as they upheld their treaty obligations and refrained from subversion.

7.5 Treatment of the Expelled Communities: Jews and Christians

It is crucial to emphasize that the expulsion of Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula was not accompanied by indiscriminate violence or maltreatment. Historical records indicate that:

- The expelled Jews and Christians were granted land and settlements in Syria and Iraq, areas under Muslim control but distant from the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁸
- They were given a two-year exemption from paying the *Jizya* (a tax levied on non-Muslim subjects), which facilitated their resettlement and economic stability.⁴⁹
- The expulsions were carried out with respect for their lives and property, signaling that the decision was motivated by political and security considerations rather than personal animosity or religious hatred.⁵⁰

These facts challenge the notion that the expulsions were acts of religious intolerance or breaches of sacred treaties. Instead, they reflect a pragmatic policy that balanced state security with humane treatment of minority groups.

8. Uthman Ibn Affan (RA)—Appointment of Governors and the Accusation of Nepotism: A Critical Response to Philip K. Hitti

Philip K. Hitti's portrayal of Caliph Uthman Ibn Affan (RA) often centers around the accusation that his reign was marred by nepotism—a governance style characterized by favoritism toward family members and close associates at the expense of competence and justice. Hitti writes:

*Uthman... was also a pious and well-meaning old man, but too weak to resist the importunities of his greedy kinsfolk. His foster brother, 'Abdullah... he appointed over Egypt; his half-brother....*⁵¹

Such claims suggest that Caliph 'Uthmān (RA) favored relatives over merit, contributing to political unrest and his eventual assassination. However, a deeper, contextual study of historical sources shows this view is overly simplistic. In reality, 'Uthmān's appointments were driven by competence, loyalty, and the need to maintain state stability, not by nepotism.

8.1 The Appointment of 'Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh (RA) as Governor of Egypt

Hitti criticizes 'Uthman (RA) for appointing his foster brother, 'Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh (RA), as governor of Egypt, insinuating nepotism. Yet this assessment overlooks the fact that 'Abdullah's initial appointment to Upper Egypt actually took place under Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab (RA), Uthman's predecessor.⁵²

The administrative situation in Egypt during the early caliphate was complex. Amr Ibn al-As (RA), a highly respected companion and military commander, was the governor of Lower Egypt. However, he and 'Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh (RA), who governed Upper Egypt, often disagreed on certain administrative and policy issues, which created tensions between the two provincial administrations. To resolve these conflicts and streamline governance, Caliph Uthman (RA) made the decision to dismiss Amr Ibn al-As (RA) from his position and appoint 'Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh (RA) as governor of the whole of Egypt. This was not a whimsical decision based on familial preference but rather a practical solution to administrative discord.⁵³

Moreover, 'Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh (RA) demonstrated his capability by implementing a different financial and administrative strategy from that of Amr Ibn al-As (RA). This resulted in increased revenue for the province under his leadership, an outcome that reflects competence and effectiveness.⁵⁴

Thus, far from being an act of nepotism, this appointment can be understood as a politically motivated decision to ensure stability and efficiency in one of the most important provinces of the caliphate. The mere fact that 'Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh (RA) was Uthman's foster brother did not compromise his ability to govern; on the contrary, his performance justified the appointment.

8.2 The Case of Walid Ibn ‘Uqbah and Governance of Kufa

Hitti also writes:

*Al-Walid Ibn ‘Uqbah....he made governor of al-Kufah;*⁵⁵

Here Hitti also refers to Walid Ibn ‘Uqbah as the governor of Kufa, implying a nepotistic appointment. While it is true that Walid was appointed governor of Kufa, Hitti’s characterization simplifies and obscures the fuller administrative history of the province under ‘Uthman (RA).

The governance of Kufa during Uthman’s caliphate was marked by considerable complexity. Five different governors administered Kufa during this period, beginning with Al-Mughirah Ibn Shu’bah (RA) and ending with Abu Musa al-Ash’ari (RA), who was governor until Uthman’s death.⁵⁶

Walid Ibn ‘Uqbah (RA) was only one among these five governors and his tenure ended when a complaint was filed against him. Consequently, he was dismissed and replaced,⁵⁷ demonstrating that the caliph did not hesitate to remove officials, including family members, when they failed to meet expectations or caused unrest.

This broader historical context highlights Caliph ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān (RA) as a just and principled leader who prioritized competence and accountability over personal ties. The appointment of al-Walid Ibn ‘Uqbah (RA) was based on administrative merit, not nepotism. When allegations of misconduct arose, ‘Uthmān (RA) promptly removed him, demonstrating a commitment to justice and public trust.

8.3 The Appointment of Marwan Ibn al-Hakam and Other Umayyad Officials

Hitti further writes:

*His cousin Marwan Ibn-al-Hakam,..... whom, he put in charge of the diwan. Many important offices were filled by Umayyads, the caliph's family. The caliph himself accepted presents from his governors or their partisans, including a beautiful maid offered by the governor of al-Baṣrah. Charges of nepotism became widespread.*⁵⁸

Here Hitti points out that Uthman (RA) appointed his cousin, Marwan Ibn al-Hakam, as head of the *Diwan* (the state bureau responsible for administration and military pay), and notes that many important offices were filled by Umayyads, the caliph’s family.⁵⁹

It is true that Uthman (RA) appointed several Umayyad relatives to key administrative positions. However, this pattern must be analyzed in its proper political and historical context:

- The Umayyads were one of the most powerful and influential families in the Arabian Peninsula at that time. They had proven administrative skills and political experience, making them a natural choice for senior roles in a rapidly expanding empire.⁶⁰
- Marwan Ibn al-Hakam, in particular, was a skilled administrator and statesman whose leadership at the *Diwan* contributed to the effective functioning of the caliphate's bureaucracy.⁶¹
- The fact that important offices were held by Umayyads does not automatically prove nepotism. In a tribal society like early Islamic Arabia, kinship ties and political alliances often overlapped, and trustworthiness was a crucial factor in appointments.⁶²
- Regarding the acceptance of gifts, Islamic tradition permits gifts between rulers and officials within ethical boundaries.⁶³ While the acceptance of a maid as a gift raises ethical questions, it was not an unusual practice in the political culture of the time. There is no clear evidence that such gifts influenced administrative decisions unfairly.⁶⁴

8.4 The Myth of Favoritism: The Case of Muhammad Ibn Abi Hudhayfah

One of the most compelling counterarguments to the charge of nepotism against Uthman (RA) is the position of Muhammad Ibn Abi Hudhayfah, the caliph's stepson. If Uthman (RA) had practiced nepotism in the simplistic sense Hitti suggests, Muhammad Ibn Abi Hudhayfah would have been the natural beneficiary, favored for prominent positions over others. Yet, historical records show that Uthman (RA) refused to appoint Muhammad Ibn Abi Hudhayfah to any administrative position for which he was unqualified or unsuitable.⁶⁵ This decision reflects the caliph's commitment to meritocracy and justice, as he prioritized competence over personal ties.

This example challenges the common claim that Caliph 'Uthmān (RA) practiced unchecked favoritism. Instead, it reveals a leader who sought to balance familial ties with public responsibility, appointing individuals based on merit and administrative need. When valid concerns arose, even about his relatives, he acted decisively,

showing a commitment to justice and the well-being of the Ummah over personal loyalty.

9. Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the era of *al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* holds a foundational place in Islamic history as an exemplary model of governance rooted in divine guidance, justice (*‘Adālah*), and consultation (*Shūrā*). Far from being merely a political succession after the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), this period represents a spiritually anchored and ethically guided system that deeply influenced Islamic civilization. However, this legacy is often misrepresented in modern Western and Orientalist scholarship. Notably, Philip K. Hitti, in his *History of the Arabs*, presents a secular and Eurocentric interpretation of the *Rashidun* era, emphasizing tribalism, economic motives, and political ambition, while downplaying its theological and moral foundations. Hitti's reading of the early Muslim conquests attributes expansion to material necessity, ignoring the Qur'anic vision of *Jihād* as a means of establishing justice, defending faith, and liberating the oppressed. His account neglects the religious commitment of the early Companions and the ethical military directives of Caliph Abū Bakr (RA), which strictly forbade harming civilians and religious institutions. Similarly, his portrayal of Caliph ‘Umar (RA) frames the expulsion of some Jewish and Christian communities as religious intolerance, overlooking treaty violations and political subversion. In reality, these actions were rooted in pragmatic concerns for state security. The *Dhimma* system under ‘Umar (RA) safeguarded minority rights in return for loyalty and tax, a nuance missing in Hitti's narrative. Lastly, Hitti's depiction of Caliph ‘Uthmān (RA) as nepotistic disregards the administrative challenges of a growing empire and the qualifications of his appointees. Internal unrest during his rule must be contextualized within broader social and political shifts rather than reduced to personal failure. Overall, Hitti's secular lens distorts the spiritual and ethical dimensions that defined the Rashidun Caliphate.

NOTES AND REFERENCE:

¹SAW stands for *Ṣallallāhu ‘Alayhi wa Sallam* which means ‘may Allah send His blessings and peace upon him’.

²*Al-Khulafā’ al-Rāshidūn* refers to the first four caliphs who led the Muslim community (*Ummah*) after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

³RA stands for ‘*Raziallahu ‘Anhu/’Anha/’Anhum/’Anhum*’, which means ‘may pleasure of Allah be upon him/her/both/them’ and whenever the name of any *Sahabi* [Companion of the Prophet (SAW)] is spoken, heard or written.

⁴Dr. Uthman Muhammad Nasri Ale Khamees, *Sahih Tarikh al-Islam Wa al-Muslimeen*, trans. Abu Mas’ud Abd al-Jabbar Salafi (Maktaba al-Saqafat al-Islamia, 2011), 64-65.

⁵Dr. Ahmad Zidan, *The Rightly Guided Caliphs (Al-Kholafa’a l-Rashidin): According to Earliest Authentic Sources*, (Islamic INC.: Publishing & Distribution, Cairo, Egypt, 1998), 141-142.

⁶The First *Fitna* (656–661 CE) was the first major civil war in Islamic history, sparked by the assassination of Caliph ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān (RA).

⁷Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *The Noble Quran: Meaning With Explanatory Notes* (Karachi: Maktaba Ma’arifur Qur’an, Darul Uloom Karachi, 2007), Qur’an 24:55.

⁸Al-Tirmidhi, *Jami’ al-Tirmidhi*, trans. Abu Khaliyl (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), hadith 2226; Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), hadiths 4646–4647.

⁹Abu As-Su’ood Muhammad Tamir, *Biographies of the Rightly Guided Caliphs*, (Egypt: Dar Al-Manarah For Translation, Publishing and Distribution, Egypt, 2001), 4.

¹⁰Jalaluddin As-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafae (The History of the Khalifahs)*, trans. Abdassamad Clarke (London: Taha Publishers Ltd, 1995), 3.

¹¹Dr. ‘Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi, *Uthman bin Affan: Shakhsiyat Aur Karnammay*, trans. Shamim Ahmad Khalil Al-Salafi (Nadwat al-Sunnah Educational And Welfare Society, 2014), 37

¹²Muhammad Tamir, *op. cit.*, 332.

¹³Yahya Ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawi, *Sharḥ Matn al-Arba’in*, 115.

¹⁴Muhammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymeen, *Sharḥ Riṭāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3 (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 2007), 338–339.

¹⁵Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, *op. cit.*, Hadith 4607.

¹⁶Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of Al-Nawawi*, Vol. 2 (Amman: Dar al-Basheer Publications & Translations, 1999), 881.

¹⁷Sultan-ul-Ashiqeen Sultan Mohammad Najib-ur-Rehman, *Khulafa-e-Rashideen (The Rashidun Caliphate)*, trans. Fatima Noor Sarwari Qadri (Lahore: Sultan-ul-Faqr Publications Regd. 2022), 14.

¹⁸Muhammad Khalid Khalid, *The Successors of the Messenger (Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him)*, trans. Muhammad Mahdi al-Sharif (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutb Al-Ilmiyah), 4-5.

¹⁹Ahmad Zidan, *op. cit.*, 25.

²⁰Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 48.

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- ²¹ Philip Khuri Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1970), 5.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 143.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Muslim Conquests*, (Princeton University Press, 1981), 268.
- ²⁶ Dr. Mustafa As-Sibaa'ie, *The Life of Muhammad: Highlights and Lessons*, trans. Nasiruddin Al-Khattab (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2003), 83-84.
- ²⁷ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), hadith 2799; Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Book of Jihad, hadith 2817.
- ²⁸ The *Kutub al-Sittah* (Six Authentic Books) of Hadith—*Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih al-Muslim*, *Sunan Abu Dawood*, *Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan an-Nasa'i*, and *Sunan Ibn Majah*—all feature dedicated chapters on Jihād fī Sabīlillāh (striving in the path of Allah). These chapters detail the legal rulings, ethical principles, and spiritual virtues of Jihad.
- ²⁹ Dr. 'Ali Muhammad As-Salabi, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq (May Allah be pleased with him)*, trans. Faisal Shafeeq (Riyadh: Darrus Salam), 341-342.
- ³⁰ Dr. 'Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi, *Umar Ibn Al-Khattab: His Life and Times*, Vol. 2 (International Islamic Publishing House), 345.
- ³¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 12, *The Battle of al-Qadisiyyah and the conquest of Syria and Palestine* trans. Y. Friedmann, Albany, (NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 62.
- ³² Al-Qur'an, 59:9; 33:23.
- ³³ Al-Qur'an, 22:41.
- ³⁴ Dr. 'Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi, *Umar Ibn Al-Khattab: His Life and Times*, Vol. 2, (International Islamic Publishing, House), 302.
- ³⁵ Al-Qur'an, 9:111.
- ³⁶ Al-Qur'an, 16:125; 3:104, 110; 2:143.
- ³⁷ Zidan, *op. cit.*, 148-150.
- ³⁸ Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, *Siasi Wathiqat Jat*, trans. Prof. Muhammad Aslam (Lahore: Majlis Taraqi Adab, 2005), 265.
- ³⁹ Muhammad Tamir, *op. cit.*, 199.
- ⁴⁰ Jamaal al-Din M. Zaraboza, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of Al-Nawawi*, Vol. 2, (Dar al-Basheer Publications & Translations, n.d.), 420-422.
- ⁴¹ P.K. Hitti, *op. cit.* 143.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 169.
- ⁴³ Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Prophet's Establishing A State and His Succession*, (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2007), 46-48.
- ⁴⁴ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith 2338.
- ⁴⁵ Shibli Numani, *Al-Farooq: The Life of Omar the Great* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2019), 363.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 363-364.

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- ⁴⁸ Abu Yousuf, *Kitab-Al-Kharaj*, trans. Niaz Ahmed (Lahore: Maktaba Rahmania, n.d.), 213.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ P.K. Hitti, *op. cit.*, 176-177.
- ⁵² Mohammad Redha, *Othman Ibn Affan: The Third Caliph*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-Ilmiyah, 1999), 49.
- ⁵³ Dr. ‘Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi, *The Biography of ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affan: Dhun Noorayn*, ed. Hoda Khattab (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, n.d.), 408-409.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 410.
- ⁵⁵ P.K. Hitti, *op. cit.*, 176-177.
- ⁵⁶ Muhammad Khalid, *op. cit.*, 269.
- ⁵⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (The History of Prophets and Kings), trans. Yohanan Friedmann, Vol. 15 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 115–117.
- ⁵⁸ P.K. Hitti, *op. cit.*, 177.
- ⁵⁹ Dr. Uthman Muhammad Nasri Ale Khamees, *Sahih Tarikh al-Islam Wa al-Muslimeen*, trans. Abu Mas’ud Abd al-Jabbar Salafi (Maktaba al-Saqafat al-Islamia, 2011), 97.
- ⁶⁰ Abul A’lā Mawdūdī, *Khilāfat-o-Mulūkīyat*, (Lahore: Idārah Tarjumān al-Qur’an, 1966), 22.
- ⁶¹ Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Vol. 5, 51.
- ⁶² W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, (Clarendon Press, 1956), 181-183.
- ⁶³ Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Vol. 1, 272–274.
- ⁶⁴ Watt, *op. cit.*, 88-91.
- ⁶⁵ Dr. ‘Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi, *The Biography of ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affan: Dhun Noorayn*, ed. Hoda Khattab (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, n.d.), 414.