

**SSWH5: Examine the political, economic, and cultural interactions within the Medieval Mediterranean World between 600 CE/ AD and 1300 CE/AD**



**Element B: Understand the reasons for the split between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.**

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**Ali's Assassination**

- While alive, Muhammad never established a plan for leadership of the Umma after his death.
  - The first three caliphs were selected from among his close companions and generally ruled without controversy until 656 when rebels from the army assassinated Uthman, the third caliph.
- The assassins then nominated Ali, a relative of Muhammad for the position.
  - Many in the community believed that Ali was Muhammad's legitimate heir because of sermon delivered by the Prophet at Ghadir al-Khumm in which he alluded to Ali as leader.
  - Ali accepted the position of caliph but he faced a challenge from two of Muhammad's close friends and his favorite wife A'isha.
    - This challenge resulted in the Battle of the Camel from which Ali emerged victorious.
  - However, after the battle Ali faced another challenge from a relative of the slain Uthman, the Syrian governor Mu'awiya.
    - This led to more armed conflict but this time the battles were inconclusive.
    - Ali and Mu'awiya agreed to negotiate a truce.
  - Some of Ali's followers, aggravated by his willingness to negotiate, assassinated him in 661.




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**Reasons for Sunni and Shi'a Split**

- The assassination of Ali cleared the way for Mu'awiya to assume the position of caliph and establish the Umayyad Caliphate.
  - However, Ali's son Husayn revolted in 680 hoping to reestablish his family's right to rule.
- The Umayyad caliph ordered Husayn and his family massacred.
- The violent death of Husayn made him a martyr to his followers who broke away and formed the Shi'a branch of Islam while the supporters of the Umayyads became known as the Sunni.




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