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Muḥammad ibn Maslama's Role in the Assassination of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf*

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Abstract

Muḥammad ibn Maslama was a prominent companion of the Prophet Muḥammad who belonged to the Ḥāritha clan of the Medinan tribe of Aws. He played a key role in the events leading to the defeat of the three Jewish tribes of Medina and participated in the assassination of the Jewish leader Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf. Muḥammad ibn Maslama was connected to the Jews in various ways, as is evident, for example, from accounts claiming that he was Ka'b's maternal nephew, and that his clan, the Banū Ḥāritha, lived in the predominantly Jewish oasis of Khaybar for nearly a year in the pre-Islamic period. Muḥammad ibn Maslama's role in Ka'b's assassination has recently been argued to be of dubious historicity. This article offers a reassessment of this conclusion by placing the accounts of Muḥammad ibn Maslama's ties with the Jews, on the one hand, and those that depict him as their enemy, on the other, in the broader context of the change in the attitudes of some of the Anṣār towards the Jews during the Prophet's Medinan period. It argues that this change of attitudes is an attested historical pattern and, accordingly, that the fact of Muḥammad ibn Maslama's participation in the assassination of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf can be deemed reliable.

Keywords: Muḥammad ibn Maslama; Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf; Marḥab the Jew; milk relations; "Hearts have changed"

Introduction

The assassination of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, who was one of the leaders of the Jewish tribe of Banū l-Naḍīr, was a major event in the politics of Medina.¹ The accounts of this assassination differ on significant details pertaining, for instance, to chronology and to the part played by each of the individuals involved. However, they agree on the general outlines of the event, as well as on the affiliation of the assassins with Nabīṭ, which was one of the branches of the tribe of Aws.

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¹ On Ka'b's assassination, see M. J. Kister, "The Market of the Prophet", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965), pp. 272–276; Uri Rubin, "The Assassination of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf", *Oriens* 32 (1990), pp. 65–71; Michael Lecker, "Wāqidi's Account on the Status of the Jews of Medina: A Study of a Combined Report", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54, no. 1 (1996), pp. 15–32; Michael Lecker, *Muḥammad and the Jews* (Jerusalem, 2014), pp. 87–112 (in Hebrew).

One of the main individuals reported to have participated in Kaʿb’s assassination was Muḥammad ibn Maslama, a member of the Ḥāritha clan who was a client (*ḥalīf*) of the ʿAbd al-Ashhal (the Ḥāritha and the ʿAbd al-Ashhal were both clans of Nabīṭ).² Aside from his role in Kaʿb’s assassination, Muḥammad ibn Maslama was tasked with various missions related to the three Jewish tribes of Medina during the Prophet’s lifetime. For example, he was responsible for seizing the property of the Banū Qaynuqāʿ after their expulsion from Medina; he was involved in the expulsion of the Banū l-Naḍīr from Medina; and he was charged with binding the prisoners of the Banū Qurayṣa with ropes following the tribe’s surrender. Muḥammad ibn Maslama’s loyalty to the Prophet also earned him a place in the early Islamic administration. Thus, after the Prophet’s death he served ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who appointed him a tax collector³ and delegated to him responsibility for “sensitive matters” in the provinces.⁴

In a recent article in the *JRAS*, Ehsan Roohi cast doubts on the role played by Muḥammad ibn Maslama and his companions in the assassination of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf.⁵ In his view, the accounts of the assassination “contain apparent discrepancies and cannot be taken at face value”. Roohi contends that “[t]he obscurities of Kaʿb’s story go beyond the contextual inconsistencies”, and he argues that we should moreover hold an even more sceptical view of the authenticity of the reports of his assassination in light of “the Jewish affiliations of Muḥammad b. Maslama and his alleged co-conspirators”.⁶

In what follows, I offer an alternative explanation to what might at first sight seem like a contradiction between Muḥammad ibn Maslama’s close ties with the Jews, on the one hand, and his harsh treatment of the Jews, on the other.⁷ I show that Muḥammad ibn Maslama’s divided loyalties are part of a significant pattern involving several members of the Anṣār, and in so doing, I argue that his participation in Kaʿb’s assassination is a detail that merits strong confidence.

Muḥammad ibn Maslama’s connections with the Jews

Muḥammad ibn Maslama’s close ties with the Jews are indisputable.⁸ He is said to have been Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf’s milk brother,⁹ and some accounts even claim that he was

² He may have become a client of the ʿAbd al-Ashhal as a result of a struggle between them and his own clan, the Ḥāritha. For more on this struggle, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ bi-akhbār dār al-Muṣṭafāʾ*, (ed.) Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʾī (London and Jedda, 2001), i, p. 346. See also William Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 160–161.

³ Note the accounts that claim that he was tax collector also during the Prophet’s lifetime; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, (ed.) Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Saʿīd ʿAlī ibn Gharāma (Beirut, 1998), lv, p. 270.

⁴ On Muḥammad ibn Maslama, see Lecker, *Muḥammad and the Jews*, pp. 96–97; Michael Cook, “Muḥammad’s Deputies in Medina”, *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 23 (2015), pp. 28–29.

⁵ Ehsan Roohi, “The Murder of the Jewish Chieftain Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf: A Re-examination”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31, no. 1 (2021), pp. 103–124 (published online in October 2020).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷ *Ibid.*, “The independent reports we possess concerning the inclinations of Kaʿb’s murderers towards Judaism are apparently contradictory to the bitter hostility they purport to show against the Jews in the story of Kaʿb’s assassination”. See also page 120: “Lasting into the Islamic period, Ibn Maslama’s Jewish affiliation appears irreconcilable with his purported implacable opposition to the well-known Jewish chieftains. It all points to the conclusion that the ubiquitous presence of Ibn Maslama in the heroic struggles with the leading Arabian Jews is nothing but a literary *topos*”.

⁸ Cf. Ibn Maslama’s refusal to convert to Judaism in a conversation which allegedly took place between him and the Jews of the Banū l-Naḍīr before the Prophet’s arrival in Medina; al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, (ed.) Marsden Jones (Beirut, 1984), i, p. 367. See also Uri Rubin, “Ḥanifiyya and the Kaʿba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), p. 88.

⁹ See Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, (ed.) ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta (Beirut, 2002), iv, p. 275.

Ka'b's maternal nephew.¹⁰ It ought to be noted, however, that there appears to be some confusion regarding the identity of the assassin who shared a milk kinship with Ka'b, as Abū Nā'ila Silkān ibn Salāma, 'Abbād ibn Bishr, and al-Ḥārith ibn Aws ibn Mu'adh, three members of the Aws who likewise took part in the assassination, are also reported in different accounts to have been Ka'b's milk brothers.¹¹

Muḥammad ibn Maslama's connections with the Jews are also apparent from his marriage ties. He was reportedly married to a woman of the Za'ūrā (on whom more below),¹² a Jewish clan incorporated into the 'Abd al-Ashhal,¹³ and possibly also to the daughter of al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Khalīfa of the 'Abd al-Ashhal clan,¹⁴ who may have been a former Jew.¹⁵ It is noteworthy in this context that Muḥammad ibn Maslama and al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Khalīfa are likely to have lived close to one another in Medina, as the sources speak of a dispute over irrigation between them which took place during the reign of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.¹⁶

Further evidence of Muḥammad ibn Maslama's ties with the Jews can be found in accounts claiming that he was literate, as literacy in pre-Islamic Medina was taught by the Jews,¹⁷ and in accounts indicating that his clan, the Banū Ḥāritha, lived in Khaybar, an oasis with a Jewish population, for nearly a year preceding the advent of Islam.¹⁸ Lastly, there are reports of a marital connection between Muḥammad ibn Maslama's

¹⁰ See Lecker, *Muḥammad and the Jews*, pp. 110–111; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (ed.) 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Bāz, Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, and Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (Cairo, n.d.), vii, p. 338; *li-anna Abā Nā'ila akhūhu min al-riḍā'a wa-Muḥammad ibn Maslama ibn ukhtihī*. Compare Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, (ed.) 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo, 2001), iii, p. 408, where Muḥammad ibn Maslama's mother is said to have been from the tribe of Khazraj.

¹¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, vii, pp. 338, 339; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, I.2, (ed.) Yūsuf al-Mar'ashli, *Bibliotheca Islamica*, 28a/2 (Beirut, 2008), p. 935; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-tarīkh*, (ed.) Abū l-Fidā' 'Abd Allāh al-Qāḍī (Beirut, 1987), ii, p. 39. Cf. Roohi, "Ka'b b. al-Ashraf", p. 107.

¹² Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, iii, p. 408.

¹³ On the Banū Za'ūrā, see Michael Lecker, "Muḥammad at Medina: A Geographical Approach", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985), pp. 44–46.

¹⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, x, p. 316; Roohi, "Ka'b b. al-Ashraf", pp. 114–115 (read Thubayta instead of Thabīta; see al-Dāraquṭnī, *al-Mu'talif wal-mukhtalif*, [ed.] Muwaffaq ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Qādir [Beirut, 1986], pp. 211–212, who also provides several variants of her name). Other sources claim that he wanted to marry her (see al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī tafsīr al-Sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām*, [ed.] 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Wakīl [Cairo, 1967], vi, p. 434), but do not say that they were in fact married. See also Ibn Qudāma, *al-Istibṣār fī nasab al-ṣaḥāba min al-anṣār*, (ed.) 'Alī Nuwayhid (Beirut, 1972), p. 226, where it is said that Muḥammad ibn Maslama used to "chase after her in order to take a look at her when he wanted to marry her": *wa-hiya llati kāna Muḥammad ibn Maslama yuṭāriduhā li-yanzurahā hīna arāda nikāhahā*. Cf. al-Dāraquṭnī, *al-Mu'talif wal-mukhtalif*, p. 211: *fa-ja'ala yuṭāriduhā bi-ṣārihi*, i.e. he merely followed her with his eyes as she passed by. Note also that Thubayta is not reported to have borne any children to Muḥammad ibn Maslama, and that she is not listed among the wives that he is reported to have had in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, iii, pp. 408–409.

¹⁵ That al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Khalīfa may have been a former Jew is evident, for instance, from claims in the sources that he used to visit the synagogue; see Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden, 1995; reprint Piscataway, 2017), pp. 41–42. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Khalīfa was reportedly also one of the individuals who "are said to have been gravely concerned at the fate of Qurayzah". See Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina*, p. 214.

¹⁶ See Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyiz al-ṣaḥāba*, (ed.) 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwad (Beirut, 1995), iii, p. 384; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd li-mā fī l-Muwatta' min al-ma'āni wa-l-asānid* ([Rabat], 1980), x, pp. 226–227. One account concerning al-Ḍaḥḥāk's daughter and Muḥammad ibn Maslama (see note 14 above) claims that the latter was at his house (*fī dārīhi*), looking at her while she was on a flat roof (*ijjār*), thus further suggesting that the two were neighbours. See Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Fāsi, *Iḥkām al-nazar fī aḥkām al-nazar bi-ḥāssat al-baṣar*, (ed.) Idrīs al-Ṣamadī (Damascus, 2012), pp. 473–474.

¹⁷ Michael Lecker, "Zayd B. Thābit, 'a Jew with Two Sidelocks': Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56, no. 4 (1997), p. 270; Roohi, "Ka'b b. al-Ashraf", p. 116.

¹⁸ Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, i, p. 346. Roohi takes this to indicate that Muḥammad ibn Maslama lived in Khaybar, but there is no explicit evidence for this in the sources. See Roohi, "Ka'b b. al-Ashraf", p. 122; see also p. 118, n. 112.

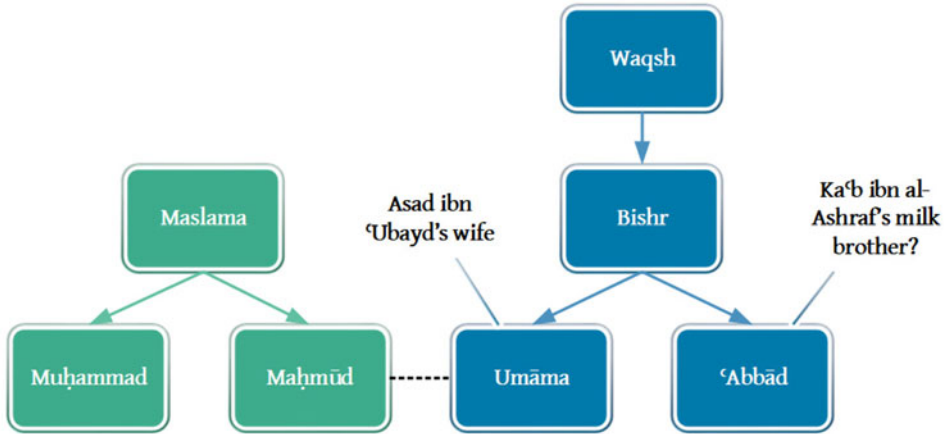


Fig. 1. Asad ibn ʿUbayd's wife's relation to Muḥammad ibn Maslama (first opinion)

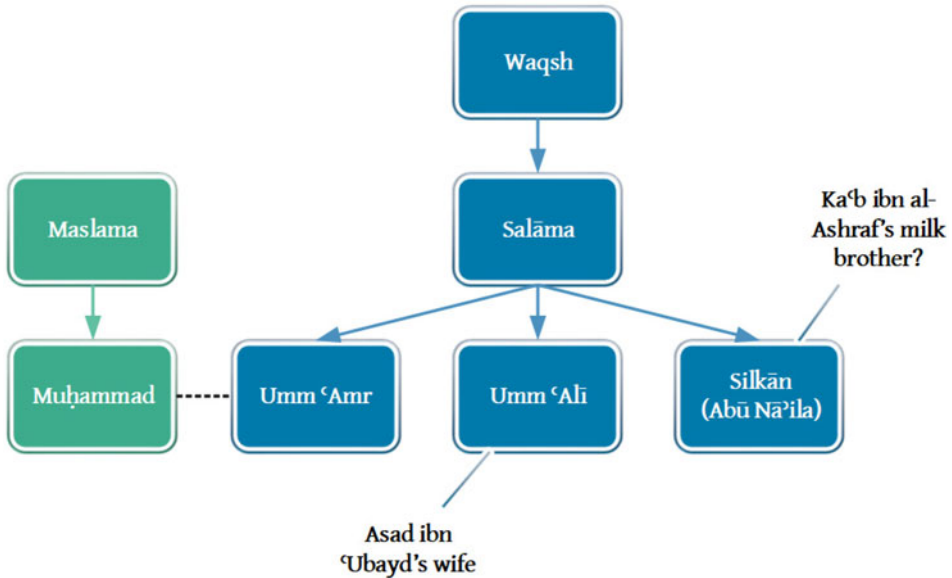


Fig. 2. Asad ibn ʿUbayd's wife's relation to Muḥammad ibn Maslama (second opinion)

family and that of the wife of Asad ibn ʿUbayd ibn Saʿya, a member of the Banū Hadl, who were clients of the Jewish tribe of Qurayza. The sources preserve two variant opinions regarding the nature of this connection. According to the first opinion, Asad ibn ʿUbayd ibn Saʿya's wife was Umāma bint Bishr of the Banū Zaʿūrā, who was the sister of ʿAbbād ibn Bishr and at some point, was also married to Muḥammad ibn Maslama's brother Maḥmūd (see Fig. 1). According to the second opinion, Asad ibn ʿUbayd's wife was Umāma's cousin Umm ʿAlī bint Salāma ibn Waqsh.¹⁹ The latter was the sister of

¹⁹ Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, x, p. 305; Michael Lecker, "Were There Female Relatives of the Prophet Muḥammad among the Besieged Qurayza?", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 2 (April–June 2016), p. 399, n. 12. It is perhaps no accident that Umm ʿAlī and Abū Nāʿila's brother, Salama ibn Salāma ibn Waqsh, is reported to have asked

Abū Nā'ila Silkān ibn Salāma and of Umm 'Amr bint Salāma, who was Muḥammad ibn Maslama's wife from the Banū Za'ūrā' (see Fig. 2).²⁰

Were Muḥammad ibn Maslama and Marḥab the Jew "brothers"?

It is worthwhile looking more closely at an account in the *Kitāb al-imāma wal-siyāsa*,²¹ which Roohi treats as "[t]he most definite indication of Ibn Maslama's close association with the Jews".²² The account, which revolves around Muḥammad ibn Maslama's and other individuals' refusal to give allegiance to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, has the latter saying: "My crime against Muḥammad ibn Maslama is that I **killed his brother** (قتلت أخاه), Marḥab the Jew, during the expedition to Khaybar".²³ 'Alī's statement creates the impression that Muḥammad ibn Maslama was very close to Marḥab, perhaps even his biological or milk brother, but the account is in fact garbled. As is evident from other sources, the correct rendering of 'Alī's statement is that he has killed the killer of Muḥammad ibn Maslama's brother: "As for Muḥammad ibn Maslama, my crime against him is that I **killed his brother's killer** (قتلت قاتل أخيه),²⁴ Marḥab, during the expedition to Khaybar".²⁵ Indeed, Marḥab is said in numerous sources to have killed Muḥammad ibn Maslama's brother Maḥmūd in Khaybar,²⁶ and according to some accounts, Marḥab himself was killed during this expedition by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.²⁷

As is typical of accounts concerning events in the Prophet's lifetime, there is no unanimity in the sources about the specifics. Thus, some accounts claim that Maḥmūd was killed not by Marḥab, but by Kināna ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq;²⁸ others say that Marḥab was killed by Muḥammad ibn Maslama,²⁹ or that Muḥammad ibn Maslama wounded Marḥab and 'Alī was the one to kill him.³⁰ We may not be able to know the precise circumstances of

Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh to show mercy to his allies, the Banū Qurayza; see al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, ii, p. 511 (*wa-qāla Salama ibn Salāma ibn Waqsh: yā Abā 'Amr aḥsin fi mawālīka wa-ḥulafā'ika*).

²⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, x, p. 303.

²¹ The work has been attributed to Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), but this attribution is wrong. Regarding this work, see Delfina Serrano Ruano, "Al-Imāma wa-l-siyāsa, 'On Legitimate Political Leadership and Governance'", in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, volume 1 (600–900), (ed.) David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden, 2009), pp. 741–742, and the references given there.

²² Roohi, "Ka'b b. al-Ashraf", pp. 110–111. Roohi refers to this account several times throughout the article; see pages 115, 118, and 120. The account that claims that Muḥammad ibn Maslama was Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf's maternal nephew is not mentioned in Roohi's article.

²³ Pseudo-Ibn Qutayba, *al-Imāma wal-siyāsa*, (ed.) Ṭāhā Muḥammad Zaynī (Cairo, 1967), i, p. 53: *wa-dhanbi ilā Muḥammad ibn Maslama annī qataltu akhāhu yawm Khaybar: Marḥab al-Yahūdī*.

²⁴ The implication being that Muḥammad ibn Maslama would rather have exacted vengeance himself. See, e.g. al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, ii, p. 655.

²⁵ Al-Iskāfī, *al-Mi'yār wa-l-muwāzana*, (ed.) Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1981), p. 108: *wa-ammā Muḥammad ibn Maslama fa-dhanbi ilayhi annī qataltu qātil akhīhi Marḥaban yawm Khaybar*. See also al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-amālī*, (ed.) Baharād al-Ja'farī and 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 2001), p. 991, where this statement is attributed to 'Ammār ibn Yāsir: *wa-ammā Muḥammad ibn Maslama fa-dhanbuka ilayhi annaka qatalta qātil akhīhi Marḥaban* ("As for Muḥammad ibn Maslama, your crime against him is that you killed his brother's killer, Marḥab").

²⁶ See al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, ii, pp. 645, 700.

²⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, (ed.) Muḥṣafā 'Abd al-Wāḥid (Beirut, 1976), iii, pp. 356–357; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, xlii, p. 105.

²⁸ Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, (ed.) Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (n.p., n.d.), ii, pp. 466–467. The accounts that claim that Maḥmūd ibn Maslama was killed by a Qurayzī woman confuse him with Khallād ibn Suwayd of the tribe of Khazraj; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-ṣaḡhīr*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī Amīn Qal'ajī, (Karachi, 1989), iii, p. 386.

²⁹ Al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, ii, pp. 656–658.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 655–656. See also the version according to which 'Alī captured Marḥab and handed him over to Muḥammad ibn Maslama, who killed him; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, xlii, p. 123. The conflicting

Maḥmūd ibn Maslama's death, or what particular roles were played by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Muḥammad ibn Maslama in Marḥab's death. However, the fact that Maḥmūd and Marḥab were both killed during the Khaybar expedition—a detail upon which the conflicting accounts largely agree—should be deemed trustworthy.

The “change of hearts” among the Prophet's companions

Do the accounts concerning Muḥammad ibn Maslama's connections to the Jews contradict those that portray him as fiercely opposed to them, or is there a deeper logic within the sources? I argue that in the case of Muḥammad ibn Maslama—as well as in the cases of several other Medinan companions of the Prophet—the sources are telling us a complex but coherent story.

Muḥammad ibn Maslama's and his companions' close ties with the Jews do not render their involvement in Ka'b's assassination implausible, and in fact they fit well into the context of the Prophet's Medinan period.³¹ It is no coincidence that in several other instances the Anṣārī men who had the closest links to the Jews were the ones who ended up turning their backs on them. As the first example, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Atīk of the Salima subdivision of the Khazraj, who participated in the expedition sent by the Prophet to kill Abū Rāfi' Sallām ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq in Khaybar,³² reportedly had a Jewish (milk) mother living in Khaybar who had suckled him (*wa-qad kānat umm 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Atīk yahūdiyyatan bi-Khaybar arḍa'athu*).³³ Second, 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa of the Banū l-Ḥārith branch of the Khazraj, who reportedly headed an expedition to Khaybar in 6/628 to kill the Jewish leader Usayr ibn Rizām,³⁴ is said in some sources to have had a mother or a wet-nurse from Khaybar.³⁵ Third, the Jewish merchant Ibn Sunayna, who was a business partner of the two brothers Ḥuwayṣṣa and Muḥayṣṣa of the Banū Ḥāritha of the Aws (Muḥammad ibn Maslama's clan), was reportedly assassinated by Muḥayṣṣa.³⁶ Fourth, the Jewish poets 'Aṣmā' bint Marwān and Abū 'Afak were both assassinated by individuals with whom they shared a close tribal connection: 'Aṣmā' was married to a man of the Banū Khaṭma clan of the Aws, and her assassin, 'Umayr ibn 'Adī, was likewise of the Banū Khaṭma, and Abū 'Afak and his assassin, Sālim ibn 'Umayr, were

accounts of Marḥab's death are also discussed in Frants Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammeds*, (trans.) Hans Heinrich Schaeder (Heidelberg, 1955), p. 293, n. 84.

³¹ Cf. Roohi, “Ka'b b. al-Ashraf”, p. 119: “The story of Ka'b's assassination, as is related by the sources, does not fit into the context, and the Jewish affiliations of the supposed assassins render their involvement in the murder of a Jewish nobleman very implausible”.

³² Regarding this expedition, see Harald Motzki, “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq: On the Origin and Reliability of Some Maghāzī-Reports”, in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, (ed.) Harald Motzki (Leiden, 2000), pp. 170–239.

³³ See Michael Lecker, “‘Amr ibn Ḥazm al-Anṣārī and Qur'ān 2,256: ‘No Compulsion Is There in Religion’”, *Oriens* 35 (1996), p. 64, who also argues that in the context of this sentence, *umm* (“mother”) should not be taken to mean biological mother. See also Motzki, “Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq”, p. 209.

³⁴ Some accounts also claim that he was sent to Khaybar beforehand to collect intelligence for this expedition; al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, ii, p. 566.

³⁵ Al-Rūyānī, *Baḥr al-madhhab fī furū' al-madhhab al-Shāfi'i*, (ed.) Ṭāriq Fathī al-Sayyid (Beirut, 2015), iii, p. 105; vii, p. 117; Ibn Shabba, *Tārīkh al-Madīna*, i, p. 179. I am currently preparing a separate study on the alternative identifications of 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa's mother.

³⁶ See Michael Lecker, “The Assassination of the Jewish Merchant Ibn Sunayna According to an Authentic Family Account”, in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, (ed.) Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (Leiden, 2011), p. 188: “Muḥayṣṣa was acting against his own interest (and that of his brother) by killing a business partner and benefactor”. For the vocalisation of the brothers' names, see *ibid.*, p. 183, n. 6.

both members of the 'Amr ibn 'Awf branch of the Aws.³⁷ It may be added that Sa'd ibn Mu'adh of the 'Abd al-Ashhal was scolded in a poem by the Jewish poet Jabal ibn Jawwāl al-Tha'labī of Ghatafān³⁸ for his decision to execute the men of the Banū Qurayza even though they were his allies, and that one of the verses of this poem suggests that by so doing, Sa'd was acting against his own tribe's interest:³⁹

You (pl.) left your cooking pot with nothing in it, while
the cooking pot of the people [i.e. of the Khazraj,
whose Jewish allies were not executed] is hot, boiling⁴⁰

تَرَكْتُمْ قِدْرَكُمْ لَا شَيْءَ فِيهَا... وَقِدْرُ الْقَوْمِ حَامِيَةٌ تَمُورُ

Muḥammad ibn Maslama's attitude towards the Jews may be exemplified by the statement "Hearts have changed" (*taghayyarat al-qulūb*), which is attributed in the sources both to him and to 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit of the Khazraj, who played a decisive role in the expulsion of the Qaynuqā' tribe from Medina. The majority of Medina's population had contacts of various types with the Jews, but as the examples above illustrate, after the beginning of the conflict between the Prophet and the Jews, several chose to abandon these connections. Indeed, the fact that some of the Anṣār severed their relations with the Jews, thus leaving the latter with no allies, was the key to the Prophet's success in his struggle against the Jews of Medina.⁴¹

The "change of hearts" pattern leads to the conclusion that there is no contradiction between the accounts that depict Muḥammad ibn Maslama and his companions as close to the Jews and those that depict them as their bitter enemies, and it follows that there is no reason to think of these individuals' role in the assassination of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf as fundamentally unhistorical. Of course, plenty of questions remain about the accounts of Ka'b's assassination. Some concern the discrepancies between the accounts,⁴² which can in part be explained as resulting from competing family traditions;⁴³ others pertain

³⁷ Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina*, p. 15; Yaara Perlman, "The Assassination of the Jewish Poetess 'Aṣmā' bint Marwān", *Pe'amim* 132 (Summer 2012), p. 157 (in Hebrew).

³⁸ He is reported to have embraced Islam at an unspecified point; see Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, i, p. 563. Some accounts claim that the Prophet granted him all the domestic animals of Khaybar or, alternatively, only the domestic animals in the Naṭāt fortress (al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzi*, ii, p. 700), and others ascribe to him a verse which was recited concerning Naṭāt during this expedition (Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, i, p. 563). Although these accounts might suggest that Jabal ibn Jawwāl switched his loyalties and became an ardent supporter of the Prophet, it may actually be that they confuse him with Ibn Luqaym al-'Absī, who presumably was also a member of the tribe of Ghatafān. See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām*, (ed.) Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and 'Abd al-Ḥafīz al-Shalabī (Cairo, 1955), ii, pp. 340–341.

³⁹ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ii, p. 273; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, vii, p. 415.

⁴⁰ Meter: *al-wāfir*. For the meaning of the sentence *qidr al-qawm ḥāmiya tafūru*, see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 652: "The people's cooking-pot is hot, boiling; meaning the people are mighty, strong, or invincible, and vehemently impetuous in valour".

⁴¹ See Lecker, *Muḥammad and the Jews*, pp. 77–78.

⁴² For the manner in which the contradictions in the accounts of Ka'b's assassination can contribute to our understanding of this event, see Lecker, "Wāqidi's Account", pp. 28–29: "[I]t must be emphasized regarding Islamic historiography in general and the *sīra* literature in particular that a thorough analysis of the disparate and, at times, conflicting evidence concerning the assassination of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf will no doubt provide a sound foundation for historical reconstruction of this event. Of course, the details will have differing degrees of probability—an aspect of the study of early Islam which modern researchers have to accept and tolerate. Paradoxically, contradictions in our sources have their benefits. They not only highlight the matters which the early Islamic community considered worth disputing, but they often provide us with information which, because it is shared by otherwise conflicting sources, has a strong claim to historical veracity".

⁴³ On the role of family traditions in the accounts of Ka'b's assassination, see *ibid.*; Lecker, *Muḥammad and the Jews*, pp. 100–110. Several other accounts of assassinations of Jews during the Prophet's Medinan period were likewise family traditions, such as some of the accounts concerning the assassinations of 'Aṣmā' bint Marwān

to the potential influence of political biases.⁴⁴ But such questions are pervasive in relation to our sources for early Islamic history.

(see Perlman, “‘Aṣmā’ bint Marwān”), of Ibn Sunayna (see Lecker, “Ibn Sunayna”), and of Sallām ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq (see Motzki, “Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq”).

⁴⁴ Roohi quotes one of Harald Motzki’s conclusions from his study on the assassination of Sallām ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq, according to which “[i]t does not make sense to assume that someone would have invented such a story at a time when many eyewitnesses of the Prophet’s Medinan period were still alive”. Roohi then argues that “if this was the case for the murder of Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq, one cannot hold the same opinion as to the story of Ka’b’s murder. For such a view overlooks the works of contemporary propagandists whose major tasks were to distort the historical truths in favour of the fervent supporters of the caliphal system, conceal their faults and magnify their achievements. This happened to Ibn Maslama, who remained steadfastly loyal to ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān”. See Roohi, “Ka’b b. al-Ashraf”, p. 123. Note, however, that some of the assassins of Sallām ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq were likewise supporters of the caliphal system, and specifically of ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib. Thus, one of the assassins of Sallām ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Atīk, is said to have died in the battle of Yamāma, but according to another opinion, he fought on ‘Alī’s side in the battle of Ṣiffīn (Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, iv, p. 144). Another assassin, Abū Qatāda, reportedly participated in all of ‘Alī’s wars and served as one of his governors over Mecca (*ibid.*, vii, p. 274; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rīkh Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt*, [ed.] Akram Ḍiyā’ al-‘Umarī [Riyadh, 1985], p. 201). It is also noteworthy that al-Aswad ibn Khuzā’ī and Mas‘ūd ibn Sinān, two clients of the Banū Salīma who were likewise involved in the assassination, both accompanied ‘Alī to Yemen on an expedition which the latter headed during the Prophet’s lifetime (al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, iii, pp. 1079–1080. See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, i, p. 223, where *rajul mudajijaj* [رجل مدحج] should be corrected to *rajul min Madhḥij* [رجل من مدحج]). In a similar vein, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Atīk and Abū Qatāda were reportedly granted various responsibilities during ‘Alī’s expedition to destroy al-Fals, which was an idol worshipped by the tribe of Ṭayyī’ (al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, iii, p. 988). The accounts of the assassinations of Sallām ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq and Ka’b ibn al-Ashraf are not free from political interests and tendentious claims. However, this should not lead us to cast doubt on the details upon which they largely agree, namely the general outline of the events and the identities of their participants.

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