

# PEOPLE, TRIBES AND SOCIETY IN ARABIA AROUND THE TIME OF MUHAMMAD

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Michael Lecker

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People, Tribes and Society in Arabia  
Around the Time of Muḥammad

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Michael Lecker

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## PREFACE

The items included in this volume which have previously been published (I, II, and V through IX) appeared between the years 1989–2003. The items that appear here for the first time – or appear in a thoroughly revised form – include the extended text of a lecture on idol worship on the eve of Islam (III), a study on a pre-Islamic legal document preserved in a literary source (IV), a study on the preservation of Muḥammad’s letters (X) and articles on the *ridda* and on eight Arabian tribes that have appeared in a much curtailed form in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (XI); early tribal Arabia usually receives little scholarly attention and it was felt that the articles might be a welcome addition to the literature on the topic.

Arabic and Islamic studies can now benefit from a variety of technological tools which render the Arabic sources more accessible than ever before. For example, many a difficult passage in Ṭabari’s *History* can now be compared within minutes with several or many parallel passages. Scientific conclusions can be expected to be based on a wider and more diversified evidence, and lengthy footnotes listing primary sources will become obsolete: a string made of several Arabic words often suffices for finding texts that are identical or similar to the one under discussion. Prosopographies and other computerized tools will reduce the time consumed by the arduous task of unearthing the relevant source material; all this could lead to a comeback of the primary sources.

My thanks are due to the editors and publishers of the journals in which the previously published articles have appeared, for kindly permitting the reproduction of the articles included in this volume: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (I); E.J. Brill, Leiden (II, VI); *Oriens* and E.J. Brill (VIII); *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* and Cambridge University Press (V, IX); and *al-Qantara* (VII).

I benefited immensely from Dr John Smedley’s judicious suggestions throughout the preparation of this somewhat unconventional volume. Professor Michael Cook kindly read all the unpublished articles included in this volume. I am indebted to him for his insights, comments and corrections.

Ms Mira Frankel Reich gave the unpublished items the final editorial touches, for which I am in her debt.

The volume is dedicated to Professor M.J. Kister on his 90th birthday.

MICHAEL LECKER

*Jerusalem*  
*August, 2004*

## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Variorum Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original pagination has been maintained wherever possible.

Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and is quoted in the index entries.

Corrections noted in the Addenda et Corrigenda have been marked by an asterisk in the margin corresponding to the relevant text to be amended.





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## THE LEVYING OF TAXES FOR THE SASSANIANS IN PRE-ISLAMIC MEDINA (YATHRIB)\*

The main Jewish tribes of Yathrib/Medina,<sup>1</sup> the Naḍīr and Qurayṣa, were “kings” operating under the Sassanians roughly to the middle of the 6th century C.E. At a later stage, more precisely in the last quarter of the 6th century, there was in Medina an Arab king (a member of the Khazraj) who was appointed by the king of al-Ḥīra; this indicates that the Sassanians continued to play a role in Medina — perhaps intermittently — in the latter half of the 6th century. This historical picture rests upon a small number of texts, but it is reliable nonetheless. The main text at our disposal, from the geographical treatise of Ibn Khurradādhbih (d. ca. 300/912), is studied here, with special emphasis on the verse attached to it. It will be argued that Ibn Khurradādhbih wrongly attributed the verse and used it out of its original context. Contrary to what is usually assumed, the verse speaks of taxes levied by the Arabs from the Jews, and not vice versa. In other words, it speaks of Arab domination rather than subordination.

### 1. A unique passage with a verse

A short passage accompanied by a verse in Ibn Khurradādhbih’s geographical treatise<sup>2</sup> mentions a Sassanian Marzubān, i.e., a military (but also civil) governor<sup>3</sup> who was linked to the main Jewish tribes of Medina,

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\* I wish to thank Simon Hopkins for a thorough criticism of the draft, and the anonymous referee who pointed out weaknesses in my argument. Her thoughtful comments made me reconsider and rephrase several paragraphs. A partial draft of the following study was presented at the fifth Colloquium “From Jāhiliyya to Islam” (Institute for Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, July 1990).

<sup>1</sup> Henceforth I shall refer to the city as Medina even with regard to the pre-Islamic period.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ph. Gignoux, “L’organisation administrative sassanide: le cas du *marzbān*,” in *JSAI* 4 (1984): 1–29, at pp. 26–27. The passage discussed in the present study would have fitted well on p. 19 of Gignoux’s article. Cf. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. *Marzpan* (J. H. Kramers–M. Morony): in the early 7th century *marzpan* was still used for the military governor of the frontier districts of al-Ḥīra, Hajar and al-Jazīra, as well as for the governors of Bābil and Khuṭarniya and of Balad. As we shall indicate later, al-Zāra was in the district of Hajar.

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the Qurayza and Naḍīr. The passage was studied over thirty years ago by M. J. Kister.<sup>4</sup> I submit that both the passage and the verse should be reinterpreted, although this by no means changes Kister's main conclusions (the translation is mine):

In the Jāhiliyya both it [Medina] and Tihāma were under an official ('*āmīl*) appointed by the *Marzubān al-bādiya*<sup>5</sup> who [i.e., the official] levied its [i.e., Medina's] taxes. [Now] Qurayza and Naḍīr were kings whom they [i.e., the Sassanians<sup>6</sup>] gave control<sup>7</sup> over Medina, [more precisely], over the Aws and Khazraj. On this matter the poet of the Anṣār<sup>8</sup> said: You<sup>9</sup> pay the tax after the tax of Khusraw<sup>10</sup> and a tax from the Qurayza and Naḍīr.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> M. J. Kister, "Al-Ḥīra: some notes on its relations with Arabia," *Arabica* 15 (1968): 143-69, at pp. 145-49; reprinted in idem, *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam* (London, 1980) (Variorum Collected Studies, no. III); for a Hebrew translation see idem, *Meḥqarim be-hithavut ha-islam (Studies on the Emergence of Islam)*, trans. A. Amir, M. Lecker, ed. (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 49-66, at pp. 50-52. Also F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, vol. 5, part 1 (Berlin, 1968), pp. 358-73 ("Ḥīra und seine arabische Politik") [the volume appeared in the same year as Kister's study], discuss the passage (at pp. 363-65) in the context of the close alliance of al-Ḥīra — and the Sassanians in general — with the Jews in Northern Arabia and in the Yemen.

<sup>5</sup> "The Marzubān of the Desert"; read: *Marzubān al-Zāra*; see below.

<sup>6</sup> See correctly in F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Finanzgeschichte der Spätantike* (Frankfurt a. M., 1957), p. 149; idem, *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, vol. 5, part 1, p. 363.

<sup>7</sup> *Mallakūhā*: this word appears to be a marginal gloss incorporated in the text due to a scribal error: first, the text is smoother without it; second, it is missing in the parallel text which al-Samhūdī quotes from Ibn Khurradādhbih; see below.

<sup>8</sup> This is wrong; as will be shown below, the verse is by 'Abd al-Masiḥ Ibn Buqayla.

<sup>9</sup> Singular; but the parallel text in Yāqūt's *Mu'jam al-buldān* (see below) has *nu'ddī*, "we", which seems to be preferable.

<sup>10</sup> Read: *Buṣrā*; see below.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, de Goeje, ed. (Leiden, 1889), p. 128: *wa-kāna 'alayhā wa-'alā Tihāma fī l-jāhiliyya 'āmīl min qibali marzubāni l-bādiya yajbī kharājahā, wa-kānat Qurayza wa-l-Naḍīr mulūkan mallakūhā 'alā l-Madīna, 'alā l-Aws wa-l-Khazraj. wa-fī dhālika yaqūlu shā'iru l-Anṣār: [wāfir]*

*tu'addī l-kharja ba'da kharāji Kisrā wa-kharjin min Qurayzata wa-l-Naḍīri*  
M. de Goeje's translation (p. 98) reads:

"Médine . . . était gouvernée, ainsi que la Tihāma, avant l'islamisme, par un délégué du *marzobān* du Désert (ou de Zāra [this is the correct reading; M. L.] chargé de la perception des impôts. Les (familles juives) de Koraiṭha et d'an-Nadhyr régnaient alors à Médine, exerçant la suprématie sur les Aus et le Khazradj. Un poète des Anṣār a rappelé cette circonstance, quand il a dit: Après le tribut payé au Kisrā (le Chosroës), après le tribut payé au Koraiṭha et aux Nadhyr, on la rançonne encore!"

Cf. Ibn Rusta (third/ninth century), *al-A'lāq al-naḥīsa*, de Goeje, ed. (Leiden, 1892), p. 177 (see Appendix, 2), whose text, which is almost identical to the one quoted

Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) has, in his geographical dictionary, a significant variant reading: *al-zāra* instead of *al-bādiya*.<sup>12</sup> In the Arabic script, *bādiya* and *zāra* are quite similar. Now while the former is a common word meaning “desert”, the latter is a rare place name which should be preferred as a *lectio difficilior*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the existence of *Marzubān al-Zāra* is attested in other sources. The correct meaning of our verse is indicated by the verses surrounding it in the poem to which it belongs (see below) and by Yāqūt’s words. The Qurayza and Naḍir, Yāqūt says, were kings until the Aws and Khazraj expelled them from Medina. Beforehand, he says, the Anṣār<sup>14</sup> used to pay taxes to the Jews. In the entry on Ma’rib we are told about the settlement of the Aws and Khazraj in Medina and their subsequent expulsion of the Jews.

In other words, the verse reflects the Arab domination in Medina which followed the Jewish one. There was a time, we are told, when the Arabs were subordinate to the Jews; later they broke the Jewish yoke

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above, preserves the word *madīna*: ... *wa-kānat Qurayza wa-l-Naḍir mulūkan ‘alā madīnati l-Aws wa-l-Khazraj* (!). Al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506), s.v. Tabūk, 1160 (see Appendix, 3), quoting Ibn Khurrādādhbih, has (as one might expect) an almost identical text. However, the order here is reversed: first the Jews are mentioned, then the Sassanian governor: *wa-qāla ṣāhibu l-Masālik wa-l-mamālik kamā fi khaṭṭi l-Aqshahrī: wa-kānat Qurayza wa-l-Naḍir mulūkan ‘alā l-Madīna, ‘alā l-Aws wa-l-Khazraj, wa-kāna ‘alā l-Madīna wa-Tihāma fi l-jāhiliyya ‘āmil min jihati marzubāni al-bādiya yujbā ilayhi kharājūhā*. On al-Aqshahrī, see Ḥamad al-Jāsir, *Rasā’il fi ta’rikh al-Madīna* (Riyād, 1392/1972), p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu’jam al-buldān*, s.v. Madīnat Yathrib, 83 (Beirut 1957); 460 (Wüstenfeld edition; see Appendix, 4): *wa-kāna ‘alā l-Madīna wa-Tihāma fi l-jāhiliyya ‘āmil min qibali marzubāni l-Zāra yajbi kharājūhā. Wa-kānat Qurayza wa-l-Naḍiru l-yahūd mulūkan ḥattā akhrajahum minhā l-Aws wa-l-Khazraj mina l-Anṣār, kamā dhakarnāhu fi Ma’rib, wa-kānati l-Anṣār qablu tu’addi kharājan ilā l-yahūd; wa-li-dhālika qāla ba’duhum: nu’addi l-kharja ba’da kharāji Kisrā wa-kharji banī Qurayzata wa-l-Naḍiri*. Yāqūt refers here to a passage in the entry on Ma’rib in his book; see *Mu’jam al-buldān*, p. 36 (Beirut edition), p. 385 (Wüstenfeld edition).

<sup>13</sup> For the correct reading, al-Zāra, see also R. Simon, *Meccan Trade and Islam: Problems of Origin and Structure* (Budapest, 1989), 56–57, 152. Cf. P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, 1987), p. 49, n. 169, who summarizes the evidence as follows: “... this was in the days when the Jews were kings, so that the Arabs in Medina would pay taxes first to Kisrā and next to Qurayza and Naḍir.” She doubts the existence of the said governor of Medina and Tihāma whom she would date to the early 7th century: “If there ever was such a governor, the most plausible period would be that of the Persian occupation of Syria, when a *marzubān al-bādiya* might well have been appointed (but not, of course, from Zāra, which is simply a different reading). This is also a period in which there was Persian collaboration with the Jews.” The conclusions of the present study do not support Crone’s views on the matter.

M. Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 8–9, says concerning the role of the Persians in Arabia that “it is hard to imagine this yoke as a heavy one in inner Arabia, least of all in the west, and it scarcely appears in the story of Muhammad’s life.”

<sup>14</sup> This is anachronistic: he means the future Anṣār.

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and expelled them. The verse which Ibn Khurradādhbih and Yāqūt wrongly ascribe to a poet of the Anṣār (but is in fact by ‘Abd al-Masiḥ Ibn Buḡayla; see below) does not fit the passage to which it is attached: while the passage speaks of the Jewish hegemony, the verse mentions the Arab hegemony which followed the Jewish one.

It should be observed at this point that the existence of an Anṣārī apologetic historiography reflecting Anṣārī sensitivities is a major factor to be reckoned with in evaluating the evidence on the history of pre-Islamic Medina. We are not dealing with history plain and simple, but with tribal reports or claims preserved by tribal informants. Events in pre-Islamic Medina, and in particular the relationship between Jews and Arabs, were subject to heated inter-tribal polemics in the early Islamic period. Hence much of the evidence found in the primary sources comes from a party with vested interests and should be evaluated accordingly.

As was shown by M. J. Kister, during the latter half of the 6th century an Arab of the Khazraj, ‘Amr b. al-It̥nāba, was made king of Medina by the king of al-Ḥīra, al-Nu‘mān b. al-Mundhir (fl. ca. 580-602). Al-Nu‘mān’s ascension to the throne provides us with a *terminus a quo*, so we can date ‘Amr’s kingship to the last quarter of the 6th century. This dating is compatible with the fact that ‘Amr b. al-It̥nāba, a member of the Ḥārith b. al-Khazraj (more precisely, of a subgroup of the Ḥārith called Mālik al-Agharr) was the grandfather of one of the Prophet’s Companions, Qaraḡa b. Ka‘b b. ‘Amr.<sup>15</sup> Another Companion, the poet ‘Abdallāh b. Rawāḡa, was the great-grandson of ‘Amr.<sup>16</sup> Abū

<sup>15</sup> Qaraḡa was a central figure in ‘Alī’s camp and his son was killed while fighting with Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī in Karbalā‘; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Ma‘add*, vol. 1, p. 407 (read Qaraḡa instead of Qurṡa). Another son of Qaraḡa fought in Karbalā‘ on the Umayyad side; Ṭabarī, II, p. 341; Ibn Ḥazm, *Ansāb*, p. 365. Kister, “al-Ḥīra”, p. 148 remarks that the report on ‘Amr’s appointment seems authentic, adding: “Invention can hardly be suspected as there were no prominent men among the descendants of ‘Amr who would have been interested to boast of this appointment.” While the report is no doubt authentic, Kister’s argument in its favour should be revised. For the offices held by Qaraḡa under ‘Alī see Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Istibṡār fī nasab al-ṡahāba min al-anṡār*, ‘Alī Nuwayḥid, ed. (Beirut, 1392/1972), pp. 123–24 (‘Alī left him in Kūfa as his deputy when he set out to the Battle of the Camel); Naṡr b. Muzāḡim, *Waq‘at ṡiffīn*<sup>3</sup>, ‘Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, ed. (Cairo, 1401/1981), p. 11 (when ‘Alī came from Baṡra to Kūfa, he appointed him on the Bihqubādḡat region); al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akḡbār al-tiwāl*, ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Āmir, ed. (Cairo, 1960), p. 153:17 (printed erroneously: Qurt). In the battle of ṡiffīn, Qaraḡa carried the banner of the Anṡār who fought with ‘Alī; M. Hinds, “The banners and battle cries of the Arabs at ṡiffīn (657 AD),” *al-Abḡāth* 24 (1971): 3–42, at p. 18; reprinted in M. Hinds, *Studies in Early Islamic history*, J. Bacharach, L. I. Conrad, and P. Crone, eds. (Princeton, 1996), pp. 97–142, at p. 117. On ‘Amr see also Ḥ. A. Thuwaynī, “‘Amr b. al-It̥nāba al-Khazrajī: ḡayātuhu wa-mā tabaqqā min ṡi‘rihi,” in *al-Mawrid* 14 (1985): 81–104. ‘Amr’s mother al-It̥nāba was of the Kināna b. al-Qayn b. Jasr of the Quḡḡa; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Ma‘add*, vol. 2, p. 687.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Abdallāh’s mother was Kabsha bint Wāqid b. ‘Amr b. al-It̥nāba; M. Lecker, “Muḡammad at Medina: a geographical approach,” *JSAI* 6 (1985): 29–62, at p. 50, n.

l-Dardā', the Qādī of Damascus in the time of 'Uthmān,<sup>17</sup> was also a great-grandson of 'Amr.<sup>18</sup>

Kister unearthed an account preserved by Ibn Sa'īd on the aftermath of the murder by al-Ḥārith b. Zālīm of Khālid b. Ja'far in the court of al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir. In it 'Amr b. al-It'nāba is mocked for his cowardice, but at the same time (and this is our main concern here) he is referred to as "the king of the Ḥijāz."<sup>19</sup> Yet another report in Ibn Sa'īd's work relates that al-Nu'mān made 'Amr the king of Medina. This statement is included in a report on the history of pre-Islamic Medina which again represents the Anṣārī point of view: until a certain point in time, the Jews dominated Medina. Later the Aws and Khazraj, exerting military pressure, achieved an agreement which gave them equal footing in the town. Then the latter managed to expel the former to "the fortresses" (*ḥuṣūn*). The report continues:

The Aws and Khazraj became the lords of Medina, but war often broke out between the two parties.<sup>20</sup> They could not agree on a king who would rule them, until 'Amr b. al-It'nāba travelled to al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir, the king of al-Ḥīra, and the latter made him king of Medina.<sup>21</sup>

'Amr's appointment is again mentioned in connection with verses by Thābit b. al-Mundhir (Ḥassān b. Thābit's father) who was opposed to it and accused 'Amr of stupidity.<sup>22</sup>

143; reprinted in idem, *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia* (Aldershot, 1998) (Variorum Collected Studies Series, no. VIII).

<sup>17</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, Shu'ayb al-Arnāwūṭ *et alii*, eds. (Beirut, 1401/1981–1409/1988), vol. 2, p. 336.

<sup>18</sup> Abū al-Dardā's father was from the smallest of all Ḥārith b. al-Khazraj clans in Medina: at the time of the Prophet they numbered only two, the rest being in Syria; Ibn Ḥazm, *Ansāb*, pp. 362–63; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Inbāh*, p. 108. Abū al-Dardā's mother, according to one source, was the above-mentioned Kabsha: it is reported that he was a half-brother of 'Abdallāh b. Rawāḥa; Ibn Manzūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh Dimashq*, vol. 12, p. 148. But a presumably more trustworthy report has it that Abū al-Dardā's mother was Kabsha's sister Maḥabba (or Muḥibba) bint Wāqid b. 'Amr b. al-It'nāba; Ibn Sa'īd, vol. 7, p. 391; Ibn al-Athīr ('Izz al-Dīn), *Usd al-ghāba*, vol. 5, p. 185.

'Amr's rise to power may be related to an attempt by another member of the Ḥārith to obtain a significant tract of land to the northwest of Medina; Lecker, "Muḥammad at Medina," pp. 48–50.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwat al-ṭarab*, vol. 2, p. 558. This source provided Kister with the decisive evidence on the matter. See also al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 11, p. 121 (quoting Abū 'Ubayda).

<sup>20</sup> I. e. the Aws and Khazraj; it could also be interpreted as relating to the Arabs and the Jews (Kister, "al-Ḥīra," p. 147 preferred the latter interpretation).

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwat al-ṭarab*, vol. 1, pp. 188–89: ... *wa-malakati l-Aws wa-l-Khazraju l-Madīna illā annahu kānati l-ḥarb kathīran mā taqa'u bayna l-fariqayni wa-lam yastaqīm lahum an yastabidda bihim malik.*

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 196.

The appointment of the Arab king suggests, as has been pointed out by Kister, that Sassanian control in Medina and Tihāma continued in the latter half of the 6th century.<sup>23</sup>

The Marzubān whose seat was in al-Zāra on the coast of the Persian Gulf did not rule Medina and Tihāma directly, but was represented by an unidentified official (*‘āmil*). This official could have been one of the Naḍīr or Qurayza, in which case his seat was in or near Medina. Now although an explanatory remark concerning the connection between this official and the Jewish tribes would have helped in elucidating this matter, one assumes that he was collecting taxes and so were the Jewish tribes, viz. they did it on his behalf.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Kister, "al-Ḥira," pp. 148–49. According to Simon, *Meccan Trade*, p. 57, Lakhmid influence in western Arabia gradually declined after ‘Amr b. al-Mundhir (554–68) and completely ceased under al-Nu‘mān b. al-Mundhir. See however a report on a punitive expedition of al-Nu‘mān b. al-Mundhir against the Sulaym, in M. Lecker, *The Banū Sulaym: A Contribution to the Study of Early Islam* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 49, n. 259. Cf. Altheim–Stiehl, *Finanzgeschichte*, p. 151: "In der Tat lassen die Ereignisse in Medina seit der Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts — mit der Sumair-Fehde beginnend und bis zur Schlacht von Bu‘āt herabreichend — keinen Raum mehr für ein Fortbestehen des sasanidischen Regiments"; the same formulation can also be found in Altheim–Stiehl, "Araber und Sasaniden" (I: "Mohammeds Geburtsjahr"), in G. Rohde *et alii*, eds. *Edwin Redslab zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1955), pp. 200–207, at 202.

See also Altheim–Stiehl, *Finanzgeschichte*, p. 157: "... Medina war mit dem Sturz der jüdischen Stämme der sasanidischen Verwaltung entwachsen"; *op. cit.*, p. 160; Altheim–Stiehl, *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, vol. 5, part 1, p. 365: "Nach der Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts nämlich beseitigten die beiden Ḳaila-Stämme, al-Aus und al-Ḥazraḡ, die Vorherrschaft der Juden Medina's. Mit der Stütze der laḥmidischen Herrschaft verschwand auch der sasanidische *‘āmil*."

Other Arabian centres of Sassanian rule appear in the sources from time to time. When Khusraw wanted to summon the Meccan ‘Abdallāh b. Jud‘ān, he sent his governor in Yamāma to Mecca; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 5 (*Sā‘ir furū‘ Quraysh*), Iḥsān ‘Abbās, ed. (Beirut, 1417/1996), pp. 221, 222. Elsewhere Khusraw's governor in the Yemen, Bādhām, is linked with Mecca: ‘Abdallāh b. Jud‘ān is reported (*loc. cit.*) to have gone to Khusraw together with several other Qurashīs to complain about Bādhām's conduct. The wording may well be a euphemistic reference to the levying of taxes by the said governor: *Bādhām ... ta‘abbatha bi-ahl Makka fi shay‘in iltamasahu minhum*, "Bādhām treated the people of Mecca with contempt regarding something he demanded from them." (Khusraw is said to have written to the governor for Ibn Jud‘ān.) The alleged instruction of Khusraw II Parwez (590–628) — which is probably apocryphal — to his governor in the Yemen that he dispatch Muḥammad to his court could be seen as an indication that the Sassanians still considered Medina part of their realm; Altheim–Stiehl, *Finanzgeschichte*, 151=Ṭabarī, I, pp. 1571–73.

<sup>24</sup> M. Forstner, "Aspects of the administration and military organization of the early caliphate," in Abdelgadir M. Abdalla, Sami Kh. al-Sakkar and Richard Mortel, eds., *Studies in the History of Arabia*, vol. 3: Arabia in the Age of the Prophet and the Four Caliphs (Riyāḍ 1410/1989), pp. 77–88, at p. 79, argues that "... al-Mundhir III ... was *marzubān* of the desert [...] ... whose tax collector ruled besides the kings of the Qurayza and Naḍīr until these kings were overthrown by the Aws and the Khazraj in the middle of the 6th century when the Arabs of Medina put an end to the Jewish political supremacy."

It could be argued that when ‘Amr b. al-Ṭnāba was made king of Medina, it was no longer controlled from al-Zāra but directly from al-Ḥīra. Direct control of Medina by al-Ḥīra may well date back to the days of al-Nu‘mān’s father, roughly in the middle of the 6th century: the Sassanian emperor Khusraw I Anūshirwān (r. 531-79) appointed the father, al-Mundhir III (ca. 504-554), as the king of the Arabs living between ‘Umān, Baḥrayn and Yamāma, to al-Ṭā’if and the rest of the Ḥijāz.<sup>25</sup>

It should be added that information on foreign control in western Arabia is scarce, perhaps due to apologetics.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. ‘Abd al-Masīḥ Ibn Buḡayla

As was argued above, Ibn Khurradādhbih’s passage and the verse attached to it do not belong to each other, although both mention a tax called *kharj/kharāj* and both mention the tribes of Qurayza and Naḍir.

Several sources ascribe the verse in question to ‘Abd al-Masīḥ b. ‘Amr al-Ghassānī (some sources have: ‘Amr b. ‘Abd al-Masīḥ) who was also called Ibn Buḡayla (“the descendant of Buḡayla,” not “the son of Buḡayla”).<sup>27</sup> The name ‘Abd al-Masīḥ suggests that he was a Christian.

<sup>25</sup> Ṭabarī, I, pp. 958-59; cf. Forstner, “Aspects of the administration,” p. 79. Nöldeke did not believe that al-Ḥīra ever controlled the Ḥijāz: “Eine gewisse Autorität übten sie zeitweise bis tief in die Wüste hinein, aber bis zum Ḥijāz (dem Theil Arabiens, in welchem Mekka und Medina liegen) hat ihr Arm nie gereicht”; *Geschichte der Perser und Araber* (Leiden, 1879), p. 46, n. 4=Ṭabarī, I, p. 834.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the insistence of al-Jāḥiẓ that contrary to the tribesmen who were under the sway of the two Christian kings of the Lakhm and Ghassān, those living in Tihāma were not Christian (or, for this matter, Jewish) and were independent: . . . *wa-qaḍ kānati l-‘arab tadīnu lahumā wa-tu‘addī l-itāwa ilayhimā . . . wa-kānat Tihāma, wa-in kānat laqāḥan, lā tadīnu l-dīna wa-lā tu‘addī l-itāwa wa-lā tadīnu li-l-mulūki, fa-innahā kānat lā tamtani‘u min ta‘zīm mā ‘azzama l-nās wa-taḡghir mā ḡaghgharū*; al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā‘il*, vol. 3, pp. 311-12 (*al-Radd ‘alā l-naḡārā*). Similarly, the Quraysh were said to have been *laqāḥ*, therefore they could not be made subject to a governor appointed by the Byzantine emperor; Kister, “al-Ḥīra,” pp. 153-54=Abū l-Baḡā‘, *Manāqib Mazyaḍiyya*, pp. 369, 65 (the Quraysh reportedly stated, in connection with the affair of this governor, ‘Uthmān b. al-Ḥuwayrith: *mā kāna bi-Tihāma malik qaṭṭu*).

<sup>27</sup> See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Ibn Buḡayla (Ch. Pellat): “The name of his ancestor . . . is often corrupted to Nufayla, but the correct reading is furnished by the tradition according to which this Buḡayla owed his surname to a green silk garment, which was the reason for his nickname of ‘little cabbage’.” On ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, see also F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), p. 331, n. 83; J. S. Tringham, *Christianity among the Arabs in pre-Islamic Times* (London and Beirut, 1979), p. 147. Ibn Buḡayla guided Sa‘d b. Abī Waḡqāḡ to the site on which Kūfa was later built; Ṭabarī, I, p. 2389. For two members of the Ashja‘ tribe called Buḡayla, one of whom was a Companion of Muḥammad, see Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā al-Yamānī, ed. (Hyderabad, 1381/1962), vol. 1, p. 347. For the name Buḡayl (among the Ḥaḍramawt) see Ibn Nāḡir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-mushtabih*, vol. 9, p. 117.

In several verses, one of which is almost identical to the one quoted by Ibn Khurradādhbih, he lamented the demise of the kings of al-Ḥīra and the town's bygone glory.<sup>28</sup> He specifically mentioned "the two Mundhirs" (al-Mundhir was a common name among these kings) and Abū Qubays, that is the last king of al-Ḥīra, Abū Qābūs al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir.<sup>29</sup>

One source says that he bewailed "the bygone kings of his tribe" (*qawm*).<sup>30</sup> This should be understood in the broadest genealogical sense: both the Lakhmids who were the kings of al-Ḥīra, and Ibn Buqayla's tribe, the Azd, belonged genealogically to the Southern Arabs.

Another verse confirms that Ibn Buqayla was indeed thinking along genealogical lines:

Tribes from Ma'add [viz. Northern tribes] divided us among  
themselves as spoils in broad daylight [literally: openly, publicly]  
as if we were parts of a slaughtered camel allotted in the  
hazard game (*maysir*).<sup>31</sup>

By "us" he may have been referring to the 'Ibād, viz. the Christian Arabs of al-Ḥīra,<sup>32</sup> or, more specifically, to those 'Ibād who belonged to the Azd; they were "divided" (i.e., probably as captives of war, or slaves) among the conquering Muslims of Northern tribes.

In the verse which concerns us here Ibn Buqayla complained about the payment of tax:

*nu'addī*<sup>33</sup> *l-kharja ba'da*<sup>34</sup> *kharāji Buṣrā*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ṭabarī, I, p. 2042 = *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 11, trans. Khalid Yahya Blankinship (New York, 1993), pp. 32–33; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 1, p. 119 [I, 221–22 in the Barbier de Meynard edition]; al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-mu'ammārīn*, pp. 47–48; ed. I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (Leiden, 1896–99), vol. 2, p. 39; al-Ḥimyarī, *Rawḍ*, s.v. al-Ḥīra, p. 209; Abū l-Baqā', *Manāqib Mazyadiyya*, vol. 1, p. 159; Ibn 'Asākir, vol. 37, p. 366. Cf. A. Oppenheimer, in collaboration with B. Isaac and M. Lecker, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> *The Lisān al-'Arab*, end of *q-b-s*, quotes a verse by al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī in which al-Nu'mān is called Abū Qubays, in the diminutive form, because of poetical necessity (*ḍarurat al-shi'r*); the same is true of our verse.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn 'Asākir, vol. 37, p. 366: *wa-qāla yadhkuru man kāna ma'ahu min mulūk qawmihi lladhīna maḍaw*.

<sup>31</sup> *Taqassamunā l-qabā' ilu min Ma'addīn 'alāniyatan ka-aysāri l-jazūri*

<sup>32</sup> The 'Ibād were a mixture of groups from different tribes: Tamīm, Ṭayyi', Ghassān (who consisted of groups from the Azd), Tanūkh and others; Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsīm b. Sallām, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, Muḥammad Khalīl Harrās, ed. (Cairo, 1396/1976), p. 36, no. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*: *tu'addī*. Yāqūt and Ṭabarī (see below) have *nu'addī*.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Ḥimyarī, *Rawḍ* and al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*: *mithla*.

<sup>35</sup> In the present context, this well-known place name should be considered *lectio difficilior* and be preferred to *kisrā*. The variant is from al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-*

*wa-kharjin*<sup>36</sup> *min Qurayzata wa-l-Naḍīri*

We pay the tax [i.e., to the Muslim conquerors of al-Ḥīra] after [having ourselves levied, in our former days of glory] the tax of Buṣrā and a tax from the Qurayza and Naḍīr.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, Buṣrā<sup>38</sup> on the one hand, and the Jewish clans Qurayza and Naḍīr on the other, belong to the bygone glories of the Southern Arabs. In the latter case, the past glory belonged to the Aws and Khazraj, while in the former it belonged, as we shall presently see, to the Ghassān. The Aws and Khazraj, the Ghassān and our poet shared a common descent: all of them were of the Azd.

The genealogical literature includes Ibn Buqayla in the chapter on the Azd, more precisely the 'Amr b. Māzin b. al-Azd, the Azd branch to which also the Aws and Khazraj belonged. There are variants regarding his precise pedigree, but the sources I consulted invariably conclude his pedigree with 'Amr b. Māzin b. al-Azd. The father of his ancestor Buqayla, whose name was Sunayn,<sup>39</sup> was the eponym of a tribal group which belonged to the 'Ibād.<sup>40</sup>

Ibn Buqayla's links with the group of tribes called Ghassān were strong. The 'Amr b. Māzin b. al-Azd were considered part of the Ghas-

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*mu'ammariin*. It has already been adduced by M. de Goeje from a MS of the *Kitāb al-mu'ammariin* in al-Ṭabarī, *Annales — Introductio, Glossarium, Addenda et Emendanda*, DCXI; see also Ibn 'Asākīr, vol. 37, p. 366 (quoting al-Sijistānī); the others have: Kisrā.

<sup>36</sup> Abū l-Baqā', *Manāqib Mazyadiyya: ka-kharji*.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to Ibn Khurradādhbih, the preposition *min* is also to be found in the version of Ṭabarī, I, p. 2042: *nu'addi l-kharja ba'da kharāji Kisrā / wa-kharjin min Qurayzata wa-l-Naḍīri*. In the translation of Ṭabarī (vol. 11, p. 32) the *min* was replaced by *banī*, reportedly following Ya'qūbī (!, read: Yāqūt) and MS M. The translation reads: "We give what is due after the tax of Kisrā and the payment of the Banū Qurayza and al-Naḍīr." Kister, "al-Ḥīra," p. 146, n. 1 has *min Qurayza*, which he renders: "for Qurayza."

<sup>38</sup> On which see *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Boṣra (A. Abel); H. Kennedy, "The last century of Byzantine Syria: a reinterpretation," in *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985): 141–83, at pp. 173–75.

<sup>39</sup> The name is often corrupted to Subayn.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Ma'add*, vol. 2, pp. 474, 471; Ibn Durayd, *Ishtiqāq*, 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, ed. (Cairo, 1378/1958), p. 485; Ibn 'Asākīr, vol. 37, p. 360. Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-mu'ammariin*, p. 48 has: Sunayn; Goldziher's edition, vol. 35, p. 39 (and the notes), also has: Sunayn, a reading supported by the *raja*-verses with which Ibn Buqayla introduced himself to Saṭīḥ (on whom see below); Ṭabarī, I, p. 982:9: ... *atāka shaykhu l-ḥayyi min āli Sanan* (Sunayn is the diminutive form of Sanan). Cf. *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, trans. C. E. Bosworth (New York, 1999), p. 287, n. 673. For Sunayn as a proper name see al-Dāraquṭnī, *al-Mu'talif wa-l-mukhtalif*, Muwaffaq b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Qādir, ed. (Beirut 1406/1986), vol. 3, pp. 1259–60; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-mushtabih*, vol. 5, p. 193. W. Caskel, *Gamharat an-Nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden, 1966), vol. 2, p. 514, has: Subayn, but he refers to F. Wüstenfeld, *Genealogische Tabellen der arabischen Stämme und Familien* (Göttingen, 1852–53) (no. 11), who has Sunayn.

sān.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, certain individuals from the ‘Amr b. Māzin b. al-Azd were supposed to have had marriage links with the princely family Jafna. A man of the ‘Amr was married to Laylā, the daughter of king al-Muḥarriq. Another man of the ‘Amr, Abū Shamir al-Ḥārith al-A‘raj b. Abī Shamir, was said to have been a king, although — as Ibn al-Kalbī emphasizes — he was not a real Jafnī, being merely the son of a Jafnī mother.<sup>42</sup>

Ibn Buqayla is also the protagonist of a “Proofs of Muḥammad’s prophethood” (*dalā’il al-nubuwwa*) story describing the supernatural phenomena which foretold Muḥammad’s mission. Ibn Buqayla is supposed to have been sent to Khusraw by al-Nu‘mān b. al-Mundhir, in connection with the emperor’s dream which foretold the victory of Islam. Ibn Buqayla suggested that Khusraw consult his (Ibn Buqayla’s) “maternal uncle,” namely Saṭīḥ al-Ghassānī<sup>43</sup> who lived in *Mashārif al-Shām*, or “townships near Ḥawrān, one of which was Buṣrā.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed the mythical *kāhīn* Saṭīḥ al-Ghassānī who was, like Ibn Buqayla himself, a hero of Azdī lore, brings us rather close to Buṣrā. He is also said to have lived in al-Jābiya which was near modern Nawā,<sup>45</sup> not far from Buṣrā (modern Boṣrā Eski Shām, on the Dar‘a—Salkhad road).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ṭabarī, I, p. 1023; *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, trans. C. E. Bosworth, p. 349; al-İṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 2, p. 120:8 (in the story of ‘Adī b. Zayd): “...the Banū Buqayla, from Ghassān.” Ibn Buqayla himself is referred to as al-Ghassānī; Ibn ‘Asākir, vol. 37, p. 360. For the identity of the groups considered part of the Ghassān, cf. Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamhara*, pp. 615, 617; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Ma‘add*, vol. 1, p. 362 f (in both sources, the Aws and Khazraj are included in the Ghassān); Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Inbāh*, p. 108 (the Aws and Khazraj are of the Ghassān, but for one clan of the Aws and another of the Khazraj who were in ‘Umān; a clan of the Khazraj that settled in Syria was of the Ghassān too). Cf. Ibn Ḥazm, *Ansāb*, p. 331: the Aws and Khazraj are specifically excluded from the Ghassān(!). For a completely different version concerning the identity of the Ghassān see al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā*, vol. 3, p. 408:2: ‘Amr Muzayqiya’ and his wife, Ṭurayfa al-kāhina, had thirteen sons, among them Tha‘laba who was the father of the Aws and Khazraj, Ḥāritha the father of Khuzā‘a, Jafna the father of Ghassān and others.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Ma‘add*, vol. 2, pp. 471–78; Ibn Ḥazm, *Ansāb*, pp. 374–75; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, I. Lichtenstaedter, ed. (Hyderabad, 1361/1942), p. 372. (Only Ibn al-Kalbī records Abū Shamir as the *kunya* of al-Ḥārith.) On al-Muḥarriq al-Ghassānī (Jafna b. al-Mundhir al-Akbar), see Ibn Sa‘īd, *Nashwat al-ṭarab*, vol. 1, p. 202. For a statement that the father of al-Ḥārith al-A‘raj was of the Jafna see Ibn Ḥazm, *Ansāb*, p. 372. Also al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-adab*, ‘Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, ed. (Cairo, 1387/1967–1406/1986), vol. 3, p. 329; vol. 2, pp. 323–24=Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, *al-‘Umda fi maḥāsīn al-shi‘r wa-ādābihi*, Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, ed. (Cairo, 1353/1934), vol. 2, pp. 217–18. Cf. Th. Nöldeke, *Die ghassānischen Fürsten aus dem Hause Gafna’s* (Berlin, 1887), p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Saṭīḥ b. Rab‘a (Levi Della Vida—T. Fahd).

<sup>44</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, s.v. al-Mashārif. Cf. *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, trans. C. E. Bosworth, p. 286 (*Mashārif al-Shām* [Ṭabarī, I, p. 982] is rendered “the elevated regions of Syria”).

<sup>45</sup> See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. al-Djābiya (H. Lammens—J. Sourdél-Thomine).

<sup>46</sup> According to others, Saṭīḥ lived in Baḥrayn; the ‘Abd al-Qays claimed that he

Saṭīḥ's affiliation to the Ghassān, as well as the place names *Mashārif al-Shām* and al-Jābiya, point to Buṣrā as the correct reading in the verse under discussion. Those who "levied the tax (*kharāj*) of Buṣrā" were the Ghassānids.<sup>47</sup> In other words, they controlled the periphery of Buṣrā, or rather the roads leading to it.<sup>48</sup>

It is noteworthy that Buṣrā was linked to the settlement of the Ghassānids in Syria: Buṣrā and 'Awīr were the destination of the Azdis who set forth from Ma'rib northwards, namely the Jafna (the future princely family) and others who were part of the group called "Ghassān al-Shām."<sup>49</sup> A parallel report has: Buṣrā and Ḥafīr.<sup>50</sup> Another par-

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was one of them. "The majority of the *muḥaddithūn* say that he was of the Azd. We do not know to whom he belonged, but his offspring say that they are of the Azd"; Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh Dimashq*, vol. 8, p. 295. The claim of the 'Abd al-Qays is also mentioned in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Saṭīḥ b. Rabī'a.

On Ibn Buqayla's mission to Saṭīḥ al-Ghassānī in al-Jābiya see Ibn 'Asākir, vol. 37, p. 363; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 981-984; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, pp. 253-57; *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, trans. C. E. Bosworth, pp. 285-89; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iḳ fi gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī and Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, eds. (Cairo, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 38-42, s.v. *r-j-s* (in all the sources but the first we only find the *Mashārif al-Shām* report). On Saṭīḥ cf. e.g. Ṭabarī, I, pp. 910-14; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, al-Saqqā, al-Abyārī and Shalabī, eds. (Beirut, 1391/1971), vol. 1, pp. 15-18. For an entry on Saṭīḥ see Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh Dimashq*, vol. 8, pp. 295-302, s.v. al-Rabī' b. Rabī'a b. Mas'ūd.

<sup>47</sup> The taxes in question were probably customs; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir Khresāt ("Ushūr al-tijāra fī l-jāhiliyya wa-ṣadr al-islām ḥattā nihāyat al-qarn al-awwal al-hijrī," in *Dirāsāt* (Amman) 15 (1988): 18-39, at p. 23), says that Byzantines delegated the levying of customs to Arab tribes such as Ghassān and Judhām and that the markets in which customs were levied were those of Buṣrā, Gaza, Ayla and Adhri'āt. I am not familiar with specific evidence that the Ghassān levied customs at Buṣrā, but it may well crop up in due course. Among other meanings of the word *kharāj*, Hossein Modarressi Tabātābā'i (*Kharāj in Islamic Law*) [London, 1983], p. 2) mentions imposts. Kennedy ("The last century of Byzantine Syria," p. 175) writes: "Bostra clearly served as an entrepôt for Arabian trade, particularly with the expanding commercial centre of Makka who merchants frequently travelled to the area."

<sup>48</sup> H. Gaube, "Arabs in sixth century Syria: some archaeological observations," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Bilad-al-Sham* (April 1974), [Amman] 1984, pp. 61-66, at 64, says of the Ghassānids: "... it can be said that even in the center of their power, the Provincia Arabia, their power was limited. The cities and the zone did not belong to their sphere of influence. The atypical westward outlying pocket in the Jawlān where they are said to have operated, can only be explained by the supposition that they were accorded summer pastures in that area by the Byzantines." See also Nöldeke, *Gafna*, p. 47: "Nirgends ... sehen wir die Gafniden im Besitz von festen Plätzen und Garnisonsorten. Wie Damascus und Bostra so war sicher auch das von Justinian neu befestigte Palmyra nie in ihrer Hand ...". The same conclusion was reached by F. Buhl, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, s.v. Boṣra: "It does not seem to have belonged to the Ghassānids but to have been ruled directly by the Byzantines." Buṣrā was sacked by supporters of the Ghassānids in 583; Kennedy, "The last century of Byzantine Syria," p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> See e.g. Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Dīwān*, W. 'Arafat, ed. (London, 1971), vol. 1, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> See al-Ṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 22, p. 110. On 'Awīr and Ḥafīr see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, s.vv.

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allel report has: Buṣrā and Sadīr.<sup>51</sup> Al-Sadīr, “a well-known place in al-Ḥīra,”<sup>52</sup> is no doubt a reference to al-Ḥīra itself; this is similar to the mention of Kūthā and Buṣrā in the following account of the immigration of the Azdis from Maʿrib:

... And he who wants wine and leavened bread (*khamīr*), brocade and silk, kingship and power (*taʿmīr*), let him go to Kūthā and Buṣrā — those were the Ghassān, [more precisely] the Banū Jafna the kings of Shām, and also those of them [i.e., of the Ghassān] who were in Iraq.<sup>53</sup>

In sum, when Ibn Buqayla boasts of the levying of taxes in Buṣrā, he has in mind the Ghassān, perhaps alluding to links between his own tribal group and the Jafna. His audience must have been aware of the intricacies of tribal genealogy involved here, which are somewhat esoteric for modern scholarship.

### 3. Al-Zāra and its Marzubān

At the end of the 3rd/9th century al-Zāra was probably still known by this very name.<sup>54</sup> The anonymous author of the *Kitāb al-manāsik wa-amākin ṭuruq al-ḥajj wa-maʿālim al-jazīra* located al-Zāra between al-ʿUqayr and al-Qulayʿa. He added (with regard to his own time, presumably the 3rd/9th or 4th/10th century) that it was a port belonging to Aḥmad b. Salm (or Sālim) al-ʿAbdī (i.e., of the ʿAbd al-Qays tribe), the leader (*raʿīs*) of the people of Qaṭīf; al-Zāra was inhabited by ʿAbd al-Qays and its inhabitants fed mainly on dates and fish. The same source added, on the authority of the ʿAbd al-Qays deputation to the Prophet, that the latter inquired of them about the strongest place in Hajar.<sup>55</sup> Their reply was: al-Zāra.<sup>56</sup> It is doubtful that this conversa-

<sup>51</sup> See al-Samhūdī, p. 171; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā*, vol. 3, p. 410.

<sup>52</sup> Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, s.v.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Būlāq, 1321/1903–1330/1912), vol. 22, pp. 59:–4, quoting Ibn Ishāq (on Qurʾān 34:19).

<sup>54</sup> See the story of the Qarmaṭians in Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī, *Jazīrat al-ʿArab min kitāb al-mamālik wa-l-masālik li-Abī ʿUbayd al-Bakrī*, ʿAbdallāh Yūsuf al-Ghunaym, ed. (Kuwait, 1397/1977), pp. 42–43; idem, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, A. P. Van Leeuwen and A. Ferre, eds. (Tunis, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 371, 374–75 (printed erroneously: al-Zarāda). Note that al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā staʿjama*, s.v. al-Zāra, p. 692, defines al-Zāra as *madīna min mudun fāris*, i.e., “a town of the Persians,” not “a town in the region of Fārs”; cf. al-Ḥimyarī, *Rawḍ*, s.v. al-Zāra, p. 282, n.; and al-Jāsir, *Muʿjam jughrāfi (Baḥrayn)*, p. 805.

<sup>55</sup> *Ayyu Hajar aʿazzu?*, “what is the best-fortified place/the place with the largest Persian garrison, in Hajar?”

<sup>56</sup> *Manāsik*, p. 621. In Yaʿqūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-maʿrifa wa-l-taʿrīkh*, Akram Ḍiyāʿ al-ʿUmarī, ed. (Beirut, 1401/1981), vol. 1, p. 298, they replied, “al-Mushaqqar” (but immediately afterwards the speaker mentions ʿAyn al-Zāra).

tion ever took place; but the reference to al-Zāra as a stronghold at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad is sound. According to Ḥamad al-Jāsir, al-Zāra should be identified with modern al-ʿAwwāmiyya, ca. five km west of al-Qaṭīf.<sup>57</sup>

Some of the fighting during the *ridda* took place in al-Zāra. The reports on the *ridda* link al-Zāra to the Dārīn island: the families of the defenders of the former place (probably Persians, perhaps assisted by Arab auxiliaries) were kept on that island.<sup>58</sup> Al-Zāra was one of the last strongholds of the so-called apostates in Baḥrayn: Abū Bakr died when al-ʿAlāʾ b. al-Ḥaḍramī (the governor of Baḥrayn) was besieging al-Zāra, and ʿUmar left al-ʿAlāʾ in office. The town reportedly fell after the location of its external water canal was disclosed by a traitor.<sup>59</sup> Another stronghold in the same area was al-Ghāba: al-ʿAlāʾ raided it and killed the Persians (*ʿajam*) who were in it (probably the troops of the Persian garrison).<sup>60</sup> According to the rather incoherent reports on the *ridda* of Baḥrayn, al-ʿAlāʾ’s siege of al-Zāra took place in 12/633. Those entrenched in it included, in addition to the Persian garrison, tribesmen of the Bakr b. Wāʿil who had crowned a scion of the Lakhmids.<sup>61</sup>

Al-Zāra also figures in the story of the conversion to Islam and torture of al-Jārūd of the ʿAbd al-Qays tribe.<sup>62</sup> When al-Jārūd professed Islam, al-Ḥuṭam of the Bakr b. Wāʿil shackled him and put him in al-Zāra,<sup>63</sup> i.e., in the jail of the Persian governor.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Al-Jāsir, *Muʿjam juḡhrāfī (Baḥrayn)*, pp. 803–805. According to G. Rentz (*EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. al-Qaṭīf, 764a), the location of al-Zāra is uncertain. On al-Zāra see also *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. ʿAbd al-Qays (W. Caskel); F. Wüstenfeld, “Baḥrein und Jamāma nach arabischen Geographen beschrieben,” in *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* 19 (1874): 173–222, at pp. 178, 182. D. T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1990), vol. 2, p. 259, assumes that Zāra may be identical with Dhahran. For Ibn al-Aṭhīr (Majd al-Dīn), *Nihāya*, s.v. z-ʿ-ʿr, vol. 2, p. 292, al-Zāra was no longer a place name: Zaʿra (*sic*) in the combination *Marzubān al-zaʿra* means an *ajama* (or thicket, or a bed of canes or reeds, or the haunt of a lion, called thus because of the lion’s roaring or growling [zaʿir] there). *Abū l-Ḥārith, marzubān al-zaʿra* (Abū l-Ḥārith, lord of the thicket) is the lion; E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, 1984) (reprint in two vols.), s.v., 1207b.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 86; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 4, p. 362. The Dārīn island (modern Tārūt) was called after a village of the same name at its southern tip; *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. al-Qaṭīf. It is now linked to the mainland by a bridge.

<sup>59</sup> Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*, Suhayl Zakkār, ed. (Damascus, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 110–11 (quoting Abū ʿUbayda).

<sup>60</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 111. From al-Ghāba al-ʿAlāʾ proceeded to al-Zāra; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 85. This suggests that al-Ghāba was in or near al-Qaṭīf. See also M. Hinds, “The First Arab Conquests in Fārs,” in J. Bacharach, L.I. Conrad and P. Crone, eds. *Studies in Early Islamic History* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 199–31, at p. 202; originally published in *Iran* 22 (1984): 39–53, at p. 40.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā staʿjama*, s.v. al-Zāra, 693.

<sup>62</sup> Whose son, al-Mundhīr, held important offices in the Islamic state.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Aṭhīr (Majd al-Dīn), *Nihāya* s.v. z-ʿ-ʿr

<sup>64</sup> Al-Ḥuṭam was the nickname of Shurayḥ b. Ḍubayʿa of the Qays b. Thaʿlaba (who

The existence of a Sassanian official called *Marzubān al-Zāra* is attested in a list of Sassanian governors who used to receive Khusraw's messengers borne on post-mules (*burud kisrā*). Three of the listed governors officiated in Baḥrayn, among them al-Muka'bir *Marzubān al-Zāra*.<sup>65</sup>

A person referred to as *Marzubān al-Zāra* was killed at the time of 'Umar in a duel with the Companion al-Barā' b. Mālik of the Khazraj, who was himself killed later in the same battle. The account of this duel is often quoted in Islamic literature because of the legal question involved, namely whether a fifth should be taken from the spoil (*salab*) obtained in a duel.<sup>66</sup> 'Umar reportedly took the fifth, thereby establishing a precedent.<sup>67</sup>

One would expect the duel between al-Barā' and *Marzubān al-Zāra* to have taken place in al-Zāra during the *ridda* wars,<sup>68</sup> but in fact the episode belongs to the siege of Tustar several years later.<sup>69</sup> In other words, it appears that having survived the siege of al-Zāra (assuming that he fought there), the former *Marzubān al-Zāra* was killed in Tustar by a

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were part of the Bakr b. Wā'il); he was killed in the *ridda* shortly after this incident; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamhara*, pp. 536–37. On al-Ḥuṭam see also al-Isfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 15, p. 255 (an ill-fated expedition of the Rab'ā to the Yemen in which they fought against the Kinda). On the support extended by al-Jārūd and the 'Abd al-Qays to al-'Alā' b. al-Ḥaḍramī, against al-Ḥuṭam, see al-Isfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 15, pp. 258–59. Also *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. al-Ḳaṭīf, 764a; *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. 'Abd al-Ḳays (W. Caskel).

<sup>65</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 291–92 (*Kitāb al-bighāl*). The vocalization of the editor, al-Muka'bar, seem to be wrong.

<sup>66</sup> More precisely, "whatever one of two antagonists in war takes from the other, of the things upon him and with him, that is, of clothes and weapons, and his beast"; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v., 1399b.

<sup>67</sup> *Manāsik*, p. 621; Ibn Zanjawayh, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, Shākir Dhīb Fayyād, ed. (Riyād, 1406/1986), vol. 2, p. 689. But cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Afghānī, ed. (Bombay, 1399/1979–1403/1983), vol. 12, p. 371. And see *Lisān al-'Arab*, s.v. *z-w-r*, p. 338 ('Ayn al-Zāra); Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, s.v. al-Zāra. Pace A. Abu Ezzah, "The political situation in Eastern Arabia at the advent of Islam," in *Proceedings of the Twelfth Seminar for Arabian Studies* (London, 1979), pp. 53–64, at p. 57, who writes: "The title of Marzbān must have been nominal, or honorary, since there is no mention whatsoever of any participation on his part in any military activity" [!].

<sup>68</sup> This is clearly suggested by al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 85, 86.

<sup>69</sup> The dates given are 17, 19, 20 and 23 A.H.; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2553 (during the siege of Tustar, al-Barā' killed one hundred[!] Persians in duels, beside those whom he killed otherwise), 2556, 2559; also al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 381 (al-Barā' was killed by al-Hurmuzān); Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Isāba fi tamyiz al-ṣaḥāba*, 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, ed. (Cairo, 1392/1972), vol. 1, p. 280 (it was Sayf who reported that al-Hurmuzān killed him); al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 380 (in the siege of Tustar, al-Barā' was in command of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī's right wing); Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, *Ma'rifaṭ al-ṣaḥāba*, Muḥammad Rāqī b. Ḥājj 'Uthmān, ed. (al-Madīna 1408/1988), vol. 3, p. 64; Ibn al-Athīr ('Izz al-Dīn), *Uṣd al-ghāba*, vol. 1, p. 173 (the 20 A.H. date is Wāqidī's); Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, p. 17 (Wāqidī notes the difficulty concerning a report that al-Barā' was killed in Yawm al-'Aqaba in Fārs, not in Tustar). Hinds, "The First Arab Conquests in Fārs," pp. 216–17 (=44) dates the conquest of Tustar to 20/641.

Companion from the Khazraj. Several decades earlier, the Marzubān's predecessor held sway over Medina with the assistance of the Jewish tribes.

Let me recapitulate the main issues discussed above.

With regard to Sassanian control in western Arabia, and in Medina in particular, two clearly defined stages emerge:

1. Roughly up until the middle of the sixth century, Medina was controlled by a Marzubān whose seat was in al-Zāra on the Persian Gulf. He had an official (*'āmil*) whose identity is not given. The official might have been of the Naḍīr or the Qurayza, since these Jewish tribes were "kings" and exacted tribute from the Aws and Khazraj on behalf of the Sassanians. This stage is attested in a crucial passage from Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*.

2. In the last quarter of the sixth century 'Amr b. al-It̤nāba of the Khazraj was made king of Medina by al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir, the king of al-Ḥīra. It would seem that Medina was no longer controlled from al-Zāra but directly from al-Ḥīra. The Jews were no longer "kings" and tribute collectors but tribute payers. The verse which Ibn Khurradādhbih attached to the passage in question actually reflects this later stage, and hence does not belong to the passage.

Moreover, while Ibn Khurradādhbih attributed the verse to a poet of the Anṣār, it is in fact by 'Abd al-Masiḥ Ibn Buḡayla, an Azdī poet, whose small tribal group was one of the components making up the 'Ibād or the Christian Arabs of al-Ḥīra.

The poem to which the verse belongs laments the demise of the Lakhmid kings of al-Ḥīra and the other kings of the Southern Arabs. When Ibn Buḡayla relates the bygone glories of the Southern Arabs, he typically adopts a tribal/genealogical point of view. The Lakhmids who were Southern Arabs are mentioned several times, and the specific verse discussed above refers to two other centres of Southern Arab kingship before Islam, namely Buṣrā and Medina. In the former the Ghassān, who belonged to the Azd, collected taxes, and in the latter the collection of taxes from the Naḍīr and Qurayza was carried out by other subdivisions of the Azd, namely Aws and Khazraj.

### Appendix

1. Ibn Khurradādhbih, p. 128:

المدينة... ويقال لها يثربُ أيضاً، وكان عليها وعلى تهامة في الجاهلية عامل من قبَلِ مرزبان البادية يجبي خراجها وكانت قريظة والنضير ملوكاً ملكوها على المدينة على الأوس والخزرج. وفي ذلك يقول شاعر الأنصار:  
تؤدي الخرج بعد خراج كسرى وخرج من قريظة والنضير

2. Ibn Rusta, p. 177:

والمدينة طيبة وهي يثربُ وكان عليها وعلى تهامة عامل من قبل مرزبان البادية يجبي خراجها وكانت قريظة والنضير ملوكاً على مدينة الأوس والخزرج.

3. al-Samhūdī, vol. 4, p. 1160:

وقال صاحب المسالك والممالك كما في خط الأقسري: وكانت قريظة والنضير ملوكاً على المدينة على الأوس والخزرج وكان على المدينة وتهامة في الجاهلية عامل من جهة مرزبان البادية يُجبي إليه خراجها.

4. Yāqūt, s. v. Madīnat Yathrib:

وكان على المدينة وتهامة في الجاهلية عامل من قبل مرزبان الزارة يجبي خراجها وكانت قريظة والنضير اليهود ملوكاً حتى اخرجهم منها الأوس والخزرج من الأنصار، كما ذكرناه في مأرب، وكانت الأنصار قبلاً تؤدي خراجاً إلى اليهود. ولذلك قال بعضهم:  
نؤدي الخرج بعد خراج كسرى وخرج بني قريظة والنضير

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## II

### KING IBN UBAYY AND THE *QUṢṢĀS*<sup>1</sup>

The following study belongs to the preparatory work that must precede the writing of a critical biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. It focuses on ‘Abd Allāh b. Ubayy (henceforward: Ibn Ubayy), one of Muḥammad’s main adversaries. It will be argued that following the Battle of Bu‘āth which took place several years before the *hijrah*, Ibn Ubayy managed to gain control of his tribe, the Khazraj, thus becoming the strongest Arab leader in Medina (Yathrib). This was due to the fact that the Khazraj were superior to the other major Arab tribe, the Aws, even after the former’s defeat in the said battle by an alliance of the Aws and the Jewish tribes Naḍīr and Qurayzah. However, some of the Khazraj—including members of Ibn Ubayy’s own subdivision, the ‘Awf b. al-Khazraj—probably opposed his leadership and at the ‘Aqabah meeting concluded an alliance with Muḥammad behind his back.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of her book on Meccan trade P. Crone argues that the storytellers played a negative role in the historical tradition of Islam by providing “utterly contradictory information.” She continues:

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<sup>1</sup> A draft of this study was presented at the colloquium “From Jāhiliyya to Islam” in the summer of 2000. I wish to thank my discussant, W. Madelung, for his comments and H. Motzki for his thorough and detailed criticism.

<sup>2</sup> The Khazraj demonstrated similar disunity at the event of Saqīfat Banī Sā‘idah. One of their leaders, Sa’d b. ‘Ubādah of the Sā‘idah (Khazraj), vied for the leadership of the Islamic community. But he did not enjoy unanimous support among the Khazraj and was flatly rejected by the Aws. In Abū Mikhnaf’s analysis, the Awsī position delivered the final blow to the Khazrajī aspirations (*fa-inkasara ‘alā Sa’d b. ‘Ubādah wa-‘alā al-Khazraj mā kānū ajma‘ū la-hu min amri-him*); Abū Ja‘far b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, edited by M.J. de Goeje *et al.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1879–1901), 1:1842–43; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation, Volume X: The Conquest of Arabia*, translated by Fred M. Donner (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 8. See also I. Hasson, “Contributions à l’étude des Aws et des Ḥazrağ,” *Arabica* 36 (1989): 29. Compare on the Saqīfah, G. Lecomte, “Sur une relation de la Saqīfa attribuée à Ibn Qutayba,” *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970): 171–83; M. Bergé, “Une profession de foi politico-religieuse sous les apparences d’une pièce d’archive: le Riwayāt al-Saqīfa d’Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (m. 414/1023),” *Annales Islamologiques* 9 (1970): 87–95.

It is well known that Medina on the eve of Islam (= Yathrib) was torn by feuds. Ibn Ishāq does not tell the full story of these feuds, but he refers to them on several occasions, and they play a crucial role in his account of how Muḥammad came to be accepted there: the Yathribīs who decide to throw in their lot with him explain that their people is divided by hatred and rancour to an unusual degree, and they express the hope that “perhaps God will unite them through you.” Yet Ibn Ishāq also informs us that when Muḥammad came to Yathrib, he found that the Yathribīs had a leader called Ibn Ubayy whom they were just about to crown their king. “None of his people contested his authority, and the Aws and Khazraj never rallied to one man before or after him, until the coming of Islam, as they did to him.” This exceptional state of unison was possible because Ibn Ubayy, though a Khazrajī, collaborated closely with a man of Aws.<sup>3</sup> The diadem for his coronation had already been made, but on the arrival of the Prophet his followers abandoned him,<sup>4</sup> and this is why he became a *munāfiq*. Ibn Ishāq, in other words, first tells us that Muḥammad stepped into a political vacuum in Yathrib and next that he snatched away authority from a well-established ruler in Yathrib.<sup>5</sup> Never had Yathrib been so disunited, or else it had never been so united. The contradiction is beyond harmonization.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The source quoted has: *wa-mā'a-hu* [i.e., with Ibn Ubayy] *fi l-Aws rajul huwa fi qaumi-hi min al-Aws sharīf muṭā'*, *Abū 'Āmir 'Abd 'Amr b. Ṣayfī*. . . The latter is usually referred to as Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib or the ascetic; M. Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), Index. Crone's interpretation of *wa-mā'a-hu* could be corroborated by the existence of a marriage link between the two leaders; below, pages 55–56. But F. Wüstenfeld, *Geschichte der Stadt Medina. Im Auszuge aus dem Arabischen des Samhūdi* (Göttingen: Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860), 53, translates this passage differently: “Ihm zur Seite betrachtete sich Abu 'Āmir ben Ḥeifī ben el-Nu'mān aus der Familie Dhubei'a ben Zeid als das Oberhaupt der Aus. . .” Wüstenfeld's translation seems preferable since the source does not imply that the two leaders actually cooperated.

<sup>4</sup> In fact their abandonment is supposed to have taken place before his arrival. One of the reports on the second or Great 'Aqabah meeting specifically refers to Ibn Ubayy: he was in Mecca at that time but knew nothing of the agreement between the Anṣār and the Prophet; he did not expect his people to be involved in such a serious matter behind his back; 'Abd al-Malik b. Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyah*, edited by Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Ibyārī and 'Abd al-Hafīz Shalabī. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1355/1936; reprint Beirut: Dār ihyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, 1391/1971), 2:89 and 91 (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyah*, edited by F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1858–60), 1:299–300 and 301). At the same meeting another leader of the 'Awf b. al-Khazraj, 'Ubādah b. al-Ṣāmit, was made the *naqīb* of the 'Awf b. al-Khazraj; Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muḥjam al-kabīr*, edited by Ḥamdī 'Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Cairo, 1400/1980–1405/1985), 19:90. See also below, page 48.

<sup>5</sup> It will be argued that Ibn Ubayy was only the tribal king of the Khazraj. In the Medinan context it probably meant that he was an arbiter and a representative of his tribe. As an arbiter he would decide in matters of blood money and perhaps irrigation rights. As a representative of his tribe he would sign treaties and receive tribal delegations. Perhaps he was also supposed to lead them in war.

<sup>6</sup> P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University

In order to substantiate her claim that the storytellers are to blame for the presumed contradictions found in the reports on pre-Islamic Medina, Crone refers to a report by ‘Āṣim b. ‘Umar b. Qatādah<sup>7</sup> who is said to be the source of two contradictory reports on the situation in Medina before the *hijrah* and on the position of Ibn Ubayy:

Now Ibn Ishāq cites both stories on the authority of ‘Āṣim b. ‘Umar b. Qatāda, an Anṣārī who, according to Ibn Ḥajar, “had knowledge of the *maghāzī*, and *siyar*, and who was invited<sup>8</sup> to sit in the mosque of Damascus and tell about the *maghāzī* and the virtues of the Companions, which he did.” ‘Āṣim, in other words, was a storyteller, and what Ibn Ishāq reproduces here is some of the stories with which he entertained the Damascenes. Evidently, his assignment was not to give boring lectures on history, but rather to evoke an emotional response to the great deeds of the Prophet and his Companions so as to commit people to Islam. And this he did, in the first story by stressing the pitiful state of the Medinese before God in His mercy sent them a prophet, and in the second story, by building up the immense opposition that Muḥammad had to overcome in Medina, using the opportunity to flesh out Qur’ānic references to *munāfiqūn*. The fact that the two stories are utterly contradictory no doubt went unnoticed both by himself and his audience, just as it has gone unnoticed by later historians, because they are told for different purposes in different context, each one of them making emotional sense on its own.<sup>9</sup>

According to Crone, the storytellers distorted the historical facts:

In historical fact it is more likely that there were feuds than kings in Medina: on this question we have a tradition used by the storytellers but not invented by them. But if there were feuds in Medina, the storytellers must have invented the power of Ibn Ubayy. They must also have invented something, possibly everything, about the position of the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

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Press, 1987), 217. Compare G. Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Muhammads* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 23–24.

<sup>7</sup> On whom see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, Band I: Qur’ānwissenschaften, Hadīth, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystik bis ca. 430 H* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 1:279–80; Kh. al-‘Asālī, “‘Āṣim b. ‘Umar b. Qatādah”, *Majallat Kuliyat al-Ādāb* (Baghdad) 8 (1965): 226–42.

<sup>8</sup> For the identity of the person who invited him see below, page 66.

<sup>9</sup> Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 217–18.

<sup>10</sup> Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 218–19. Compare Juynboll, who contrasts “the storyteller’s approach to history” with “the *mawālī*’s approach to history;” the latter approach was “more scholarly,” the *mawālī*, “who must have lacked this predilection for typically Arab storytelling, preferred to take a less romantic view of the past.” G.H.A. Juynboll, “On the Origins of Arabic Prose: Reflections on Authenticity,” in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, edited by G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 168, 167, and 165, respectively. The report on ‘Āṣim, which is quoted by Crone, is also quoted in Juynboll, “On the Origins of Arabic Prose,” 257, n. 37.

In a review article on Crone's book Serjeant rejects Crone's statement that the evidence on the situation in Medina before the *hijrah* is contradictory: "How can a historian make such nonsense out of a straightforward situation?" he wonders. "The situation is quite clear," he continues, "though Ibn Ishāq marshals his information in a manner a little disjointed." This is Serjeant's own analysis of the situation:

Following the contest at Bu'āth, the Aws and Khazraj tribes wished to compose their differences and arrive at a peaceful settlement. Ibn Ubayy of Khazraj, about whose honour (*sharaf*) . . . , and therefore his eligibility, there was no question, was rallied around by Aws and Khazraj. With Ibn Ubayy was a *sharif* man of Aws.<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ubayy's tribe had strung some beads on a fillet<sup>12</sup> to wind round his head as a form of investiture, intending then to make him king, when the Prophet arrived, and his tribe abandoned him for Islam. Ibn Ubayy is called the *sayyid* of the people of Yathrib, i.e., their chief; there must be reservations about the term "king," which may possibly have meant something in the nature of a paramount chief. Ibn Ubayy was evidently not a "well-established ruler" as Dr. Crone avers, but since he had held aloof from participating in the Bu'āth fighting, he may have been regarded as the most suitable chief available to try and establish peace, and he certainly was a man of standing.

In the meantime, the *naqībs*, of lesser rank than a *sayyid*, had been secretly negotiating with Muḥammad in what was patently a conspiracy against Ibn Ubayy, whom they took care not to inform of what they were doing. Nine of the *naqībs* were of Khazraj and three of Aws. Whether they were motivated by jealousies or rivalry or not, they had a superior candidate for office, not likely to be party to either tribe in their quarrels, and, as well, having the over-riding prestige of being a member of a holy house; so Ibn Ubayy had to acquiesce. The only contradiction is that manufactured by Dr. Crone herself!<sup>13</sup>

In her reply to his review Crone says:

All Arabian kings were petty rulers. The question is not whether Arabian kingship merits the name or not, but rather how Yathrib came to have a leader so powerful by Arabian standards that he was about to become what the Arabs called a king, though we might prefer to call him a paramount chief. Nor is the problem whether or why Ibn Ubayy was the most suitable chief for the establishment of peace (he

<sup>11</sup> Serjeant implies that he supported Ibn Ubayy; compare above.

<sup>12</sup> Serjeant remarks that "[t]his form of investiture was customary in Arabia by the time of the Namārah inscription of the 4th century A.D., . . . and as recent at least as the investiture of the 'Awdhalī sultan . . . with the *fatīlah* of the Arab match-lock gun."

<sup>13</sup> R.B. Serjeant, "Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam: Misconceptions and Flawed Polemics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110 (1990): 485.

had not fought at Bu<sup>ʿ</sup>āth, etc.), but whether or how there came to be a chief maintaining peace at all: Ibn Ishāq's first statement is to the effect that there was none, and modern Islamicists generally say that Muḥammad was accepted in Yathrib because the oasis was in need of a peacemaker.<sup>14</sup>

She suggests another approach, which could have been adopted by her reviewer:

Had Serjeant wished to engage in scholarly debate, he could have argued that the problem should be solved historically rather than historiographically, for whereas I take it to illustrate the ahistorical methods of storytellers, others might argue that conditions had drastically changed in Yathrib in the period between Muḥammad's first encounter with Yathribīs and his emigration: the very fact that an outsider had been approached, for example, could have caused the majority of Yathribīs to unite around Ibn Ubayy, only a small number continuing to lobby for Muḥammad, who thus arrived to a very insecure position.

### I. *The Kings of Medina (Yathrib)*

Before dealing with Ibn Ubayy himself, a study of kingship in Medina before his time will be appropriate. Several generations before Islam there was in Medina a king called Amah b. Ḥarām. He belonged to the Banū Salimah, a subdivision of the Khazraj further divided into three clans: Sawād, ʿUbayd and Ḥarām. The evidence about Amah appears in Samhūdī's description of the tribal territories, most of which is taken from Ibn Zabālah's book on the history of Medina, which was compiled some seven centuries before Samhūdī's time. Sometimes Samhūdī interprets Ibn Zabālah's words or adduces complementary materials from other sources. Having surveyed the fortresses built by the subdivisions of the Salimah, Samhūdī quotes from Ibn Zabālah and others several reports on the history of the Salimah before Islam and at the time of Muḥammad. The first report deals with king Amah:

All of these are Banū Salimah. They were in these courts, unified, and made Amah b. Ḥarām their king. He had reigned for a while until a man of the ʿUbayd who had many orchards died. He had one son called Ṣakhr. Ama wanted to take part of his orchards and divide it among the Salima, but this was grievous for Ṣakhr and he complained

<sup>14</sup> Crone, "Serjeant and Meccan Trade," *Arabica* 39 (1992): 234–35.

about it to the ‘Ubayd and Sawād, saying: “If Amah does it, I shall hit him with a sword”; and he asked them to give him shelter if he carried this out. They consented and when Amah did it [i.e., took some of Ṣakhr’s property], Ṣakhr hit him, cutting the muscle between his neck and the head of his shoulderblade. The ‘Ubayd and Sawād protected him [that is, Ṣakhr] and Amah vowed that for the rest of his life he would not be sheltered by a house unless the Salimah kill Amah or bring him to him so that he would decide what to do with him. Amah sat in the sun near the projecting stone that is above Masjid al-Faṭḥ near al-Jurf. A small girl collecting firewood passed by him and asked: “Sir, what are you doing here in the sun?” He answered [verse]:

My people put me in charge of their affairs, then they summoned to me Ṣakhr and he hit [me]

Verily I vowed that the roof of a house would not shelter me from the heat of the sun and the blaze

As long as Ṣakhr is safe among them, walking free of the fear of death.

The girl went and informed them [of what Amah had said], and they bound Ṣakhr and brought him to him. He forgave them and took what he wanted from his orchards.<sup>15</sup>

This legend and the bad poetry attached to it indicate that the memory of king Amah b. Ḥarām was still alive among the Salimah in the early days of Islam. The fact that the ‘Ubayd and Sawād subdivisions of the Salimah acted against him shows that he belonged to the third subdivision of the Salimah, namely the Ḥarām; Ḥarām, the eponym of this subdivision, was probably Amah’s father. Ṣakhr

<sup>15</sup> ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā’ bi-akḥbār dār al-muṣṭafā*, edited by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī, 1401/1981 [Cairo, 1374/1955]), 202–203: *wa-kull ḥā’ulā’i banū Salimah, wa-kānū bi-ḥādhihi al-dūr wa-kalimatu-hum wāḥidah wa-mallakū ‘alay-him Amah b. Ḥarām fa-labiḥa fi-him zamānan ḥattā halaka rajul min banī ‘Ubayd dhū amwāl kathīrah la-hu walad wāḥid ismu-hu Ṣakhr fa-arāda Amah an yanzi’a tā’ifah min amwālī-hi fa-yaqsima-hā fi banī Salimah, fa-‘azuma dhālika ‘alā Ṣakhr wa-shakā dhālika ‘alā [sic] banī ‘Ubayd wa-banī Sawād, wa-qāla: in fa’ala Amah dhālika la-aḍribanna-hu bi-al-sayf wa-sa’ala-hum an yamna’u-hu in huwa fa’ala, fa-aṭā’u la-hu [sic], fa-lammā fa’ala Amah dhālika ḍaraba-hu Ṣakhr fa-qaṣ’a ḥabl ‘ātiqi-hi, wa-qāmat dīna-hu banū ‘Ubayd wa-banū Sawād, fa-nadhara Amah an lā yu’wīya-hu zill bayt mā ‘āsha ḥattā yaqtula banū Salimah Ṣakhran aw ya’tū-hu bi-hi fa-yarā fi-hi ra’ya-hu, wa-jalasa Amah ‘inda al-ḍaribi [read: al-ḍaribi, as in al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-wafā’ bi-akḥbār dār al-muṣṭafā* (Medina: al-Maktabah al-‘ilmīyah, 1392/1972), 173] alladhī fauqa maṣjid al-faḥ mimnā yalī al-Jurf fi al-shams, fa-marrat bi-hi walīdah ḥaṭṭābah fa-qālat: mā la-ka yā sayyidī hunā fi al-shams? fa-qāla:*

inna qaumī ajmā’ū lī amra-hum / thumma nādaw lī Ṣakhran fa-ḍarab  
inna-nī ālaytu lā yasturunī / saḡfu baytin min ḥarūrīn wa-lahab

abadan mā dāma Ṣakhrun āminan / bayna-hum yamshī wa-lā yakshā al-‘aṭab.