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*Studies Presented to Claude Gilliot on the
Occasion of His 75th Birthday*

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Contents

Abbreviations	ix
List of Illustrations	x
Professori emerito Claudio Gilliot Latina nuncupatio	xi
<i>Francesco Zappa</i>	
Claude Gilliot, A Biographical Sketch	xv
<i>Roberto Tottoli and Andrew Rippin</i>	

Authors

Criteria for Authenticity of Prophecy in ‘Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī’s <i>Risāla</i>	3
<i>Emilio Platti</i>	
Muḥammad b. Ishāq <i>ṣāhib al-maghāzī</i> : Was His Grandfather Jewish?	26
<i>Michael Lecker</i>	
Les <i>Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān</i> d’al-Farrā’ ou la théologie tempérée par la philologie	39
<i>Pierre Larcher</i>	
Al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898) and Polysemy in the Qur’ān	56
<i>Andrew Rippin</i>	
Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, l’arabe et le Bédouin	70
<i>Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa</i>	
The <i>Ḥāshiya</i> of Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 683/1284) on <i>al-Kashshāf</i> of al-Zamakhsharī	86
<i>Walid A. Saleh</i>	
New Light on the Translation of the Qur’ān of Ludovico Marracci from His Manuscripts Recently Discovered at the Order of the Mother of God in Rome	91
<i>Roberto Tottoli</i>	

Genres

- Le contre-discours coranique et la construction d'une figure
de l'opposant** 133

Mehdi Azaiez

- Présentation coranique des messages prophétiques anciens: l'attitude de
kufr dénoncée** 144

Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau

- Locating the Qur'ān in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity** 159

Angelika Neuwirth

- Wirkende Worte: Das *Ḥadīth* und die Metaphysik** 180

Tilman Nagel

- Gedanken zur Charakteristik der arabischen gnomischen Poesie der
frühen Abbasidenzeit** 213

Reinhard Weipert

- Écrire le secret sans le révéler: Remarques sur le vocabulaire technique de
la poésie mystique persane** 235

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

- Ibn Abī l-Iṣḥā' al-Miṣrī et son traité sur le début des sourates** 257

Denis Gril

Traditions

- Lisān 'arabiyy mubīn* – „klares Arabisch“? oder: „offenbar Arabisch“,
gar „geoffenbartes Arabisch“?** 271

Manfred Kropp

- More Light on Muḥammad's Pre-existence: Qur'ānic and post-Qur'ānic
Perspectives** 288

Uri Rubin

La présentation du Prophète au Temple	312
<i>J.M.F. Van Reeth</i>	
Connecting Moses and Muḥammad	326
<i>Jane Dammen McAuliffe</i>	
Moïse et le rocher de la Querelle	341
<i>Jean-Louis Déclais</i>	
Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael at Mecca: A Contribution to the Problem of Dating Muslim Traditions	361
<i>Harald Motzki</i>	
Index of Qur'ānic References	385
Index of Biblical and Extra-Biblical References	392
Index of Arabic, Latin and Persian Titles	393
Index of Arabic, Latin and Persian Authors	396

Muḥammad b. Ishāq *ṣāhib al-maghāzī*: Was His Grandfather Jewish?

Michael Lecker¹

The Synagogue at Nuqayra

It is widely assumed that Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d.c. 768), the famous compiler of the first extant biography of the prophet Muḥammad, was of Christian descent. J. Horovitz for example, wrote:

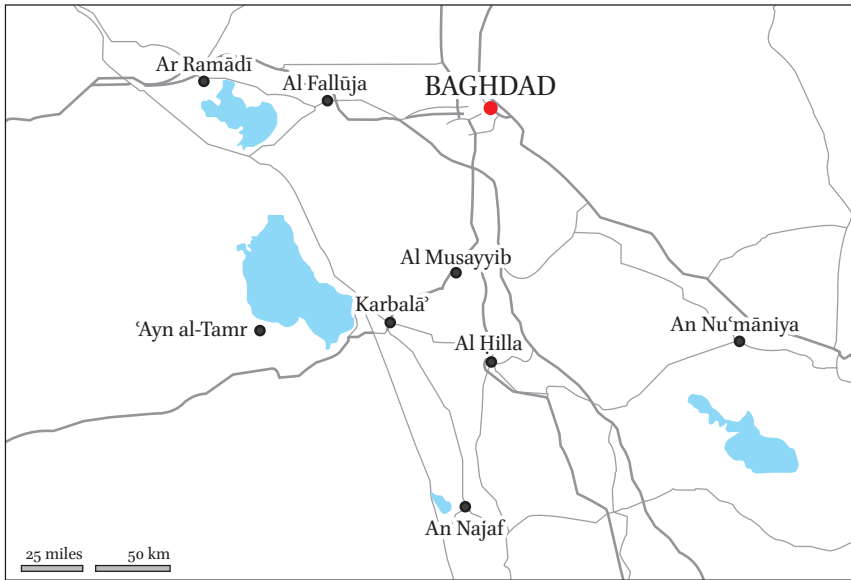
His grandfather Yasār, probably a Christian Arab, was, at the taking of ‘Ayn al-Tamr in Iraq in the year AH 12, sent with other prisoners to Medina and became a slave in the possession of the family of Qays b. Makhrama b. al-Muṭṭalib, by whom he was set free after his conversion to Islam.²

Indeed, according to Sayf b. ‘Umar as quoted by al-Ṭabarī in his *History*, Khālīd b. al-Walīd found forty boys (*ghulām*) in their *bī’a* or church (i.e. at ‘Ayn al-Tamr) where they were studying the *injīl* or the Gospel. They were behind a locked door which Khālīd broke down in order to release them (*‘alayhim bāb mughlaq fa-kasarahu ‘anhum*). The boys told Khālīd that they were hostages (*ruhun*) and were divided among the finest Muslim warriors (*ahl al-balā’*). Several names of captives were preserved – naturally the most prominent ones, or those whose descendants became prominent, stood a better chance of being remembered. Among those listed by Sayf we find, for example, Ḥumrān b. Abān and Sīrīn (on both see below). Yasār is not on this specific list which concludes with Ibn Ukht al-Namir.³ But a partial parallel text found in Ibn

1 The outline of the argument was presented in a colloquium held at The Hebrew University on 27 March 2012.

2 Horovitz, *The earliest biographies*, 76. Fück, *Muḥammad ibn Ishāq*, 27, n. 2 mentions both versions regarding the place in which Yasār was taken captive, namely a church and a synagogue. Jones, Ibn Ishāq, does not refer to the grandfather’s religion. This is also the case with Sellheim, *Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte*, 34, and Guillaume in his introduction to the English translation of the *sīra*: *The Life of Muhammad*, xiii.

3 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh* i, 2064. According to Conrad, Sayf omitted Yasār’s name from the list of captives “out of a disinclination to acknowledge the eminence of his predecessor from Medina”; Conrad, *The mawālī and early Arabic historiography*, 370–1 (Reference by Joseph Witztum). Conrad (*ibid.*, 370, n. 1) says that the boys locked themselves in, but it appears that they were



MAP 1 Location of 'Ayn al-Tamr (modern Shithathah/Shifāthā), some 50 km west of Karbalā'. Al-Fallūja is some 100 km north east of 'Ayn al-Tamr, located near the ruins of Anbār/Pumbedita.

al-Jawzī's *Muntaẓam* has, after Ibn Ukht al-Namir: Yasār, the *mawlā* or manumitted slave of Qays b. Makhrama.⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī's account of 'Ayn al-Tamr is a summary of al-Ṭabarī's account, and it is unlikely that the former added Yasār's name. The name belongs in Sayf's original account and for some reason was omitted by al-Ṭabarī or by a copyist.⁵

The mention of the Gospel indicates that the *bī'a* was a church and not a synagogue. Indeed, the expression *bī'at al-naṣārā* is more common in the sources than the expression *bī'at al-yahūd*. However, in what follows it will become clear that the boys were taken captive in a synagogue and that they were circumcised. In other words, they were Jews.

held as prisoners. Idris, *Réflexions sur ibn iṣḥāq*, 23, assumed that Ibn Iṣḥāq's grandfather was either a Persian or of Iranian origin.

4 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam* iv, 107.

5 The number forty is of course typological. Two instances will suffice: Pharaoh sent forty boys (*ghulām*) from the Children of Israel to Faramā to be instructed in witchcraft (*sihr*); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* v, 587 (printed: *bi-l-'awmā*). Before the battle of Bu'āth the Khazraj received from the Jews forty boys (*ghulām*) as hostages; Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā* i, 384.

Yasār also appears in al-Balādhurī's account about the boys captured in a *kanīsa* at 'Ayn al-Tamr (*wa-wajada fī kanīsa hunāka jamā'a sabāhum*). Like the word *bī'a*, *kanīsa* can mean either a church or a synagogue,⁶ and al-Balādhurī does not mention the Gospel. Al-Balādhurī lists, among others, Ḥumrān, Sirīn and Yasār, the grandfather of Muḥammad b. Ishāq *ṣāhib al-sīra* (the compiler of the *sīra*) who was the *mawlā* or manumitted slave of Qays b. Makhrama. Al-Balādhurī also has another account with an alternative location of the *kanīsa*: according to some, Khālīd made an agreement with the people of the 'Ayn al-Tamr castle (in other words, it was not taken by force) and the captives were found in a *kanīsa* somewhere in the district (*bi-ba'ḍi l-ṭassūj*).⁷

The statement that Yasār was among the boys taken captive at 'Ayn al-Tamr was transmitted by his famous grandson, Muḥammad b. Ishāq. His account, as quoted by al-Ṭabarī, mentions neither church nor hostages. The many captives taken at 'Ayn al-Tamr and sent to the caliph Abū Bakr included the children of the warriors whom Khusro had stationed there. One of the captives was Muḥammad b. Ishāq's grandfather Yasār. (Ibn Ishāq speaks of himself in the 3rd person.) But the wording, which is somewhat obscure, does not suggest that Yasār was a warrior's son: "He took from 'Ayn al-Tamr and from the children of the warriors stationed there many captives and sent them to Abū Bakr. Among those captives were ..." (*wa-sabā min 'Ayn al-Tamr wa-min abnā' tilka l-murābiṭa sabāyā kathīra fa-ba'atha bihā ilā Abī Bakr, fa-kāna min tilka l-sabāyā...*).⁸ While we have here neither *kanīsa* nor hostages, nothing in this account contradicts the claim that Yasār belonged to a special category of young captives.

In his *History of Damascus* Ibn 'Asākir includes two consecutive accounts going back to Ibn Ishāq through Abū Ḥudhayfa Ishāq b. Bishr (d. 206/821).⁹ Yasār only appears in the first account which runs along the lines of one of al-Ṭabarī's two accounts. However, Ibn 'Asākir does not refer to sons of warriors (al-Ṭabarī: *abnā' tilka l-murābiṭa*; Ibn 'Asākir: *wa-sabā min 'Ayn al-Tamr basharan kathīran fa-ba'atha bihim ilā Abī Bakr*). Ibn 'Asākir's second account

6 Troupeau, *Kanīsa*.

7 Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 247, 248. The district in question is the *ṭassūj* of 'Ayn al-Tamr which was part of Iṣṭān al-Bihqubādh al-A'lā; Ibn Khurādādhbih, *Masālik*, 8; Morony, *Continuity and change*, 25–27.

8 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh* i, 2122. The passage is referred to in Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 227.

9 The compiler of *Mubtada' al-dunyā wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, *GAS*, i, 294. The MS of this book is quoted in Kister, 'And he was born circumcised,' 10, 11, 21. Kister's articles are available at www.kister.huji.ac.il.

adds a few more names, not including our Yasār (while including another Yasār, the *mawlā* of Ubayy b. Ka'b and the father of al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī).¹⁰ More importantly, the latter account identifies the synagogue's location:

Among them (*kāna fīhim*) were [three names] ... They [i.e. the Muslim warriors] found in the synagogue (*kanīsat al-yahūd*) boys (*ṣibyān*) instructed in literacy, namely in one of the villages of 'Ayn al-Tamr called Nuqayra. Among them was Ḥumrān b. Abān the *mawlā* of 'Uthmān.¹¹

Kanīsat al-yahūd at Nuqayra corresponds to the *kanīsa* "somewhere in the district" (*bi-ba'ḍi l-tassūj*) mentioned by al-Balādhurī. Sayf b. 'Umar's *bī'a* in which the Gospel was studied is incongruous with the mention of the synagogue and the evidence that the boys were circumcised (see below). The only name linked to the Nuqayra synagogue appears to be Ḥumrān. One assumes that he was singled out because he became an eminent political figure, while the other captives only became famous through their offspring.

Yet another account of Ibn Iṣḥāq that goes back to Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān (d. after 140/757)¹² mentions some of those taken captive at 'Ayn al-Tamr, including Ḥumrān, Sīrīn and Yasār.¹³

The following account that appears in the entry on Ḥumrān in the *History of Damascus* goes back to Ibn Abī Khaythama < Muṣ'ab al-Zubayrī. Although Yasār is not mentioned, it is relevant for us because it confirms that Ḥumrān was a Jew and that the *kanīsa* was a synagogue:

Muḥammad b. Sīrīn [or rather his father] is from 'Ayn al-Tamr, [more precisely, he is] of those taken captive by Khālīd b. al-Walīd. Khālīd b. al-Walīd found in it forty circumcised (*m.kh.t.nīna*) boys. He disapproved of them (or: he did not recognize them, *fa-ankarahum*), but they said: We used to belong to a kingdom (? *innā kunnā ahl mamlaka*). He divided them among the people. Sīrīn was one of them. Anas [b. Mālik who was

10 His original name was Pērōz; Ritter, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. One assumes that the name Yasār – in early Islam it was a typical name of a slave – was given to the different Yasārs upon their enslavement. Cf. Kister, Call yourselves by graceful names, 19.

11 *Wa-wajadū fī kanīsati l-yahūd ṣibyānan yata'allamūna l-kitābata fī qarya min qurā 'Ayn al-Tamr yuqālu lahā Nuqayra* ...; Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq* ii, 87–8. Yāqūt has *kanīsa* instead of *kanīsat al-yahūd*; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān* v, 301, s.v. Nuqayra. (In the entry itself the place is called al-Nuqayra.).

12 Mizzī, *Tahdhib al-kamāl* xiii, 79–84.

13 Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba* vi, 707–8, s.v. Yasār al-Muṭṭalibī. In Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq* ix, 178–9 read instead of Abī Iṣḥāq: Ibn Iṣḥāq.

his owner] drafted with him a manumission contract (*kātabahu*) following which he was manumitted. Also Ḥumrān b. Abān was one of them. He used to be called Ibn Abbā, but his sons said: Ibn Abān.¹⁴

The obscure phrase *ahl mamlaka* seems to relate to the hostages (*ruhun*) mentioned earlier. *Mamlakat Fāris* or the Persian Empire is meant here.¹⁵

Instead of *m.kh.t.nīna* or circumcised, read: *mukhtatinīna* in the 8th form (a haplogogy of one of the *tā*'s occurred).¹⁶ Some versions of this account have *mukhtafīna*¹⁷ or hiding away. But this variant – which is absolutely fitting in the context of war – should be rejected as *lectio facillior*. There is no mention in this case of a *kanīsa/bī'a* or of study of any kind.¹⁸

There is yet another source that specifically mentions a synagogue. According to Ya'qūbī, after the battle of 'Ayn al-Tamr Khālīd defeated a troop of the Taghlib tribe and sent many captives from among them to Medina. Then he sent troops to the synagogue (*kanīsat al-yahūd*) and took captive twenty boys (*ghulām*). He proceeded to Anbār and crossed the desert to Syria.¹⁹

14 Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq* xv, 175. See also Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* vii, 303, where the crucial word is vocalized *mukhattanīna*.

15 When Khusro II Parvez came to power, he made Iyās b. Qabiṣa al-Ṭā'ī king of Ḥīra and granted him (*aṭ'amahu*) 'Ayn al-Tamr and eighty villages on the fringes of the Sawād, including Aqsās Mālik; Abū l-Baqā', *al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya* ii, 502 (in a verse Iyās is referred to as *rabbu l-'Ayn* or the Lord of 'Ayn al-Tamr); Kister, *al-Ḥīra*, 152. Elsewhere he is said to have been Khusro's governor at 'Ayn al-Tamr and its environs whose authority extended to Ḥīra; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* xxiv, 60. The wording (*wa-kāna 'āmilahu 'alā 'Ayn al-Tamr wa-mā wālāhā ilā l-Ḥīra*) seems to suggest that his authority did not include Ḥīra itself. Iyās had a brother at 'Ayn al-Tamr; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* xxiv, 75. Iyās is also said to have died there; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 650. As to the number eighty, it may be typological: Qays b. Mas'ūd received from Khusro al-Ubulla and eighty of its villages; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-muḥabbar*, 253. In administrative terms 'Ayn al-Tamr and al-Ubulla were both centres of districts and seats of governors.

16 The correct reading is found in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* iv, 181, who says about Muḥammad b. Sirīn's father that Khālīd b. al-Walīd took him captive *fī arba'ina ghulāman mukhtatinīna*. Variants: *m.kh.th.y.n.* and *m.ḥ.n.th.y.n.*

17 E.g. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḫ Baghdad* iii, 284.

18 Perhaps because Sirīn was an artisan, more precisely a maker of copper cooking pots who came from his hometown Jarjarāyā to 'Ayn al-Tamr to practice his craft; *ibid.* However, it is not at all certain that he was taken captive at 'Ayn al-Tamr. According to some, he belonged to the captives of the Maysān region; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* iv, 181.

19 Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḫ* ii, 133.

Surprisingly, one account speaks of Arab hostages:

In the *kanīsa* of ‘Ayn al-Tamr Khālīd b. al-Walīd found the Arab boys (*al-ghilma mina l-‘arab*) who were Khusro’s hostages (*ruhun fī yad kisrā*). They [i.e. their descendants] are dispersed in Syria and Iraq. Among them were the grandfather (*jadd*) of the learned genealogist al-Kalbī, the grandfather of the grammarian Ibn Abī Iṣḥāq al-Ḥaḍramī and the grandfather of ṣāḥīb al-maghāzī (the compiler of the *maghāzī*)²⁰ Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq. Also among the captives of ‘Ayn al-Tamr were [the fathers of] al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Muḥammad b. Sīrīn, the *mawlās* of Jamīla bint Abī Quṭba al-Anṣāriyya.²¹

The kings of Ḥīra did take young hostages (*rahā’in*) from among the Bedouin tribes to secure their obedience and good conduct.²² But we are only concerned here with Yasār, whose non-Arab origin is beyond doubt. His grandson Ibn Iṣḥāq is said to have been a Persian *mawlā*,²³ and his foreign roots are probably behind his incompetence with regard to poetry.²⁴ Ḥumrān claimed Arab descent (see below). Had he been an Arab, there would have been no need to make false claims regarding his genealogy.²⁵

20 Elad, The beginnings of historical writing by the Arabs, 107.

21 Al-Bakrī, *Muḡam mā staḡam* i, 319, s.v. (‘Ayn) al-Tamr. Jamīla, who was Anas b. Mālīk’s wife, belonged to the Sawād, a subdivision of the Salima (Khazraj); Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-‘arab*, 360.

22 Kister, al-Ḥīra, 166–7; Abū l-Baqā’, al-*Manāqib al-mazyadiyya* i, 107.

23 Fasawī, al-*Ma’rifā wa-l-ta’rīkh* ii, 742.

24 For a biting criticism of his uncritical treatment of poetry in the *sīra* see Al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu’arā* i, 7–8. His Arabic skills may well have been wanting too. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dimashq* xxxiv, 243, quotes ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Bashīr al-Shaybānī’s statement that he corrected the grammar of Ibn Iṣḥāq’s “books” (*anā aṣlaḥtu i’rāb kutub Muḥammad ibn Iṣḥāq*). This Damascene scholar transmitted the *maghāzī* on the authority of Ibn Iṣḥāq; Ibn Hibbān, al-*Thiqāt* viii, 373. The “books” in question were the copies he prepared for himself during his sessions with Ibn Iṣḥāq. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was described as ṣāḥīb al-maghāzī ‘an Ibn Iṣḥāq, i.e. he owned a recension of the *maghāzī* going back to Ibn Iṣḥāq.

25 Ibn al-Kalbī compiled a monograph that is now lost about Khusro’s Arab hostages; Yāqūt, *Muḡam al-udabā’* vi, 2780: *Kitāb akhdh kisrā rahn al-‘arab*. A passage that may well have belonged to it concerns the poet Laqīṭ b. Ma’bad (or b. Ma’mar) al-Iyādī who was Khusro’s hostage (*kāna fī rahn kisrā*) and wrote to his tribe to warn them of an imminent attack; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab ma’add wa-l-yaman al-kabīr* i, 126–7. Cf. Ibn Qutayba, al-*Shi’r wa-l-shu’arā* i, 199–201 (Laqīṭ b. Ma’mar).

Ḥumrān b. Abān, formerly known as Ṭuwayd b. Abbā

Further details concerning Ḥumrān's Jewish origin belong here. Al-Musayyab b. Najba al-Fazārī who took him captive at 'Ayn al-Tamr found that he was circumcised – he was in fact a Jew called Ṭuwayd. He was bought for 'Uthmān b. 'Affān who manumitted him and made him his secretary.²⁶

Ḥumrān, who died in the seventies of the first Islamic century was reportedly born “at the time of the prophet Muḥammad.”²⁷ Assuming that the expression “at the time of the prophet Muḥammad” refers to the post-*hijra* period, we can deduce that when he was captured at the beginning of Abū Bakr's caliphate, he was under 12 years old. This may be true of the other boys captured with him.

As has already been mentioned, Ḥumrān's father had an Aramaic name, Abbā, but Ḥumrān's sons claimed that their grandfather had an Arab name, namely Abān.²⁸ They also claimed descent from the Namir b. Qāsiṭ tribe.²⁹ Ḥumrān himself is supposed to have made the same claim. The Umayyad governor in Iraq, Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, threatened that if Ḥumrān claimed to be of Arab descent and did not reveal that his father's name was Abbā, he would cut his head off.³⁰ Obviously, Ḥumrān was still an influential political figure when these threats were made.³¹

26 Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 435–6. Considering his non-Arab descent one is surprised to find that his grandfather's name was 'Abd 'Amr. But this typically Arab name appears to have been part of the claim of Arab descent. Gil, *Jews in Islamic countries in the Middle Ages*, 294, no. 175, says about Ḥumrān that he “was one of the four [?] boys forcefully held by the Christians in the church at 'Ayn Tamr in order to teach them Christianity.” Incidentally, the *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. *ṭ.w.d.*, records the name Ṭawd (“mountain”) and its diminutive form Ṭuwayd (“small mountain”) as Arab names. One wonders if al-Musayyab actually captured Ḥumrān or – what seems more likely – received him when the boys were divided among the finest warriors; see an entry on al-Musayyab who fought on 'Alī's side in his wars in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* vi, 216.

27 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa al-latīfa* i, 305.

28 Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq* xv, 175; *wa-innamā kāna bna Abbā fa-qāla banūhu bn Abān*.

29 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* vii, 303; *wa-ḥdda'ā waladuhu fi l-Namir ibn Qāsiṭ*. It was one of the Rabi'a tribes; Lecker, al-Namir b. Qāsiṭ. In al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 247, he is called Ḥumrān b. Abān b. Khālīd al-Namarī (printed: al-Tamrī); in al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-burṣān*, 553, instead of al-N.m.y.rī, read: al-Namarī.

30 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf* vii/1, 293 (printed erroneously Ubayy). Ḥajjāj's threats notwithstanding, Ḥumrān married an Arab woman from the Sa'd (a large subdivision of the Tamīm) and his children too had Arab wives: *wa-tazawwaja wulduhu fi l-'arab*; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 436.

31 Ḥumrān's biography demonstrates that the road to fame and wealth was open for captives of war who embraced Islam regardless of their origin. The young boy's mother tongue was

Yet another anecdote – regardless of whether or not it is historical – is based on Ḥumrān's Jewish origin. A leading political figure is said to have addressed him with the following words: "You son of a Jewess, you are nothing but a Persian/foreign farmer (*'ilj nabaṭī*) taken captive at 'Ayn al-Tamr, and your father's name was Abbā."³²

The Great-Grandfather Khiyār/Kūthān

According to some, Ibn Iṣḥāq's great-grandfather, who is often referred to as Khiyār, was called Kūthān (or Kūtān).³³ Kūthān is a non-Arab name, and indeed if Yasār was a first generation Muslim, one would expect a foreign name rather than an Arab one. Perhaps the foreign name Kūthān was replaced by his descendants with the Arab name Khiyār.

There is yet another difficulty regarding the great-grandfather. Two prominent authorities on genealogy, Haytham b. 'Adī and Madā'inī, report that Khiyār was Qays b. Makhrama's slave.³⁴ But elsewhere Madā'inī is quoted as saying that Yasār (and not his father Khiyār), a slave of Qays b. Makhrama, was among the forty (boys) taken captive by Khālīd b. al-Walīd at 'Ayn al-Tamr when its inhabitants capitulated without condition (*nazalū 'alā ḥukmihi*).³⁵ That Madā'inī did not reject the 'Ayn al-Tamr story is also shown by an account regarding Ḥumrān.³⁶ It appears that confusion occurred between the names Yasār and Khiyār which in the Arabic script are rather similar, especially when they are stripped of their diacritical points.

probably Aramaic, but the border areas of Iraq were inhabited by Arabs and frequented by Arab traders, and he may have acquired some knowledge of Arabic even before his capture. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb used to call 'Ayn al-Tamr, probably with reference to its Arab inhabitants, *qaryat al-'Arab* or the town of the Arabs; Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa wa-l-ta'rīkh* iii, 298 (the events of 14 AH).

32 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf* iv/1, 470 (printed 'm.y.). The speaker is Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr. *Naqā'id jarīr wa-l-farazdaq* ii, 751 has *yā bna l-fā'ila* instead of *yā bna l-yahūdiyya*.

33 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* xxiv, 405–6; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* ii, 9.

34 Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl* ii, 43: *wa-kāna Khiyār li-Qays ibn Makhrama ibn al-Muṭṭalib ibn 'Abd Manāf, qālahu l-Haytham ibn 'Adī wa-l-Madā'inī*.

35 Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rīkh* i, 102, quoting Abū 'Ubayda and 'Alī b. Muḥammad (al-Madā'inī).

36 According to al-Madā'inī and others, Ḥumrān who was from the captives of 'Ayn al-Tamr claimed descent from the Namir b. Qāsiṭ and was consequently threatened by Ḥajjāj; Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf* vii/1, 293.

Finally, the *Tāj al-ʿarūs* dictionary has it that the prophet Muḥammad stroked the head of our Yasār³⁷ (as a blessing). But the *Tāj al-ʿarūs* that lists many persons called Yasār confuses between our Yasār and Yasār b. Uzayhir al-Juhanī who claimed that Muḥammad had stroked his head.³⁸ Ibn Ḥajar does have an entry on our Yasār in his Companion dictionary, but it is in the third category (*al-qism al-thālith*) of alleged Companions. This category is dedicated to those who are not entitled to Companion status, namely those who lived at the time of Muḥammad but there is no evidence that they met or saw him. Regarding those included in this category there is unanimity, Ibn Ḥajar says, that they were not Muḥammad's Companions.³⁹

Another Yasār from ʿAyn al-Tamr appears in Qurʾān commentaries in connection with Muḥammad's accusation by his Meccan detractors that he received his knowledge from human beings (*yuʿallimuhu bashar*, "a certain mortal is teaching him," Qurʾān 16:103).⁴⁰ Yasār and Jabr (variant: Khayr), two Christian slaves from ʿAyn al-Tamr, were employed as sword sharpeners in Mecca. They were reading a book belonging to them – according to some, the Torah and the Psalms, according to others, the Torah alone. Muḥammad used to listen to their reading, and the pagans said that he learned from them.⁴¹ But this Yasār is irrelevant for us here since he was in Mecca before the *hijra*.

The *walāʾ* Link with Qays b. Makhrama and the Jewish Connection

Ishāq b. Yasār was the *mawlā* of Qays b. Makhrama⁴² or of his son Muḥammad b. Qays⁴³ who inherited the *walāʾ*. In other words, Yasār was Qays's *mawlā*, while Yasār's son Ishāq was the *mawlā* of Qays's son Muḥammad. But usually the *walāʾ* link is said to have belonged to Qays. Ishāq's brother, Mūsā b. Yasār, was the *mawlā* of Qays b. Makhrama.⁴⁴ Ibn Ishāq himself, who lived two gener-

37 Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs* vii, 637, s.v. *y.s.r.*: *wa-Yasār jadd Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ṣāḥib al-sira masaḥa l-nabī ra'sahu*.

38 His daughter ʿAmra added that her father's hair never grayed; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba* vi, 678.

39 Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba* vi, 707–8, s.v. Yasār al-Muṭṭalibī; i, 4–5.

40 Cf. Gilliot, Informants.

41 Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr* x, 178.

42 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 154. Some said that Yasār was the *mawlā* of ʿAbdallāh b. Qays b. Makhrama; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾriḫ Baghdad* ii, 9. The source is the genealogist Muṣʿab (b. ʿAbdallāh) al-Zubayrī.

43 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* ii, 495.

44 Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt* v, 404.

ations after the formation of the *walā'* with Qays, was Qays's *mawlā*,⁴⁵ and the same is true of his brother 'Umar b. Iṣḥāq.⁴⁶ The *nisbas* or relative adjectives al-Makhramī and al-Muṭṭalibī that are attached to Ibn Iṣḥāq and to his family members (after Qays's father Makhrama and Qays's grandfather al-Muṭṭalib) were preferred to the *nisba* al-Qaysī in order to avoid confusion with the Qays 'Aylān tribal federation. Ibn Iṣḥāq's father and his paternal uncles Mūsā and 'Abd al-Raḥmān were *mawālī Makhrama*,⁴⁷ and Iṣḥāq b. Yasār was also referred to as *mawlā āl Makhrama*.⁴⁸ Ibn Iṣḥāq was *mawlā āl Qays b. Makhrama*,⁴⁹ *mawlan li-banī Qays b. Makhrama*⁵⁰ or, as has already been mentioned, *mawlā Qays b. Makhrama*.⁵¹ While the *walā'* link is often called after its initiator, Qays b. Makhrama, reference to Qays's family members was also considered appropriate.

But why did Qays b. Makhrama choose to buy the young slave? We seem to have an answer. Both Qays and his father Makhrama appear on the list of the prominent persons who were born by Jewish mothers.⁵² According to Jewish Law, they were both Jews, but this does not necessarily mean that they considered themselves as such. Still, a feeling of solidarity with the plight of the young slaves might have motivated Qays to buy the young slave and give him a chance to integrate into the emerging Muslim society.

45 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* vii, 321.

46 Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt* vii, 167.

47 Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl* i, 315. There was a third uncle called Ṣadaqa b. Yasār; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-mushtabih* i, 517.

48 He used to pass by the *bazzāzūn* or the cloth merchants and tell them to stick to their trade because their father Abraham was a cloth merchant; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Iṣlāḥ al-māl*, 260–1.

49 Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* v, 37, s.v. Mālik Ibn 'Awf al-Ashja'ī.

50 Mu'arrīj al-Sadūsī, *Ḥadhf min nasab Quraysh*, 27.

51 Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ* i, 2122. The source is Ibn Iṣḥāq himself. Some said that Ibn Iṣḥāq was the *mawlā* of Makhrama b. Nawfal b. 'Abd Manāf b. Zuhra b. Kilāb; Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ṭabaqāt*, 271. But this is the result of confusion between Makhrama b. Nawfal, a Qurayshī from the Zuhra clan, and Makhrama b. al-Muṭṭalib.

52 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-munammaq*, 402; Lecker, A note on early marriage links 24, 34–5. For a fuller discussion of Makhrama's mother see Lecker, Genealogy and politics. *Ibn al-Yahūdīyya* has always been a slanderous expression.

Conclusions

Ibn Ishāq's grandfather Yasār was Jewish. He belonged to a group of circumcised boys taken captive at the beginning of Abū Bakr's caliphate in the synagogue of Nuqayra near 'Ayn al-Tamr. 'Ayn al-Tamr was some 100 km as the crow flies from Pumbedita (Anbār, near the present day al-Fallūja). It was some 90 km as the crow flies from Sūrā (near the present day al-Ḥilla), which was the other major centre of Jewish learning in Iraq.⁵³ Yasār was sold to Qays b. Makhrama b. al-Muṭṭalib who was a remote relative of the prophet Muḥammad. Qays's mother and his grandmother on his father's side were Jewish, which may have been behind his purchase of the young slave.

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