

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

ALLEGED MURDER SANCTIONED BY THE PROPHET - OVERLAP OF THE AHADITH CANON WITH THE SIRA GENRE

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It is not uncommon to note many learned Muslims assert that the Ahadith cannon has received a different, far more rigorous form of scrutiny than the biographical sources of the Prophet (The Sira genre). It is implied that the veracity of the Ahadith cannon is far more superior to the Sira genre which contain traditions recorded by the earliest historians. This is despite the fact that the traditions that the historians recorded were far earlier and closer to the Prophetic ministry than those recorded by the Ahadith compilers.

This assertion is usually advanced to imply that some of the more graphic, unsavoury details found in the Sira genre, which potentially question the character of the Prophet, are not to be found in the main Ahadith corpus. An example from the earliest record of Islamic history (Ibn Ishaq's Sira) is cited which consists of a historical record which can be potentially construed as damaging to the character of the prophet.

THE REST OF THE AFFAIR OF KHAYBAR

Kinana b.al-Rabi, who had the custody of the treasure of B. al-Nadir, was brought to the apostle who asked him about it. He denied that he knew where it was. A Jew came (T. was brought) to the apostle and said that he had seen Kinana going round a certain ruin every morning early. **When the apostle said to Kinana, 'Do you know that if we find you have it I shall kill you?'** he said Yes. The apostle gave orders that the ruin was to be excavated and some of the treasure was found. When he asked him about the rest he refused to produce it, **so the apostle gave orders to al-Zubayr b. al-Awwam, 'Torture him until you extract what he has'** so he kindled a fire with flint and steel on his chest until he was nearly dead. Then

the **apostle delivered him to Muhammad b. Musalama and he struck off his head, in revenge for his brother Mahmud.** [1]

No commentary is necessary to underscore the implications of such a narrative.

Another similar questionable historical report pertains to the killing of 'Asma bint Marwan' who was a poetess who strongly disagreed to the killing of an individual by the name of Afak. In her disaffection, she would compose poems to oppose new converts to Islam, defame and incite hatred against them. The Prophet simply had her murdered.

'UMAYR B. ADIY'S JOURNEY TO KILL 'ASMA' D. MARWAN

"She was of B. Umayyya b. Zayd. **When Abu Afak had been killed she displayed disaffection.** 'Abdullah b. al-Harith b. Al-Fudayl from his father said that she was married to a man of B. Khatma called Yazid b. Zayd. Blaming Islam and its followers she said:

"I despise B. Malik and al-Nabit
And 'Auf and B. al-Khazraj.
You obey a stranger who is none of yours,
One not of Murad or Madhhij. (1)
Do you expect good from him after the killing of your chiefs
Like a hungry man waiting for a cook's broth?
Is there no man of pride who would attack him by surprise
And cut off the hopes of those who expect aught from him?"

Hassan b. Thabit answered her:

"Banu Wa'il and B. Waqif and Khatma
Are inferior to B. al-Khazraj.
When she called for folly woe to her in her weeping,
For death is coming.
She stirred up a man of glorious origin,
Noble in his going out and in his coming in.
Before midnight he dyed her in her blood
And incurred no guilt thereby."

When the apostle heard what she had said he said, "Who will rid me of Marwan's daughter?" Umayr b. 'Adiy al-Khatmi who was with him heard him, and that very night he went to her house and killed her. In the morning he came to the apostle and told him what he had done and he said, 'You have helped God and His apostle, O 'Umayr!' When he asked if he would have to bear any evil consequences **the apostle said, "Two goats won't butt their heads about her"**, so Umayr went back to his people.

Now there was a great commotion among B. Khatma that day about the affair of Bint

Marwan. She had five sons, and when 'Umayr went to them from the apostle he said, "I have killed bint Marwan, O sons of Khatma. Withstand me if you can; don't keep me waiting." (2) That was the first day Islam became powerful among B. Khatma; before that those who were Muslims concealed the fact. The first of them to accept Islam was 'Umayr b. 'Adiy who was called 'the reader', and 'Abdullah b. Aus and Khuzayma b. Thabit. The day after Bint Marwan was killed the men of B. Khatma became Muslims because they saw the power of Islam. [2]

What is often not appreciated is some of the overlap of the Sira genre and the canonised Ahadith. The Ahadith compilers of the 9th century such as Imam Bukhari, were often drawing from the same pool of traditions which were left by previous historians, professional storytellers and traditionalists. These traditions were already in circulation and within popular memory and circulation for decades, if not centuries before the Ahadith compilers collated their traditions.

A BASIC TIMELINE

Death of Prophet Muhammad	632 CE
Imam Bukhari compiles his works	846 CE (214 years later)

Imam Bukhari's work then took further time to achieve full canonisation.

On the other hand, Islam's earliest recorded history by Ibn Ishaq was put together around 760-763 CE (Approximately 130 years after the death of the Prophet and over 80 years before Imam Bukhari's work was allegedly written)

It is also common for some learned Muslims to acknowledge the problems and immense criticism generated against Islam's earliest historians and reject the credibility of their material. However, what is then ironic to note is that the same learned Muslims then rely on the same sources to build their understanding of the historical periods of Islam and quote them as historical facts.

This unfortunate situation is possibly caused by one or a combination of the following:

- (1) Lack of **actual** awareness of the **full** contents of the Sira genre or the information learnt from it and its influence on later material.
- (2) Acceptance of **selective** historical narratives based on an arbitrary method of what appears to be 'an agreeable, of more palatable content', which to any unbiased reader would amount to nothing short of 'pick and choose'. Certainly on the basis of 'isnad' (chain of narrators) scrutiny of some of these reports, there is no reason why one narrative is taken as truth and another rejected.
- (3) There is intellectual dishonesty.

More extreme (and wholly unjustified) claims include the assertion that the Ahadith corpus went through a completely **different** mechanism of collation. Therefore it is implied that the information contained in the Sira genre is not to be found in the more trusted works of the Ahadith compilers such as the Sahih Bukhari. Based on a sustained study, this view cannot be supported.

One example will be used to illustrate this point. This will **allow the reader to conclude whether the Ahadith corpus was actually independent of the type of information contained in the traditions of the earliest histories or not.**

SAHIH BUKHARI

THE ASSASSINATION OF KA'B BIN ASHRAF - THE PROPHET ALLOWED KILLING THROUGH DECEPTION

BUKHARI Volume 5, Book 59, Number 369 (part):

Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah:

"Allah's Apostle said, "Who is willing to kill Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf who has hurt Allah and His Apostle?" Thereupon Muhammad bin Maslama got up saying, "O Allah's Apostle! Would you like that I kill him?" The Prophet said, "Yes," Muhammad bin Maslama said, "Then allow me to say a (false) thing (i.e. to deceive Kab). "The Prophet said, "You may say it." Then Muhammad bin Maslama went to Kab and said ..." [3]

The full narrative with all its details, can be read in the complete hadith. It culminates in the murder of Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf after which Abu Rafi was also murdered. Similar hadith reports of the same incident can also be found in other parts of the corpus.

BUKHARI Volume 4, Book 52, Number 271:

Narrated Jabir:

The Prophet said, "Who is ready to kill Ka'b bin Ashraf (i.e. a Jew)." Muhammad bin Maslama replied, "Do you like me to kill him?" The Prophet replied in the affirmative. Muhammad bin Maslama said, "Then allow me to say what I like." The Prophet replied, "I do (i.e. allow you)." [4]

Nearly a hundred years before Imam Bukhari's work was allegedly completed, **the full narrative** could be found written in the Sira (biography) of Islam's earliest historian, Ibn Ishaq. This begs the question of exclusivity of the two genres and suggests that they are actually not really independent of one another.

The detailed story is fleshed with many poems and only an excerpt of the contents will be provided below. The narrative recording the deception is narrated (and translated) as follows in Ibn Ishaq's sira (biography).

IBN ISHAQ'S SIRA

Then he composed amatory verses of an insulting nature about the Muslim women. The apostle said - according to what 'Abdullah b. al-Mughith b. Abu Burda told me - 'Who will rid me of Ibnu'l-Ashraf?' Muhammad b. Maslama, brother of the B. 'Abdu'l-Ashhal, said, 'I will deal with him for you, O apostle of God, I will kill him,' **He said, 'Do so if you can.'** So Muhammad b. Maslama returned and waited for three days without food or drink, apart from what was absolutely necessary. When the apostle was told of this he summoned him and asked him why he had given up eating and drinking. He replied that he had given an undertaking and he did not know whether he could fulfil it. The apostle said, 'All that is incumbent upon you is that you should try.' **He said, 'O apostle of God, we shall have to tell lies.'** **He answered, 'Say what you like, for you are free in the matter.'** [5]

The narrative continues to the murder of Ka'b bin Ashraf at the Prophet's instructions. A couple of poems complete the narrative.

Ka'b b. Malik said:

Of them Ka'b was left prostrate there
(After his fall al-Nadir were brought low).

Sword in hand we cut him down
By Muhammad's order when he sent secretly by night
Ka'b's brother to go to Ka'b
He beguiled him and brought him sown with guile
Mahmud was trustworthy, bold.

Hassan b. Thabit, mentioning the killing of Ka'b and of Sallam b. Abu'l-Huqayq, said:

What a fine band you met, O Ibnu'l-Huqayq,
And you too, Ibnu'l-Ashraf,
Travelling by night with their light swords
Bold as lions in their jungle lair
Until they came to you in your quarter
And made you taste death with their deadly swords,
Seeking victory for the religion of their prophet
Counting their lives and wealth as nothing. [6]

FINAL THOUGHTS

Many Muslims are familiar with narratives which exemplify the Prophet's patient endurance against adversity. A common tradition is quoted whereby the prophet visited a sick woman even though she had consistently missed no opportunity to throw garbage at him.

The Quran also calls for the Prophet to be patient and endure against adversity.

074:007

"And for the sake of your Lord, be patient"

020.130

"Therefore be patient with what they say and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun and before its setting; yea, celebrate them for part of the hours of the night, and at the sides of the day: that you may have (spiritual) joy"

050.039-40

"Therefore (O Muhammad) bear with what they say and hymn the praise of thy Lord before the rising and before the setting of the sun; And in the night-time hymn His praise, and after the prostrations"

013:032

"And messengers before you were certainly mocked at, but I gave respite to those who disbelieved, then I destroyed them; how then was My requital (of evil)?"

Yet, the historical reports capture incidents where the prophet called for the murder of a woman due to her crude poetry and incitement against Muslims because she felt she had been wronged. Or incidents which involved torture and deception for the purposes of murder.

The Quran is clear, that no life is to be taken unless for two purposes:

- (a) For just retribution in the case of murder (for unintentional manslaughter, see 4:92)
- (b) For spreading sheer corruption in the land (5:33)

It is inconceivable to imagine that a Prophet of God who remained an example for his people would not have upheld his Divine Lord's teachings.

It is also clear that both the Ahadith corpus and the Sira (biography) genre are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they seem to draw from a common pool of narratives. Many Muslims have no qualms in quoting historical facts picking and choosing palatable narratives whilst rejecting others. This kind of arbitrary selection does little to propagate the true message of Islam or provide a convincing argument.

The question remains for the reader. Have the canonised Ahadith narratives really been exclusively collated, independent of questionable historical sources? Or, are they heavily influenced by the pool of traditions by historians already in the public domain for nearly 100 years before them?

Related Articles:

- (1) [The Beautiful Character of Prophet Muhammad \(pbuh\)](#)
- (2) [Ibn Ishaq's Sira of Prophet Muhammad \(pbuh\)](#)

REFERENCES

[1] GUILLAUME. A, **The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah**, Oxford University Press, Page 515.

Highlights in black text are my own insertions and are for clarification and emphasis only.

[2] **Ibid., Page 675-676. Notes: (1) Two tribes of Yamani origin. (2) Cf. Sura 11.58**

Highlights in black text are my own insertions and are for clarification and emphasis only.

[3] **SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 5, Book 59, Number 369, Translations: KHAN, M. M - Translations available online and in appropriate bookstores. [Online] Translation available at: <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/059-sbt.php> [Accessed 5th October 2011].**

Any bold emphasis are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[4] **SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 4, Book 52, Number 271. Translations: KHAN, M. M - Translations available online and in appropriate bookstores. [Online] Translation available at: <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/052-sbt.php> [Accessed 7th October 2011].**

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[5] **GUILLAUME. A, The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah, Oxford University Press, Page 367.**

Highlights in black text are my own insertions and are for clarification and emphasis only.

[6] **Ibid., Page 368-369.**

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