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# Prophet Muhammad's Relations with Christians (An Islamic Perspective)

Hz. Peygamber'in Hristiyanlarla İliřkisi

Seyfettin Erřahin\*



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**Abstract**

As far as Prophet Muhammad's relations with the Christians is concerned, there is a great deal of lay approaches that proved to be controversial, and a limited number of scientific studies conducted by both Muslim and Christian scholars. However, most of these studies demonstrate Christians to take an accusatory and aggressive approach, while Muslims to present an apologetic attitude as if there is an underlying feeling of inferiority complex that stems from feelings around inadequacy and insecurity.

In this article, we present an Islamic perspective to the topic with references to the main Islamic sources, while also communicating a descriptive approach that is vary of the ongoing tensions that either defends or attacks the matter. The Islamic sources the article utilised hereby are the Holy Qur'an, canonicals of hadiths and sirah literature. In addition, there are refutations argued by the Christians, dates back to the 8th century. The scope of the framework also covers Muslim relations with Jews and Christians through the concept of *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book/Scripture, later including Sabians, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Assyrians etc.), and moves its emphasis on Christians alone. To note, members of divine religions such as Jews and Christians are called Ahl al-Kitab in the Islamic civilization. Although this group is not in the category of infidels who deny Allah, yet they are considered non-Muslims as they do not accept Muhammad as a prophet. The Qur'an contains several provisions related to People of the Book. Some verses are directly related to the beliefs of People of the Book, while others regulate the legal and human relations with them. Here, current work explores the dynamics of these relations from religious, humanitarian, political-military etc. aspects.

**Öz**

Hiz. Muhammed'in Hristiyanlarla ilişkileri dünya barışı için önemlidir. Konu hakkında tartışmalı çok sayıda yaklaşım yanında hem Müslüman hem de Hristiyan bilim insanlarıncaya yapılan sınırlı sayıda bilimsel çalışma bulunmaktadır. Ancak bu çalışmaların çoğu, Hristiyanların suçlayıcı ve saldırgan bir yaklaşım sergilediklerini, Müslümanların ise yetersizlik ve güvensizlik duygularından kaynaklanan kompleksle savunmacı bir tutum izlediklerini göstermektedir. Oysa her konu gibi bu da nesnel yaklaşımla ele alınmak durumundadır.

Bu makalede, biz konuya ana İslami kaynaklar Kur'an-ı Kerim ve hadisler ile tarih ve siyer kitaplarının "İslami bakış açısı" sunarken, aynı zamanda savunan ya da saldıran yaklaşımlardan uzak durduk. Konuyu Ehl-i kitab kavramı çerçevesinde değerlendirdik. Zira, İslam medeniyetinde Yahudiler ve Hristiyanlar gibi ilahi din mensuplarına Ehl-i Kitap denir; sonraları Sabiler, Hindular, Mecusiler, Asuriler vb. de bu kategoride değerlendirilmiştir). Her ne kadar bu kesimler Allah'ı inkâr eden kafirler kategorisinde olmasa da Hiz. Muhammed'i peygamber olarak kabul etmedikleri için gayrimüslim sayılırlar. Kur'an, Ehl-i Kitap ile ilgili çeşitli hükümler içermektedir. Biz Hiz. Muhammed'in Hristiyanlarla ilişkilerini Mekke ve Medine dönemlerine ayırıp hem teorik/teolojik hem de pratik yönleriyle söz konusu ettik. İstisnalar dışında, ilişkilerin insani ve karşılıklı sorumluluk ve saygı içinde geliştiğini tespit ettik.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam, Hiz. Muhammed, Hristiyanlar, ilişki, birlikte yaşama, çoğulculuk.

*“...And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians.” (al-Maida, 5/82)*

## Introductory Remarks

The world's population constitute nearly 2.3 billion Christians (31.1%) and 1.9 billion Muslims (24.9%) that accounts for more than half of the total number (7.79 billion) according to the latest statistics.<sup>[1]</sup> (2050'de 2.9 billion 31.4 Christian, 2.7 billion 29.7 Muslim) The relations between them decisively influence the world from religious, intellectual, political, economic and social aspects. The origins of these relations go back to the relations that Muhammad established with Christians during his time according to the Qur'an. The determination of the quantity and nature of Muhammad's relations keeps making a great contribution to world peace, prosperity and tranquility since his days.

There is a great deal of lay approaches that proved to be controversial, and a limited number of scientific studies conducted by both Muslim and Christian scholars. However, most of these studies demonstrate Christians to take an accusatory and aggressive approach, while Muslims to be following a defensive/apologetic attitude as if there is an underlying feeling of inferiority complex that stems from feelings around inadequacy and insecurity.

In this article, we present an Islamic perspective to the topic with references to the main Islamic sources, while also communicating a descriptive approach that is vary of the ongoing tensions that either defends or attacks the matter. The Islamic sources the article utilized hereby are the Holy Qur'an, canonicals of hadiths and sirah literature. In addition, there are refutations argued by the Christians, dates back to the 8th century. The scope of the framework also covers Muslim relations with Jews and Christians through the concept of *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book/Scripture), and moves its emphasis on Christians alone. To note, members of divine religions such as Jews and Christians are called Ahl al-Kitab in the Islamic civilization. Although this group is not in the category of infidels who deny Allah, yet they are considered non-Muslims as they do not accept Muhammad as a prophet. The Qur'an contains several provisions related to People of the Book. Some verses are directly related to the beliefs of People of the Book, while others regulate the legal and human relations with them. Here, current work explores the dynamics of these relations from religious, humanitarian, and political-military aspects.

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[1] PEW, "Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050", Pew Research Center. 2 April 2015. Archived from the original on 15 June 2020. Retrieved 5 May 2020. (04.10.2021); <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Dunya-Nufus-Gunu-2021-37250> (08.10.2021)

### A. Christianity among the Arabs

Scholars argue that in the years Islam was born, there were 15 million Christians among Eastern Arabs.<sup>[2]</sup> A variety of sects/groups, including the Nestorians/Assyrians, Monophysites, and Dyophysites/Malkites had a strong chance that Muhammad may encountered them. Considering the relations with Christians, the first encounters we recall are among the Eastern Roman Empire and its satellite/vassal states. The reason might rely heavily on the fact that this empire held massive power and symbolized a flagbearer of Christianity on both religious and political-military fields. In the time, the Ghassanids in Syria, the Copts in Egypt, and even the Christians of Abyssinia and Najran were directly or indirectly connected to the Eastern Rome. Perhaps it was only the Hiran Christians were vassals of the Sassanid Empire that did not identify their faith in accordance with the Roman Empire.<sup>[3]</sup>

After abandoning the creed of Monotheism, the Jews, who had come under the rule of the Romans, began to expect the arrival of a new prophet, a savior, a Messiah who would save them. God brought Jesus into the world through the Virgin Mary. Although Jesus showed miracles from his birth, and although there were very few who believed in him, his message spread afterwards through his apostles. Over time, various sects were born among the descendants. Christianity had the status of an official religion in Eastern Roman Empire. Although Orthodoxy Christianity was the predominant religion in Eastern Rome, there were other forms of different religions that existed. In Constantinople, the Nestorian-Syriac, Abyssinian and Coptic Armenian churches were represented independently and engaged in activities freely. Egypt and Abyssinia, neighboring the Arabian Peninsula and in which the Arabs had relations, were dominated by the Monophysite, and Jerusalem was dominated by the Trinity doctrine. To create a common ground, the Eastern Roman Emperor Constantine ruled all his Christian subjects to join the sect Dyophysitism during a council held in Chalcedon/Kadıköy with the underlying purpose of unifying different sects blooming under his rule.<sup>[4]</sup> This religious-political project did not interest many followers, since it required absolute subordination to the king, and the idea itself being a by-product of the King himself. Muqawqis was appointed by the Eastern Roman Empire as governor and bishop of Egypt to spread this sect, and meanwhile the Ghassanis

[2] İbrahim Kalın, Ben, Öteki ve Ötesi İslam-Batı İlişkileri Tarihine Giriş, (I, the Other and Beyond: An Introduction to the History of Islamic-Western Relations), İnsan pub., İstanbul, 2016, p. 74.

[3] Neşet Çağatay, İslam Öncesi Arap Tarihi (Pre-Islamic Arab History), Ankara Üniversitesi pub., Ankara, 1963, p. 68-74; Salih Kesgin, Hz. Muhammed ve Öteki (Muhammad and the Other), İnsan pub., İstanbul, 2016, 32-34.

[4] Mehmet Aydın, "Hıristiyanlık: Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar" (Christianity: Sects and Orders), DİA, v. 17, p. 353-355.

who adopted this new sect followed a policy of establishing good relations with Egyptians. Additionally, the Kalb, Taghlib, Lahm, Cüzam, Kayn Baliyy, Kuda and some other Arab tribes living in the same region had also partially or completely converted to Christianity.<sup>[5]</sup>

As a matter of fact, there is none solid documents that records Christianity to gain a strong foothold among Arabs of Arabia back in the time. Furthermore, Marcus Julius Philippus (244-249), known as Philip the Arab, who took the Roman throne in the middle of the 3rd century, accepted Christianity only to remain private and did not identify himself with it in the public domain. In the 5th century, some of the Ghassanids that were in the buffer zone on the Syria-Jerusalem route on the Eastern Roman-Arabian border accepted a form of Christianity called Monophysite. The members of the sect Nestorianism, founded by the patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, were also known as Assyrians or Syrians. When Nestorianism was excluded by Eastern Romans and subjected to prosecution, it retreated to the territory of the Sasanids. Hire was one of them. Copticism was an Eastern Church based in Alexandria, which also had an influence on Abyssinia. Even though the kingdom of Aksum was run independently, they still accepted the authority of the Coptic Church. Christianity also gained adherents among the Lakhmids-Hirans. Numan bin Munzir, the head of the Lakhmids, was converted to Nestorian Christianity between 583 and 602. Essentially, Hira, the capital of the Lakhmis, had been the centre of Nestorianism since the 4th century. In fact, this sect even had a base further south, on the eastern shores of the Persian Gulf. So much so that there were Nestorian bishops in Bahrain, which is considered to be the eastern coast of Arabia. In addition, there was a Monophysite community that accepted Christianity through Abyssinia in the Najran region on the border with Yemen. There are no clear records about when Christianity was preached there.<sup>[6]</sup>

When Prophet Muhammad began to transmit the message of Islam, the Christians in Mecca consisted of foreigners, slaves, and locals without a church. There are no exact records on the religious nature of the few Christians of Hejaz and their relations with the Eastern Rome. They also did not have a temple or church.<sup>[7]</sup> Moreover, most of the Christians to whom Prophet Muhammad

[5] Nadir Özkuyumcu, "Hıristiyanlarla İlişkiler" (Relations with Christians), *İslam Tarihi ve Medeniyeti v. 1: Hz. Peygamber Dönemi*, ed. Hüseyin Algül, Rıza Savaş, Siyer pub. İstanbul, 2021, p. 543.

[6] Adnan Demircan, "İslam Öncesi Arap Yarımadasının Dini, Siyasi, Sosyo-Kültürel ve Ekonomik Tarihi" (Religious, Political, Socio-Cultural and Economic History of the Pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula), *İslam Tarihi ve Medeniyeti v. 1: Hz. Peygamber Dönemi*, ed. Hüseyin Algül, Rıza Savaş, Siyer pub. İstanbul, 2021, p. 146.

[7] Özkuyumcu, p. 547.

received an interlocutor for his invitation were of Arab origin. In addition, to fulfil his divine duty, he contacted several rulers of states (kings) through envoys including the Eastern Rome and Abyssinia. However, it is also fair to suggest that they also had a Monophysite understanding of Christianity, which was rather derived from Syria.

## B. General Principles of Prophet Muhammad's Relations with Non-Muslims

In the Qur'an, Muhammad b. Abdullah is called to be the last prophet (al-Ahzab, 33/40) and mercy whom is bestowed upon the worlds (al-Anbiya, 21/107). The underlying framework of his relations with members of other religions or non-Muslims is defined in the Quran. The provisions or principles of this framework comprise basic human rights and the freedom of conscience. The following provisions are found in the verses sent down during the period of Mecca:

*"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance." (al-Nahl, 16/125)*

*"Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just." (al-Mumtahina, 60/8)*

*"Say: O ye that reject Faith! I worship not that which ye worship, Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship, Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your Way, and to me mine." (al-Kafirun, 109/1-6)*

*"Say, "The truth is from your Lord": Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it)." (al-Kehf, 18/29)*

In the verses of the Medina period, these provisions are expressed in a different manner, as follows;

*"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things." (al-Baqara, 2/256)*

*"Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus, have We made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord, and We shall then tell them the truth of all that they did." (al-Anam, 6/108)*

### C. Prophet Muhammad's Theological Approach to Christianity

The method and content of Prophet Muhammad's invitation/communiqué relevant to Christianity and Christians for both Mecca and Medina period, are covered in the Qur'an. From these verses we also gather information about his relations with Christians in the early years of the communiqué.

Following the provisions of Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad behaved to People of the Book as the creation of Allah regardless of their path. He treated those who were not hostile with a measure of humanity; ate at their tables; visited their patients, provided material and moral assistance to the needy of them, paid respect at their funerals. He sent invitation letters to the leaders of the Christians, explaining that "there is no God but Allah and he is servant and messenger of Allah", and invited them "to worship Allah, who is the only one and has no partner". He emphasized that he believed in the prophets before him, especially Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus, and that Jesus was the spirit and word that Allah gave to Maryam, pure and pure, untouched by him. He also expressed his closeness to Jesus with the following statement "I am the closest to Jesus, the son of Mary, in this world and in the hereafter with people." (Bukhari, "Anbiya", 48) Meanwhile the Qur'an affirmed that it was wrong for People of the Book to believe in some of the prophets and deny others:

*"Those who deny Allah and His messengers, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His messengers, saying: "We believe in some but reject others": And (those who) wish to take a course midway, They are in truth (equally) unbelievers; and we have prepared for unbelievers a humiliating punishment. (al-Nisa, 4/150-151).*

Verses of 15-37 of chapter 19/Surah Maryam, which was revealed in Mecca, details the birth of Mary to Jesus without a father. When Mary was accused of defiling chastity, she instead asked his accusers to talk to him, pointing to Jesus. Upon this, Jesus in the cradle spoke out and said:

*"16: Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. 17: She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them: then We sent to her Our angel and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. 18: She said: "I seek refuge from thee to (Allah) Most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear Allah." 19: He said: "Nay I am only a messenger from thy Lord (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son." 20: She said: "How shall I have a son seeing that no man has touched me and I am not unchaste?" 21: He said: "So (it will be): thy Lord saith 'That is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us': it is a matter (so) decreed." 22: So she conceived him and she retired with him to a remote place. 23: And the*

*pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: she cried (in her anguish): "Ah! would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" 24: But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-free): "Grieve not! for thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; 25: "And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-tree: it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. 26: "So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man say 'I have vowed a fast to (Allah) Most Gracious and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being.' 27: At length she brought the (babe) to her people carrying him (in her arms). They said: "O Mary! truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! 28: "O sister of Aaron! thy father was not a man of evil nor thy mother a woman unchaste!" 29: But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" 30: He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; 31: "And He hath made me Blessed wheresoever I be and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live; 32: "(He) hath made me kind to my mother and not overbearing or miserable; 33: "So Peace is on me the day I was born the day that I die and the Day that I shall be raised up to life (again)"! 34: Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth about which they (vainly) dispute. 35: It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it "Be" and it is. 36: Verily Allah is my Lord and your Lord: Him therefore serve ye: this is a Way that is straight. 37: But the sects differ among themselves: and woe to the Unbelievers because of the (coming) Judgment of a momentous Day!" (Maryam 19/16-37)*

In some surahs of the Mecca period, the reason behind Jesus to be sent as a prophet to the children of Israel is explained as follows:

*"When Jesus came with Clear Signs, he said: "Now have I come to you with Wisdom, and in order to make clear to you some of the (points) on which ye dispute: therefore, fear Allah and obey me." (al-Zuhruf 43/63)*

The verse that was sent down during the Hijra frames the policies Messenger of Allah followed in Medina towards People of the Book, as follows:

*"And dispute ye not with People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)." (al-Ankabut, 29/46),*

The following verse also emphasize the invitation methods of Messenger of Allah further:

*"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance." (en-Nahl, 16/125)*

Prophet Muhammad tried to establish good relations with People of the Book. He designated the direction of worship (Qibla) to Jerusalem, which also is the Qibla of the Jews, as well as being the holy place Jesus ascended to heaven. He respected to Jews on issues that did not come in revelations to him.<sup>[8]</sup> As an example, on the tenth of the month of Muharram, he fasted the Ashura fast Jews traditionally followed.<sup>[9]</sup> He allowed Muslims to eat what they slaughtered and marry their chaste women (al-Maida, 5/5), and told the stories of Israel.<sup>[10]</sup> In accordance with Quran, he accepted that it was mandatory for Jews to believe in the religion of Torah and invited them to Islam.

Prophet Muhammad remained true to this method also after his emigration to Yasrib/Madinah.

*"The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah -(4541) the which We have sent by inspiration to thee - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than Allah, hard is the (way) to which thou callest them." (as-Shura, 42/13).*

The provisions regarding People of the Book were quite lenient in the verses of Madinah. It was recalled that among them there are believers and followers of the truth:

*"And there are, certainly, among People of the Book, those who believe in Allah, in the revelation to you, and in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to Allah. They will not sell the Signs of Allah for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord, and Allah is swift in account." (Al-i Imran, 3/199)*

*"But those among them who are well-grounded in knowledge, and the believers, believe in what hath been revealed to thee and what was revealed before thee: And (especially) those who establish regular prayer and practice regular charity and believe in Allah and in the Last Day: To them shall We soon give a great reward." (al-Nisa, 4/162)*

In the context of theological-social relations, getting married with Christian women and eat from the food of the Ahl al-Kitab are also allowed:

[8] al-Bukhari, "Menakib al-ansar", 52.

[9] al-Bukhari, "Savm", 69.

[10] Abu Dawud, "Ilim", 11.

*"This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among People of the Book, revealed before your time, - when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues if any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter, he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)." (al-Maida, 5/5)*

The Qur'an also distinguishes among People of the Book with regards to their attitudes towards Muslims:

*"You will find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud." (al-Maida, 5/82)*

However, the Quran reveals the state of moral and material corruption of Christianity faced after Jesus; call such faiths as "blasphemy". First of all, the Qur'an point out the role of Christian clerics for corruptions:

*"They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One Allah. there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him)." O ye who believe! there are indeed many among the priests and anchorites, who in falsehood devour the substance of men and hinder (them) from the way of Allah. And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah. Announce unto them a most grievous penalty." (al-Tawba, 9/31, 34)*

We summarize the corruptions in detail through the following paragraphs.

1. The Bible is corrupted: The Qur'an declares the original versions of the ancient holy books reliable and invited both Muslims and the People the Book to believe in them (al-Maida 5/44; al-Anam 6/91; al-Anbiya 21/48). Nevertheless, it also points out the Ahl al-Kitab to falsify some of the verses in the holy books. With regards to the matter, the Quran constitute either a response or warning to Ahl al-Kitab who reacted to the revelation of the Qur'an with a negative attitude, that the Quran is a revelation like the other holy books and they should believe in it; or it simply warns believers on their so-called righteous path. The following verses exemplify those:

*"From those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a Covenant, but they forgot a good part of the message that was sent them: so we estranged them, with enmity and hatred between the one and the other,*

*to the day of judgment. And soon will Allah(715-A) show them what it is they have done.” (al-Maida, 5/14)*

*“And remember Allah took a covenant from People of the Book, to make it known and clear to mankind, and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and purchased with it some miserable gain! And vile was the bargain they made!” (Al-i Imran: 3/187)*

2. ‘Trinity’ Means Three Gods: The Qur’an states that Christians worship three gods, and them to view the Christian Trinity consisting of the Father, the Son, and Mary:

*“In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary. Say: “Who then hath the least power against Allah, if His will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, his mother, and all every - one that is on the earth? For to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between. He createth what He pleaseth. For Allah hath power over all things.” (al-Maida, 5/17)*

*“They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.” (al-Maida, 5/73)*

3. God Cannot Have a Son: The Qur’an objects Christians in believing God has a son:

*“The Jews call ‘Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah’s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!” (al-Tawba 9/60)*

The Qur’an affirms that having a Son would entail physical procreation and would violate God’s Tawheed, or oneness.

*“Say: ‘He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him” (al-Ikhlās 112/1-4).*

4. Jesus is Not God: Islam declares that Jesus is among prophets of Allah Almighty. According to Islam accepting Jesus a God is blasphemy. Islam asserts that Jesus was born of a virgin and he was of the righteous:

*“She said: “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?” He said: “Even so: Allah createth what He willeth: When He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, ‘Be,’ and it is!” (Al-i Imran 3:47)*

*“He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous.” (Al-i Imran 3/46)*

Jesus was God’s Messenger and His Word:

*“O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary,*

*and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs." (al-Nisa 4/171)*

5. Jesus was Not Crucified: The following two verses inform us on Jesus's last moments on the earth and his prospective future:

*"That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah;- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not, Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise." (al-Nisa, 4/157-158)*

*"Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute." (Al-i Imran, 3/55)*

#### D. Social, Political and Religious Relations

Residing in the Hejaz region (Macca, Madinah and Taif), Muhammad always had ongoing social relations with Christians. While he kept daily contact with indigenous Christians in the Hejaz and he also established business with those Christians to the outside of the region. We could explore such relations in two distinct timelines; pre-prophetic and prophetic periods. The theoretical basis of the relations of the second period, was ruled out by the Qur'an. Next paragraphs go in detail with regards to these timelines.

#### E. Pre-Prophetic Period

There is a strong argument on whether those Christians Muhammad was in contact conveyed a Biblical influence on his faith and the Quran. Accepting this argument would falsely lead us to suspect his prophethood rather than appointed by God Himself. Among those Christians who were in contact with Muhammad they were either locals or of foreign origin. The following verse, which was revealed in response to the claims of idolaters of Mecca, sheds light into this argument:

*"We know indeed that they say, "It is a man that teaches him." The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign, while this is Arabic, pure and clear." (al-Nahl 16/103)*

However, following the early invitations of Prophet Muhammad to Islam, the Meccan polytheists insisted on denying the divine revelation, claiming that he received this information from a Christian slave who was not an Arab, and whom he worked as a blacksmith in Mecca.

## F. Relations with the Priests of Busra-Syria

### 1. Matter of Bahira: The Reverend Priest

During his pre-prophetic years, scholars suggest Muhammad to go on two commercial expeditions to Syria and met a priest in every each of them. However, others argue on him meeting with the same priest during these two expeditions.

According to a narration that is widely accepted, the first one occurred when Muhammad was a child (at the age of 8-9, or 12) accompanied by his uncle Abu Talib, and he met with the Nestorian priest Bahira at his monastery near Busra in Syria. In fact, the real name of this priest is Sergius. Bahira or Behira is the title of this priest and has the meaning of "chosen" in the Aramaic language. Sources note that he was from the Abdulkays tribe, and one rumor claims him to be from the Teyma Jews, and him to convert to Christianity later on. Bahira was excommunicated by the Church for rejecting the submission of Jesus to the divinity, the "Father-Son-Holy Spirit" and advocating monotheism. Having acquired a monastery on the Busra road, he lived an ascetic life and kept inviting passengers to Tawhid. Alas, he died before the prophethood of Muhammad. According to Muslim sources, Bahira is a priest who recites the texts/booklets/suhufs of past prophets. From these texts, he deciphered some knowledge on a prospective prophet of the Arabs, and his prophetic signs. He witnessed those signs in the aura of little Muhammad, including the seal of the prophethood on his back. Then he warned Abu Talib on some members of People of the Book were expecting a prophet of the same origin and they will harm him. As narrated, he also prevented Muhammad from three men among People of the Book. Immediately Abu Talib took action and left with Muhammad back to Mecca.<sup>[11]</sup>

While Muslim scholars record that Muhammad also encountered him when he went with Khadija's caravan at the age of 25, other sources suggest him to meet with the priest Nestor at this expedition.<sup>[12]</sup>

However, some Muslim scholars argue this narrative to be not in line with the authenticity requirements with regards to the criteria of chain/sanad and

[11] Mustafa Fayda, "Bahîrâ", *DÎA* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi), v. 4, p.486-487.

[12] Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah)*, translated by: A. Guillaume, Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, 1998, p.79-81.

narrator/ravi. In particular, contemporary Muslim researchers emphasize the Bahira event to be off significant to Muhammad's personality or Islam itself. Even if so, they challenge the notion of young child to recall such theological thought he acquired during a short exchange when the time comes in almost 30 years. On the other hand, the Christian version of the narration falsifies Muhammad's prophetic claim. Even more, Bahira is assaulted to be a perverted Nestorian or Jacobite. Thus, they attribute the inspiration of the Qur'an and even its author to this perversion. The first version of the narration, the apocalypse of Bahira, allegedly belongs to Isho'yabh, who met with Bahira. English Arabic and Syriac copies of this text were published by the British-born Jewish American orientalist R.J.H. Gottheil (d.1936). He then suggested these texts seem to be purposefully created to fuel a hostile attitude towards Islam, arguing the origins of Islam or Muhammad's inspiration was Judaism.<sup>[13]</sup> These sorts of acclaims still have room in the current agenda of some orientalists, while Muslim scholars criticize and reject the narrative, as mentioned above. Regardless, the Muslim tradition utilizes the narrative in favour of the fact that there will be a prophet in the future; which could be taken as a heralded event which was deciphered from those texts of the Ahl al-Kitab.<sup>[14]</sup>

The matter has always maintained its vitality in Muslim-Christian relations. Narration works bilaterally. The Qur'an informs that prophet Muhammad is in the footsteps of the past prophets of People of the Book, emphasizing that their prophets also remained in the path of truth. This is mainly in response to the arguments of John of Damascus (d.750) who claims Muhammad was a false prophet as he had received all of his information from heretics and Christians with very little understanding.<sup>[15]</sup>

## 2. Matter of Nestor: The Reverend Priest

In this narrative, at the age of twenty-five, Muhammad lead Meccan business woman Khadija's caravan to the Syria with her slave Maysara. They

[13] Richard James Horatio Gottheil, *A Christian Bahira Legend*, Published by Facsimile Publisher, 2016, p 215, Turkish trans. Bir Hristiyan Bahîrâ Efsanesi - Bir Tahrîf Örneği (XI-XII. yüzyıl), tr. Fatmatüz Zehra Kamacı, İstanbul: İnkılâb Basım pub., 2008.

[14] Ibn Ishaq- Guillaume, pp.79-81; İbn Hisham, es-Sîre, v. I, pp. 180-183; İbn Sa'd, al-Tabakâtü'l-Kübrâ, Dâru Sâdir, Beyrut, 1985, v. I, pp. 121, 153-155; Hamîdullah, İslâm Peygamberi, çev. Salih Tuğ, İstanbul, 1980, v. I, p. 50-51; Mustafa Fayda, "Bahîrâ", DÎA, v. 4, pp. 486-487; Halis Demir - Recep Tayyip Gedikli - Mikail Şeker, "İslâm Tarihindeki Bir Vakânın Yorum Kritiği: Rahip Bahira Olayı" (Criticism of the Interpretation of a Case in the History of Islam: The Case of the Priest Bahira), Ağrı İslâmi İlimler Dergisi, 2018 (2); Ahmet Erçetin, "Rivâyetler ve Farklı Yorumlar Işığında Rahip Bahîrâ Olayı" (In the Light of Narrations and Different Interpretations, the Priest Bahira Incident. Yüksek Lisans tezi, Selçuk Üniversitesi, 2008.

[15] İbrahim Sarıçam, Mehmet Özdemir, Seyfettin Erşahin, İngiliz ve Alman Oryantalistlerin Hz. Muhammed Tasavvuru, (The Mohammedan Conception of the British and German Orientalists) Nobel pup. Ankara, 2011, p. 55-57.

stayed at the same monastery of Busra again. However, in the meantime, the priest Bahira was deceased and replaced with a priest named Nestor. While Muhammad was resting under an olive tree next to the monastery, he caught Nestor's attention and called Maysara, whom he had met before, and asked who he was. Maysara said, "He is a person from the Quraysh of Mecca". Nestor was deeply absorbed in thought for a moment. Then he said, 'No one has ever come down under that tree but the prophet.' Next, he asked Maysara 'Is there a little red in his eye?'. Upon receiving a nod, he expressed "He is a prophet. He is the last of the prophets" with confidence.<sup>[16]</sup>

This narration reminds us the Bahira event in many aspects. That is, the prophetic announcement of Muhammad, and his refusal of the oath to Lat and Uzza during the exchange of communication are narrated in the same manner. Therefore, some Muslims raise questions to these records. Firstly, these narrations only strengthen our belief of a prophet who kept revealing miracles or been surrounded by miracles since his birth. However, these arguments are not supported by the Quran itself. Moreover, when the first revelation came to him, both Muhammad and his wife Khadija were surprised and turned to Waraqa b. Nawfal for him to explain them what was happening. For these reasons, we assume these narrations may not be authentic at all.<sup>[17]</sup>

## G. The Prophetic Period

Islamic accounts inform about those relations the Prophet had with Christians during the Macca period as follows.

## H. Relations with Christians of the Hijaz Region

There are still discussions around whether Muhammad was also recognized as a Prophet by People of the Book residing in Mecca.

### 1. Relations with Waraqa of Macca

Actually, there seems to be an existing relationship between Muhammad and Waraqa b. Nawfal who was competent in Hebrew, read the Torah and the Bible, and was also a Nestorian Christian scholar. Some Muslim authors record that Muhammad also met with Waraqa when he immediately married Khadija. According to Ibn Ishaq, Maysara told Khadija about their meetings with the priest Nestor during their expedition to Busra. Khadija conveyed this news to her uncle's son Waraqa. Hearing this news, Waraqa responded as

[16] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, p. 82.

[17] Muhammed Hamidulah, "Hz. Peygamber'in Risâlet Öncesi Seyahatleri" (Pre-Propethood Travels of Muhammad), tr:Abdullah Aydınli, İslâmî İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi, Ankara, 1980, p. 331.

follows “If this is true Khadija, Verily Muhammad is the prophet of this people. I knew that prophet of this people was to be expected. His time has come.”<sup>[18]</sup>

When Muhammad received the first revelation, he consulted with his wife Khadija in awe. Khadija then took Muhammad to Waraqa. He, upon hearing the story, told Muhammad that the angel who appeared before him was Namus (archangel Gabriel or Torah), who also appeared to Moses (Jesus in some narrations). He informed Muhammad that he was the last prophet expected by the Jews and Christians, and when he makes his announcement of prophecy eventually, him and his followers will be ostracized. In the face of an adversity, he reassured Muhammad that he will help him as best as he could provide providing that he is still alive and healthy. Waraqa died soon after.<sup>[19]</sup> Some Muslim scholars believe that Waraqa was among many other Christians residing in Mecca who knew about the future of Muhammad (al-Qasas, 28/51-52). The following verses also point to this:

*“Those to whom We have given the Book know this as they know their own sons. Those who have lost their own souls refuse therefore to believe.”*  
(al-Anam, 6/20)

*“Those to whom We have given the Book rejoice at what hath been revealed unto thee: but there are among the clans those who reject a part thereof. Say: “I am commanded to worship Allah, and not to join partners with Him. Unto Him do I call, and unto Him is my return.”* (er-Rad, 13/36)

## 2. Relations the Priest Abu Amir al-Rahib of Madinah

Yasrib (later named Madinah) was mainly composed of polytheistic Arabs and Jews before Islam. However, just like Mecca, there were also individuals who belonged to the Christianity or Hanif religion, such as Abu Amr al-Rahib of the Hazraj tribe. He was also a relative of Abdullah b Ubay b Selul, the head of the Medina hypocrites. According to some sources, he had previously adopted the Hanif religion and become a Christian. Although Abu Amr al-Rahib opposed to the emigration of Muslims to Madinah, he did not have the power to prevent it. Muhammad called him “Abu Amir al-Fasiq” (perverse, sinful). He then migrated to Mecca with fifty young people. Here he provoked the polytheists and encouraged them to attack to the Muslims. As a matter of fact, he was one of the instigators of the Badr conflict. He had participated in this battle with some of his men to fight alongside the Meccans.<sup>[20]</sup>

[18] Ibn Ishaq- Guillaume, p. 83.

[19] al-Bukhari, Bad’ al-wahy, 3; Ibn Ishaq- Guillaume, p. 107

[20] Ibn Sa’d, III, 540-541.

Even after facing a failure here, he maintained the same attitude in future military encounters and invited his compatriots of Madinah to rebel during the Ghazwa of Uhud, and took part in the ranks of the Maccan polytheists. When Macca was conquered by Messenger of Allah, he took refuge in Taif and fled to Syria after the successes of the Muslims in the Ghazwa of Hunayn (Havazin) and the Taif Campaign. However, during the Tabuk expedition, he sent a letter to the Hypocrites and opponents of Madinah, requesting an army to be prepared in the best possible way. Abu Amr had promised that he himself had contacted Eastern Roman Empire, that they would provide troops and clear Madinah of Muslims. In this context, the Hypocrites needed an alternative place / shrine to the Masjid al-Kuba where they could both get organized, and meet with Abu Amr in secret. They opened a masjid in the district of Salim b Avf, called Masjid-i Dirar (the mosque of harm); justifying this move with the rationale suggesting people were experiencing difficulties in reaching Masjid al-Kuba and Masjid al-Nebi on cold and rainy nights, and that the elderly could not keep up with the congregation. They also asked Prophet Muhammad to open this place or pray there before the Tabuk expedition. In the meantime, the Prophet received the following verses related to the subject:

*“And there are those who put up a mosque by way of mischief and infidelity - to disunite the Believers - and in preparation for one who warred against Allah and His Messenger aforetime. They will indeed swear that their intention is nothing but good; But Allah doth declare that they are certainly liars. Never stand thou forth therein. There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of the standing forth (for prayer) therein. In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure. Which then is best? - he that layeth his foundation on piety to Allah and His good pleasure? - or he that layeth his foundation on an undermined sandcliff ready to crumble to pieces? and it doth crumble to pieces with him, into the fire of Hell. And Allah guideth not people that do wrong. The foundation of those who so build is never free from suspicion and shakiness in their hearts, until their hearts are cut to pieces. And Allah is All-Knowing, Wise. (al-Tawba 9/107-110)*

In line with the verses, when Messenger of Allah returned from the expedition, he ordered a group to destroy the mosque in question.<sup>[21]</sup> The destroyed structure is sometimes referred to as Masjid al-shikak/discord or Masjid al-nifak/dissension. Abu Amr al-Rahib has always maintained a good relationship with Eastern Roman Empire and died in the palace of Emperor Heraclius (H. 10/A.D. 632).<sup>[22]</sup>

[21] Waqidi, Kitab al-Magāzi, edit. Marsden Jones, Oxford Uni press, 1966, III, 1046; Ibn Hisham, es-Sīretü'n-Nebevi, 1955, IV, 530.

[22] Ibn Hisham, IV, 530.

## I. Relations with Native Christian Communities

### 1. Relations with the Najran

Najran is a region of Arabia near the border of Yemen, almost 1200 miles from Medina. Today it is known as Ukhdud. It is at the junction of important trade routes. Christianity appeared in the region through Hannan (Hayyan), who traded with Hire in the 5th century, and then became the centre of the Eastern Church in Southern Arabia. He was a Monophysite refugee who fled the persecution of the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian (527-565 A.D). In the following years, the king of Himyarite, Zunuvas, converted to Judaism and threw Christians into ditches and burned them. Quran informs us about these events, calling the victims as believers”:

*“Woe to the makers of the pit (of fire), Fire supplied (abundantly) with fuel: Behold! They sat over against the (fire), And they witnessed (all) that they were doing against the Believers. And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, Exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise! - Him to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth! And Allah is Witness to all things.” (al-Buruj 85/4-9)*

Whereupon the East Roman-Abyssinian alliance sent an army to dethrone him and put an end to the Himyarite kingdom in A.D 525. The people of Najran also had connections with the Abyssinian kingdom, which led them to open up to the sphere of influence of Eastern Roman Empire. In Najran region, the largest tribe was the Beni Haris b. Ka’b (Belharis). During this period, a large number of churches and monasteries were built there. For example, a monastery-church called Ka’betu Najran (Deiru Najran) was built in the memory of Christians who were burned in the city. Meanwhile, the Church of Najran declared Haris b. Ka’b, the head of the martyrs, a saint and blessed him at Ka’betu Najran. Thus, the temple was transformed into one of the pilgrimage sites of Christians. Messenger of Allah invited various regions to Islam in the year of the delegations (Senetu’l-Wufud) of Medina (H. 9/A.D. 631). In this regard, he also sent a letter to people of Najran offering them to either convert to Islam or pay a jizya:

*“From Muhammad, the messenger of Allah, to the priests of Najran.*

*In the name of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’s God.*

*I call you to worship Allah instead of worshipping creatures. Again, I urge you to make an alliance agreement with Allah instead of your alliance with creatures. If you do not accept this, you will give the jizya, and if you refuse the jizya, I will fight you.*

*Wa’s-Salam”<sup>[23]</sup>*

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[23] Özkuyumcu, p. 556.

In response, the Christians of Najran sent a delegation of 60 people to Medina, including the emir / president “aqib” Abdul-masih” of the Kinde tribe, the religious leader “uskuf” Abu Harise b. Alkama and the finance and travel officer “sayyid” al-Ayham. The delegation arrived to Madinah, just after the Prophet and his companions had performed the afternoon prayer. So, they entered the Masjid and headed in the eastern direction, as it was time for their own worship. The Prophet let them to perform. The meeting lasted for three days in peace, and predominantly religious matters were discussed throughout. Meanwhile, the meeting came to a significant moment called “mubahala”, which means “to curse and curse together with the decoy and the cruel one”, according to the Quran (Al-i Imran 3/61). Abu Harisa, the head of the delegation, greets the Messenger of Allah by saying, “We have become Muslims before you”. However, the Prophet informs them that they cannot be considered Muslims since they consume pork, worship the cross, and accept Jesus as the son of Allah. In response, the delegation asks who the father of Jesus was. Muhammad does not answer immediately until the first eighty verses of Surah Al-Imran were revealed. These verses inform about Christianity, Jesus to born without a father, and the creation of Adam without a mother and father, including the verse of mubahala:

*“If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge Hath come to thee, say: “Come! let us gather together;- our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie!” (Al-i Imran 3/61)*

Thereupon, after gathering his daughter Fatima, son-in-law Ali, grandchildren Hassan and Hussein; Muhammad invited the delegation of Najran to the exchange and recited the revealing verses. Soon after a short consultation between themselves, the Najranids did not dare to decamp.<sup>[24]</sup>

Both sides agreed to disagree - that they acknowledge each other's religions but will stay committed to their own. Finally, they signed a treaty and returned to Najran. The Prophet told Abu Ubaidah b. al-Cerrah, “Go with them and judge decently between them on the issues they are in dispute with” and asked to arbitrate especially on financial issues. The treaty covered protection of Najranids' property, life and religious freedom, while issuing them to pay with 2,000 clothes of a jizya per year. Following statements constitute the treaty:

*“In the name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent.*

*This is what Muhammad, the Prophet and God's Messenger, has written down for the people of Najran when he has the authority over all their fruits, gold, silver, crops and slaves. He has benevolently left them all that*

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[24] Mustafa Fayda, “Mübâhale”, DÎA, v. 31, p. 425.

*in return for 2,000 hullas every year, 1,000 to be given in the month of Rajab and 1,000 in the month of Safar. Each hulla is equal to one ounce (a measure equal to 4 dirhams). The Najran are also required to provide accommodation and expenses for my messengers, for up to 20 days. None of my messengers shall be kept in Najran more than one month. They are also required to give, as a loan, 30 shields, 30 horses and 30 camels, in case of any disorder and treachery in Yemen. If anything is loss of the shields, horses or camels they loan to my messenger, it will remain owing by my messenger until it is given back. Najran has the protection of God and the pledges of Muhammad, the Prophet, to protect their lives, faith, land, property, those who are absent and those who are present, and their clan and allies. They need not change anything of their past customs. No right of theirs or their religion shall be altered. No bishop, monk or church guard shall be removed from his position. Whatever they have is theirs, no matter how big or small. They are not held in suspicion and they shall suffer no vengeance killing. They are not required to be mobilized and no army shall trespass on their land. If any of them requests that any right of his should be given to him, justice shall be administered among them. He who takes usury on past loans is not under my protection. No person in Najran is answerable for an injustice committed by another.<sup>[25]</sup>*

In the following years, Prophet Muhammad sent Khalid b. Walid with a force of 400 men, to Najran of Beni Haris b. Ka'b for another invitation to Islam (10 H/631 A.D). He gave the order to wait three days before using force. Upon the majority of the tribe converted to Islam, Najran became a member of the Madinah administration without using force. Khalid b. Walid stayed behind to teach religious provisions. He returned to Madinah with a Najran delegation and Prophet Muhammad himself gave treats and gifts to this delegation.

## 2. Relations with the Taghlib Tribe

The Beni Taghlib or Taghlib tribe, an Adnanian branch of the Northern Arabs, was amongst those well-recognized communities in the Thema region of Arabian Peninsula. Some of the sub-branches of the Taghlib tribe migrated to east and kept moving from Hejaz to Najid and Bahrain, and then from Iraq and Syria to the land of al-Jazeera, especially around Mosul, Sinjar and Nusaybin. Such movement lasted even after Islam was sent down. Thus, they became neighbors of the East Romans and the Sassanids, as well as their allies which were the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids at the time. Many of the members of

[25] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, p. 271-277; M. H. Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, American Trust Publications, 2005, p.54.; Mustafa Fayda, *İslamiyetin Güney Arabistan'a Yayılışı*, (Spread of Islam in Southern Arabia), Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi pub., Ankara, 1982, p. 29-30.

Beni Taglib also converted to Christianity there. In an incident back at the time, they also appeared in the Yemen region. In fact, during the period of the Ignorance/Jahiliyya, Beni Taghlib was a renounced tribe with its aggressive and warrior identity.<sup>[26]</sup>

In the Year of the Delegations (9 H/631 A.D) the Christians of Beni Taglib came to Madinah with a delegation of 16 people and appeared before the Prophet, declaring some of the tribe to become Muslims and follow his lead, and some others to remain in Christianity. In response, Muhammad included the following provision in the agreement between them: "The Christians of Beni Taghlib will remain in their religion (that is, Christianity). They will not baptize their children born after this agreement."<sup>[27]</sup>

To our knowledge, there are no further incidents that is recorded with regards to Beni Taghlib's relations to the Messenger of Allah.

## J. Relations with the Neighbouring Christian States

### 1. Relations with Abyssinia

It is noted that the first foreign citizens who became Muslims in the history of Islam were Abyssinian Christians. After hearing about Muhammad was designated as a prophet, the negus/najashi/king sent twenty Abyssinian Christians to Mecca to discuss the matter. Delegation found Prophet Muhammad in the Kaaba raised questions about the content of the invitation. The Prophet responded back with some verses from the Qur'an. The delegation, who listened the Qur'an wept, accepting Islam. In the Qur'an, this event is pointed out as follows:

*"Those to whom We sent the Book before this,- they do believe in this (revelation): And when it is recited to them, they say: "We believe therein, for it is the Truth from our Lord: indeed we have been Muslims (bowing to Allah.s Will) from before this. Twice will they be given their reward, for that they have persevered, that they avert Evil with Good, and that they spend (in charity) out of what We have given them. And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom and say: "To us our deeds, and to you yours; peace be to you: we seek not the ignorant." (Kasas 28/52-55)*

When Messenger o Allah started his invitation, he and his followers were subjected to severe oppression and torture by the idolaters of Mecca. After a while, with the divine permission, the emigration of some Muslims to Abyssinia took place. The verses that were revealed in this regard are as follows:

[26] Casim Avci, "Tağlib (Beni Tağlib)", DİA, v. 39, pp. 374-375.

[27] Ibn Sa'd, I, p. 316; Özkuyumcu, p. 561.

*“To those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression. We will assuredly give a goodly home in this world; but truly the reward of the Hereafter will be greater. If they only realised (this)! (They are) those who persevere in patience, and put their trust on their Lord.” (Nahl 16/41-42)*

Some scholars suggest there had been contacts between the Arabian Peninsula and ancient Christian homeland Abyssinia; including political, military and commercial relations with the Arabs in general, the Arabs of Mecca in particular. The leader of the Meccan Quraysh tribe, Hashim b. Abdimenaf received a concession from Negus to trade with Abyssinia. The incident of Negus’ arbitration towards the conflict between Abdulmuttalib b. Hashim and Harb b. Umayya indicates a close relationship between Mecca and Abyssinia.<sup>[28]</sup>

It is also possible to suggest Prophet Muhammad might also kept a positive attitude and confidence with Abyssinian Negus Ashama in the turn of these events. When the oppression and persecution of the Polytheists increased towards Muslims in Mecca, Messenger of Allah suggested those oppressed with the following statement of “a ruler who has never been wronged in his country is at work there; go and stay in the land of righteousness until Allah shows you a way out of the situation you are in”.<sup>[29]</sup> Besides, 15 people migrated to Abyssinia under the leadership of Jafar b. Abi Talib, the son of Muhammad’s uncle (615 A.D). During this occasion, the Prophet sent a letter to Ashama expressing his thoughts sincerely: *“I am sending Ca’fer, my nephew by my uncle, to you immediately with a small Muslim community with a small number of Muslims. Show them hospitality as soon as he gets to you.”* The letter was well received by Ashama. In the meantime, an interesting incident happened in Mecca, called as the Gharaniq incident. During this incident, the polytheists assumed Prophet Muhammad accepted their religion so they would also accept Islam in peace. Upon receiving the news, Muslims returned to Mecca from Abyssinia. However, when they realized that this was not the case, the second Abyssinian migration took place, which was attended by 103 Muslims, 18 of whom were women. Idolaters who got worried about these developments sent Amr b. al-As and Abdullah b. Abi Rabia to Abyssinia with some gifts and asked for the deportation of the muhajirs. Amr b. al-As responded as follows:

*“Some foolish fellows from our people have taken refuge in the king’s country. They have forsaken our religion and not accepted yours, but have brought in an invented religion which. neither we nor you know anything about. Our nobles have sent us to the king to get him to return them, so*

[28] Belazuri, Ansâbu’l-Aşrâf, tk., Süheyl Zekkâr- Riyad Zirikli, Beirut 1417/1996, I, 73.

[29] Ibn Hisham, I, 321-322.

*when we speak to the king about them advise him to surrender them to us and not to speak to them, for their own people have the keenest insight and know most about their faults.*"<sup>[30]</sup>

Ashama also wanted to hear the Muslims. Jafar b. Abi Talib took the lead and expressed his frustration with their ignorance, and then explained the goodness and beauty that Prophet Muhammad had offered them with Islam, and concluded his words as follows:

*"O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly, and our strong devoured our weak. Thus we were until God sent us an apostle whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness, and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge God's unity and to worship him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and kindly hospitality, and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and to speak lies, and to devour the property of orphans, to vilify chaste women. He commanded us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, and he gave us orders about prayer, almsgiving, and fasting (enumerating the commands of Islam). We confessed his truth and believed in him, and we followed him in what he had brought from God, and we worshipped God alone without associating aught with Him. We treated as forbidden what he forbade, and as lawful what he declared lawful. Thereupon our people attacked us, treated us harshly and seduced us from our faith to try to make us go back to the worship of idols instead of the worship of God, and to regard as lawful the evil deeds we once committed. So when they got the better of us, treated us unjustly and circumscribed our lives, and came between us and our religion, we came to your country, having chosen you above all others. Here we have been happy in your protection, and we hope that we shall not be treated unjustly while we are with you, O King."*<sup>[31]</sup>

When Ashama inquired about the approach of the Prophet towards Jesus, Jafar read the following verses:

*"But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; "And He hath made me Blessed wheresoever I be and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long*

[30] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, p. 150; İbrahim Sarıçam, Hz. Muhammed ve Evrensel Mesajı, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı matbaası, Ankara, 2001, p. 81.

[31] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, p. 151-152.

*as I live; "(He) hath made me kind to my mother and not overbearing or miserable; "So Peace is on me the day I was born the day that I die and the Day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!" (Maryam 19/29-33)*

The king Ashama listened and "...wept until his beard was wet and the bishops wept until their scrolls were wet, when they heard what he read to them. Then the Negus said, 'Of a truth, this and what Jesus brought have come from the same niche. You two may go, for by God, I will never give them up to them and they shall not be betrayed.'<sup>32]</sup>

Muslims who were sent to Abyssinia lived there in peace and security. This situation caused dissatisfaction among some administrators in Abyssinia, and as a result, an internal rebellion broke out. Sources report that Muslims sided with Ashama during this civil war, and after peace and stability were restored, they were rewarded with many gifts. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad sent Amr b. Umayya ad-Damrî to Negus Ashama with two letters and some gifts (7 H/629 A.D). In the first letter, he invited Ashama to Islam. In the second one, he asked Ashama to marry him with one of the muhajirs in Abyssinia, Umm Habiba, the daughter of Abu Sufyan, and also asked him to send the muhajirs to Medina subsequently. Ashama responded positively to the invitation and converted to Islam. As for the second request, he sent the muhajirs to Medina with a companion of seventy people, as well as with a gift package consisting of three short spears (cargoes), a ring, a pair of boots, an Egyptian dress, turban, underwear and a mule for Prophet Muhammad. Negus Ashama also sent a letter to him:

*"By Najashi to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.  
And the Messenger of Allah! Peace be upon you, and the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you! Allah, who is no god but Himself, guided me to Islam.  
And the Messenger of Allah! I have received your letter in which you mention the condition of Jesus. I swear by the Lord of the earth and the sky that His Holiness Jesus has not said much about himself other than what you have mentioned. And His message is the same as what you command.  
We have learned the principles of Islam, which you have been the officer of conveying to us. We have invited your uncle's son and his companions who emigrated to our land. I bear witness that You are the Messenger of Allah. You're true to your word. You are the truth and the truthful.  
And the Messenger of Allah! I have declared my allegiance to you through your uncle, who is Your representative. I have submitted myself before him to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. I'm sending you my son Erha. I have only my own property, and if you want me to come to you, O Messenger*

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[32] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, p. 146-153.

*of Allah, I will come immediately. I bear witness that what you say is true.  
O Messenger of Allah, Peace be upon you!..”<sup>[33]</sup>*

Muhajirs of Abyssinia returned to Medina during the conquest of Khyber (7 H/629 A.D). Upon sending the muhajirs back to Mecca, Ashama also had his son Erha escort them with a group of sixty men in another ship. Unfortunately, this ship sank, and all the passengers were drowned. When the Muhajirs and the Abyssinian delegation came to Medina, Prophet Muhammad himself gave them a blessing and a treat. In addition, he recited Surah Yasin after those who were drowned.<sup>[34]</sup> According to an account, the 82nd verse of the Maida surah was revealed upon the incident to signify the love Abyssinians had for Islam in their hearts.<sup>[35]</sup>

However, during these years Negus Ashama experienced troubled days. Muhammad had performed funeral prayers in absentia after the deceased Ashama.

Prophet Muhammad kept to continue contact with the Abyssinia. Sources mention another insincere letter sent to Abyssinia:

*“In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful  
From the Messenger of Allah Muhammad, king of the Abyssinians to  
Najashi;  
I inform you of the praise of Allah, the true Ruler, the Protector, the Savior,  
who is no god but himself. I confirm and bear witness that Isa, the son of  
Mary, is the Spirit and the Word of Allah, and (this word) is left to Mary,  
chaste, honest, no man has touched her. So She became pregnant with  
Jesus, and Allah created her just as He created Adam, both from his own  
Soul and from His own Soul.  
I call you to Allah, the Only One, with no partner to Him. Follow me and  
believe in what has come to me. Because I am the messenger of Allah.  
Accordingly, I invite you and my soldiers around you to Allah, who has  
Power and Perseverance. I advise you to accept my advice and words.  
Peace be upon those who follow the path of true guidance.”  
“And Peace unto whoever follows the guided path.” (Ta-Ha, 20/47)  
Seal: Muhammad, Messenger of Allah.”<sup>[36]</sup>*

After this letter, recordings do not mention of any other relations between the Prophet and the Abyssinian Negus in the available sources.

[33] Ibn al-Sa'd, I, 259; Hamidullah, al-Vesaik, p. 100, 104-105.

[34] Beyhaki, Delailün-nübuvve, ed. Abdulmu'ti Qal'aci, Beirut 1405/1985, II, 307

[35] Yusuf b. Ismail an-Nebhani, Hüccetullah 'ale'l-'alemin, Diyarbakır, no date, al-Maktabat al-Is-lamiyya, p. 156.

[36] Özkuyumcu, p. 556.

## 2. Relations with the Coptic Egypt

During the time Messenger of Allah Muhammad began his invitation, Egypt was dominated by Eastern Rome. It was led by Muqawqis as the governor-general, who was also the patriarch of Alexandria. The Eastern Roman Empire's Heraclius appointed him to this post after the victory over the Sassanids in Nineveh (6 H/ A.D. 627A.D). Messenger of Allah has sent an invitation letter to the Muqawqis with Khatib b. Ebi Beltea in the same year. Some Western historians have suggested that the letter in question is a fabrication. However, Muslim historians and contemporary researchers note that the letter was genuine.

Prophet Muhammad's letter, to our knowledge, follows as such:

*In the name of God, the Gracious One, the Merciful*

*From Muhammad, servant of God and His apostle to al-Muqawqis, premier of Egypt:*

*Peace unto whoever follows the guided path! And thereafter, verily I call you to the call of Submission [to God] ("Islam"). Submit (i.e., embrace Islam) and be safe [from perdition, as] God shall compensate your reward two-folds. But if you turn away, then upon you will be the guilt [of delusion] of the Egyptians. Then "O People of the Scripture, come to a term equitable between us and you that we worship none but God and associate [as partners in worship] with Him nothing, and we take not one another as Lords apart from God. [Then God says] But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Submitters [to God] ("Muslims")." (Āl-i Īmrân, 3/64)<sup>[37]</sup>*

The Muqawqis hosted Khatib for five days. During this stay he learned about Prophet Muhammad and his invitation. He then sent over two sisters named Mary and Sirin, two of his concubines, a eunuch slave, a thousand muskals (approximately 4.5 gram) of gold, beautiful dresses and fabrics, perfumes, a donkey and a mule, as gifts to Prophet Muhammad and wrote a letter with the answer to his invitation:

*"From Muqawqis to Muhammad bin Abdullah, Greetings from the governor of Copt, Muqawqis!*

*I read your letter. I understood what you were saying and invited me to do. I know that another prophet is coming, but I thought he was coming out of Damascus. I have received your messenger. I am sending you robes with two high-ranking concubines in the Copts. And I am giving you a mule to ride. Greetings to you!"<sup>[38]</sup>*

[37] Casim Avcı, İslam Bizans İlişkileri (Relations between Islam and Byzantine), TTK (Türk Tarih Kurumu) pub. Ankara, 2015, p. 50-51.

[38] Özkuyumcu, p. 555.

Regarding the attitude of Muqawqis, Khatib informed Prophet Muhammad: "Muqawqis did not do much more than that, nor did he become a Muslim. He said to me: "Don't you dare! Let the Copts not hear a single word from your mouth!". The Messenger of Allah said, "The naughty man has not come to his reign! And the reign that he has spared will not remain with him!" Two sisters Mariyah and Sirin became Muslims upon Khatib's suggestion on the way. Messenger of Allah wed Sirin to Hassan bin Sabit and Mariyah to himself. Mariyah then became the mother of his son Ibrahim. There are also many political aspects of this marriage. During the wars with Eastern Roman Empire in the following years, conquests held with less effort as Egyptians took a side in favour of Eastern Rome.<sup>[39]</sup>

### 3. Relations with the Eastern Rome Empire

One of the issues related to Christians the Holy Qur'an mentions is the war between the Eastern Roman and Sassanids. During this fight for dominance, the Qur'an foreshadowed that People of the Book of Eastern Rome would prevail in the near future against the pagan Sassanids. There is a surah revealed in Mecca called "Rum", that mentions about Romans, which takes its name from the word er-Rum, and touches on the subject as follows:

*"Alif. Lãm. Mîm. The Roman Empire has been defeated - In a land close by; but they, (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious - Within a few years. With Allah is the Decision, in the past and in the Future: on that Day shall the Believers rejoice- With the help of Allah. He helps whom He will, and He is exalted in might, most merciful. (It is) the promise of Allah. Never does Allah depart from His promise: but most men understand not." (al-Rum, 30/1-6)*

These verses also indicate the approach of Messenger of Allah and Muslims to People of The Book in general and Christians in particular. The content of these verses points out the following: in the sixth year of Muhammad's prophethood in 616, Christian Eastern Rome suffered a series of military defeats during the war against the polytheist Sassanids. They've subsequently lost their rule on Syria, Anatolia, and Egypt. These developments were treated as the victory of polytheism by the Meccan polytheists. They started the propaganda of "Just as the Sassanids defeated the Romans of the Book, we will defeat you" against Muslims. According to common interpretation, Allah Almighty sent down these verses and informed Muslims with the news of victory of Romans over the Sassanids. As a matter of fact, Eastern Rome defeated the Sassanids and regained all the lands that were lost in 619.

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[39] Ibn S'd, I, 260-261; Muhammad Hamidullah, al-Wasaiqi's-siyasiyya, Bairut, 1969, p. 135-136.

Muslim sources record that Prophet Muhammad sent an invitation letter to the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius with Dihyah al-Kalbi (628 A.D). At that time, the emperor had come to Jerusalem to celebrate his victory at Nineveh over the Sassanids and to replace the Holy Cross that he had taken back. Prophet Muhammad's envoy appeared before the emperor through the governor of Busra. The emperor summoned Abu Sufyan, who was in Jerusalem at the time, to his presence to get more information. From him, he received information about Prophet Muhammad's ancestry, family, environment, personality, social position. Subsequently he believed that Muhammad had prophetic signs. Then the envoy Dihya al-Kalbi entertained him according to diplomatic rules and sent him off with gifts.<sup>[40]</sup> The letter is as follows:<sup>[41]</sup>

*"In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.*

*From Muhammad, servant of God and His Messenger to Heraclius, premier of the Romans:*

*Peace unto whoever follows the guided path!*

*Thereafter, verily I call you to the call of Submission [to God] ("Islam").*

*Submit [to God] and be safe, then God shall compensate your reward two-folds. But if you turn away, then upon you will be the guilt [of delusion]*

*of the peasantry. Then "O People of the Book, come to a term equitable*

*between us and you that we worship none but God and associate [as partners in worship] with Him nothing, and we take not one another as Lords*

*apart from God. [Then God says] But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Submitters [to God] ("Muslims")."[Al-i Imran 3/64]*

*Seal: Muhammad, Apostle of God."*

Another phase of relations with the East Romans was military. Muslims organized military expeditions directly or indirectly towards to the East Roman Empire or its vassals. Two of them were Muta and Tabuk.

#### a. The Muta Expedition

According to historical accounts, Muslims and East Roman Christians had their first military encounter at Muta (8 H/629 A.D). The developments that lead to this encounter are as follows: The Ghassanids decimated Syria between 200 and 636. Over time, they became vassals of the Eastern Roman Empire. Rather, they adopted Christianity, which was subordinate to the Monophysite church or sect. They were given the title of Phylarkhos, "grand emir", which was the highest title after the emperor in Eastern Roman Empire. In the years

[40] Ibn Sa'd, II, 88; Avci, İslam Bizans İlişkileri, p. 45.

[41] al-Bukhari, "Badu'l-Wahy," 6; "Cihad", 102; Hamidullah, al-Wasaiq, p. 109; Avci, İslam Bizans İlişkileri, p. 44.

Muhammad started the Islamic invitation, the Ghassanids continued their residency relying on their relationship with Eastern Romans. However, the central authority was weak, and disagreements and struggles between the Ghassani tribes and tribal orders/chieftains, were substantial. The Ghassanids took part in the battle at Nineveh between Eastern Rome and the Sassanids. In process of contact Prophet Muhammad sent an invitation letter to the head of the Ghassanids, Haris b. Abi Shamir:

*"In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful*

*From Muhammad, Apostle of God to al-Ḥaris the son of 'Abu Shamir:*

*Peace unto whoever follows the guided path and believe in God and is sincere!*

*Thereby I call you to [this] that you believe in the one God with no partner to Him [and] your kingship remains yours.*

*Seal: Muhammad, Apostle of God."<sup>[42]</sup>*

The Head of Ghassanids Haris b. Abi Shamir received the letter got infuriated and martyred the envoy of the Prophet This meant both a flagrant violation of the international law and diplomatic practices, as well as defying the rule of Prophet Muhammad in Medina. Upon this development, Messenger of Allah sent an army of 3,000 soldiers to Mute, which was located in the 11km south of the lake of Lot, 50 km to Jerusalem. Prophet Muhammad's son in law Zayd b. Harisa was the commander. During the takeoff, the Prophet said, "If Zayd falls, Jafar b. Abi Talib is your commander if he too becomes a martyr, so does Abdullah b. Ravaha is your commander. And if he becomes a martyr, then bring someone to the command whom you will be pleased with." In addition, he ordered them to invite the enemy to Islam first, and providing that they receive a refusal, they are then allowed to fight. In particular, he insisted that children, women, the elderly and people around the monasteries should not be touched, palm trees that are a source of food and livelihood should not be damaged, trees should not be cut down, and buildings should not be destroyed, since they are already vulnerable and unlikely to be attacked.<sup>[43]</sup>

To resist to Muslim army, the Ghassanids asked for help from the Eastern Roman emperor Heraclius, who was in Jerusalem for a ceremony / celebration at the time. The emperor sent help with an army under the command of Theodoros. There are records that the Christian forces with the participation of Shurahbil and the Christian Arab tribes found 100,000-200,000 people. The two armies met at Mute. Three commanders of Muslims were martyred. Khalid b. Walid led the army and managed to break out of the circle with a splitting

[42] Hamidullah, Wasaiq, p. 126; Avci, İslam-Bizans, p. 51.

[43] Waqidi, II, 757-758, Sarıçam, p. 202-203.

operation and save his remaining troops. Among the Muslims in Madinah, some spread rumours about the army to escape and desert the war-zone. Thereupon the Prophet corrected the rumour by explaining the movement to aim regrouping and confronting the enemy again, and the rumours died down. Khalid b. Walid who shattered nine swords in his hand, in the way of Allah, was nicknamed “Saifullah: the sword of Allah” by the Prophet.<sup>[44]</sup>

#### b. The Tabuk Expedition

This is the last ghazwa of Prophet Muhammad, which took fifty days. Messenger of Allah launched his last Ghazwa expedition (H. 9/A.D. 630) to Tabuk, against Eastern Roman Empire in a city located on the Medina-Syria trade route, 700 km from Medina. Preparations for this expedition was particularly difficult as it took during the summer time, and harvesting season. The challenges are referred in the Qur’an as “saat al-usra” (time of hardship) (al-Tawba 9/117). For this reason, the army was also called “jaysh al-usr” (army of hardship), and “Ghazwat al-usr” (Battle of hardship). There are many verses related to this topic in the Surah of al-Tawba that came down during the Tabuk ghazwa.

The rationale behind this expedition were argued by Muslim scholars. Some of them believed that one of the main reasons, the bitterness of the defeat of the Mute and the concern over an unexpected attack from Eastern Rome. Another reason that was pointed out “the jizya ayah” in the following line discussed.

Sources record that the Christian Arabs in Syria wrote a letter to Heraclius, noting that Muhammad had died, that Muslims were in financial and spiritual decadence, that they were experiencing famine, and that it was the right time to send an army and subject them to his religion. According to these accounts, Nabatean merchants from Syria were receiving news that the Eastern Roman king Heraclius was preparing to attack the Muslims, more specifically to Medina. It is believed that those Christian Arab tribes including the Ghassan, Lahm, Cuzam, and Amila also supported Eastern Romans with their finances, military, and spiritual forces. Their pioneer troops reached Belka on the border of the Arabian Desert. After that, Muhammad began his preparations for the Tabuk ghazwa.<sup>[45]</sup> The army of about 30,000 soldiers got ready in great difficulty, and later arrived in Tabuk after a long and exhausting journey under the command of Prophet Muhammad. He stayed here for about fifteen to twenty days. However, there were no signs of an attack from

[44] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, pp. 531-540; Waqidi, II, 755-765; Ibn Sa’d, III, 129; Avci, Islam-Bizans, s. 53.

[45] Waqidi, I, 990; Ibn Sa’d, II, 165

Eastern Rome or its ally, the Arabs. It was understood that the news was unfounded. Some sources suggest the enemy retreated upon hearing the news of Muslims coming for them.<sup>[46]</sup>

As we mentioned, some Muslim scholars suggest another justification for the Tabuk gahazwa, that is "verse of the jizyah":

*"Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."* (al-Tawba 9/29)

The second justification stems from the following verse:

*"O ye who believe! fight the unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you: and know that Allah is with those who fear Him."* (al-Tawba 9/123)

The Jizyah/poll-tax means both submission to the rule of Islam and Muslims, and payment of tax, which is a civic duty. In return, Muslims are obliged to pay zakah, which is classified for worship and tax purposes. The people who pay jizyah has got the status of "ahl al-zimmah" the protected people. The Mamluk historians and mufassirs Ibn Kathir (d.774/1373) argues that when these verses were revealed, Prophet Muhammad decided to organize an expedition towards the Eastern Rome, as the people of these lands lived nearby and were considered as the worthiest to be called to the truth because they were People of the book.<sup>[47]</sup>

After having break at Tabuk, in accordance with the jizyah verse, Messenger of Allah sent troops to the Port of Ayla/Aqaba, Ezruh, Jarba, Makna and Maan in the north side of the Gulf of Aqaba, and to Dumatu'l-jandal on the Iraqi road. In addition, a second invitation letter was sent to Heraclius, which states that the Prophet was staying in Homs or Damascus at that time.<sup>[48]</sup> The departing troops offered to the people of the region to choose either jizya or Islam. Subsequently, the representatives of the region appeared before Muhammad and informed him that they had accepted the jizyah. And He gave them his word, assuring their lives and properties were safe and signed an agreement (ahid-nama).<sup>[49]</sup>

From a military-political point of view, going on an expedition with a massive army in the face of harsh conditions also led neighboring states to be more

[46] Sariçam, p. 207.

[47] Ibn Kasir, Tafsiru Kur'ani'l-Azim, Daru'l-Marife, Bairut, 1400/1980, v. II, p. 346-348.

[48] Ibn Hanbal, al-Musnad, III, 441-442; IV, 74-75; Hamidullah, al-Vesaiq p. 110-115.

[49] Sariçam, p. 208.

cautious towards Muslims. Indeed, it was an indicator of the power Medina held back in the time. In this aspect, without throwing a fist Muslims considered the Tabuk expedition as victory. The army was greeted with joy in Madinah.<sup>[50]</sup>

We believe these approaches and interpretations have a historical background as described in detail. After the conquest of Macca, almost all of the Arabian Peninsula accepted either Islam or the rule of Muslims. However, Muhammad's task of prophethood was not limited to the Arabs or the Arabian Peninsula. Some neighboring states or tribes were also considered as potential receivers. One of these regions, which is indicated in the verse by the phrase of "those that are in your immediate vicinity", was the Arab tribes in Syria and the Ghassanid region dominated by Eastern Rome. Prophet Muhammad organized an expedition to this predominantly Christian region to deliver a message and also to eliminate the threat.

### Final Remarks

The heavenly duty and responsibility of the Last Prophet Muhammad to mankind was to communicate the religion that was sent to all prophets from Adam onwards and was finally completed with him. Within the framework of this mission, he also appealed to Christians of the Ahl al-Kitab. Although he did not receive a positive response, he kept his social relations with those who did not pose a threat to Islam and Muslims. He granted them with a zimmi status to keep his end of the agreements. Shortly after his arrival in Medina, he signed an agreement with non-Muslims under the Madinah document (al-wasiqa), based on the principle of providing the parties with mutual good relations, as well as freedom of religion and conscience.

In the meantime, he also responded to armed struggle or resistance, but did not show a hostile attitude towards biblical values during and post conflicts. After any sorts of disagreement / conflict, he acted fairly and reminded Muslims that it was forbidden to encroach on the property of those who had an agreement with them. We should consider Prophet Muhammad's relations with Christians as an act of harmony, cohesion and pluralistic grounds.

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[50] Ibn Ishaq-Guillaume, pp. 602-610.

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