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**Economic and Commercial Relations of the Prophet
Muhammad with the Jews**

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Economic and Commercial Relations of the Prophet Muhammad with the Jews*

Abstract

Prophet Muhammad's relations with the Jews began with Muslims' migration to Medina (Hijra). The Prophet firstly signed the Constitution of Medina with all parties to establish social peace and the basis for living together. After the provision of social peace, the Prophet made many arrangements and activities to balance the economic conditions favoring the Jews against the Muslims and other Arab tribes. The social economy, which has been reshaped and balanced in line with the Prophet's encouragement and recommendations, has been brought into an international nature with the inclusion of the other elements of the society in

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economic and commercial activities from being a closed Jewish monopoly.

The economic and trade relations of the Prophet with the Jews have occurred in two ways, both individual and social. In the individual sense, he has directly engaged in trading and two-way loaning activities personally; in the social sense, he has made commercial, and agricultural arrangements with the Jews on behalf of the Muslims and the community. In this study, the economic and commercial relations that the Prophet had carried out with the Jews, especially during the Medina period, and the principles he introduced will be examined.

Keywords: *The Period of the Prophet, Commercial Relations, Jewish, Islamic Economics, Market Place.*

Introduction

The Arabian Peninsula, where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lived, is a very important geostrategic location in the world. These lands at the intersection of Africa and Asia were also very important in terms of commercial activities. The Quraysh tribe that the Prophet was a member of had an active role in the trade activities of the region. The Prophet (PBUH) was engaged in trade in order to maintain his life, indeed during his youth, he had participated in caravans with his uncles and made commercial trips to Syria and Yemen. The first commercial travel of the Prophet is with his uncle Abu

Talib ibn Abd al-Muttalib to Damascus. Muhammad (PBUH) who had gained trust in the community has been to Yemen for trade activities twice later on behalf of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. Furthermore, it is known that the Prophet Muhammad traveled to Abyssinia (Hamidullah, *İslam Peygamberi*, 1990) and Bahrain in addition to Yemen for this purpose.

It is seen that the Prophet made many economic attempts in his life, founded partnerships, bought and sold goods in advance or in debt, made various contracts in this regard and offered job opportunities to many people (Yüksel, 2018). In his commercial life, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has become a beautiful model to humanity and he has expressed his sensitivity about this subject by saying that “no one ever eats a better livelihood than their own earnings” (el-Buhârî, 2001). He also encouraged people to earn their livelihood in this way by expressing the broadness of sustenance by saying “nineteenths of the livelihood is in trade”. In addition, the Prophet said that the trader, who will be engaged in trade, should be reliable and have their heat on their sleeve. Prophet who stated the importance of trade for the society wanted women, disabled, etc., from all parts of society to be in commercial life. Women traders such as Kayle el-Enmâriyye, Muleyke, Esmâ bint Muharrib, and Havle bint Tuveyt are examples of them (Yüksel, 2018).

Mecca Period

The Prophet (PBUH), after the call to prophethood, started inviting people to Islam from his closest surroundings in Mecca. There were few people who responded to this call. Yet,

the majority's view of the new religion was reactive and critical. Over time, this response to Muslims was extended to cynicism, boycott, and violence. Muslims who were trying to resist all difficulties were not the size of an economic structure in Mecca. It is natural for these people (believers) who are trying to survive and live their religion cannot obtain an economic presence because of all the obstacles put in front of them. In addition, the existence of almost no Jewish population in Mecca can be considered as the reason why no commercial activity has taken place with them either. After migrating to Medina, Muslims had the opportunity to continue their existence and to live their religion comfortably. Muslims, who have become part of the community of Medina, have acquired new opportunities with their acceptance in society. For this reason, the Medina period weighs heavy in this study. It is a milestone that lay the foundations of a new era for Muslims and the issues that concern all humanity in the future.

Jewish Presence on the Peninsula

The arrival of the Jews in Medina and the surrounding regions and settling in these areas rests much longer than the Prophet's migration. There are even some saying their inhabiting goes back until Moses era, but the general opinion is that it started with the Babylonians besieging and routing Jerusalem (586/7 BC). During the exile of the Israelites to Babylon those who are able to escape settled in Arabia (Kesir, 1994). Jews who escaped from the diaspora settled in the regions of Kura Valley, Medina, Khaybar, and Tayma (Taberi). The Jews after settling on this land formed their own areas by establishing various dwellings. The influence of the

Jews dealing with agriculture and craft in the development of Medina, Khaybar, and Fadak as a settlement is especially great. Although the relations of the Prophet with the Jews began with the birth of Islam, these relations were limited in the first period in Mecca due to the lack of Jewish population (Hamidullah, 1990). The increase of the relations of the Prophet with the Jews, the establishment of many relationships in many areas such as commercial and economic have started with the Hijra.

Medina Period Relations

When Muhammad (PBUH) came to this city, he did not exclude the Jews from the society to establish the political stability, establish the social order and provide economic life as the first job and he chose to win them (Sourdell, 1995). He has signed the Constitution of Madina with the Jewish tribes that are not happy with Muslim immigration such as Banu Qurayza, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qaynuka (Hamidullah, Islam Peygamberi, 1990). This agreement has special importance in terms of initial relations with Jews. According to the provisions of this agreement that forms the basis of coexistence Jews shall not collaborate with the enemies of the Muslims (Sirma, 1994). Moreover, the decisions taken in articles 37, 38, and 24 of this agreement to cover the costs of war and to defend the city together against external threats and attacks indicate that the Prophet did not ignore the issues related to the economy while creating the basis for coexistence. After signing the Constitution of Medina, the Prophet showed a tolerant attitude towards the Jews. Situations like marrying their chaste women (Sa'd, 1960), eating the animals they slaughtered, and letting them enter

the masjid, etc., show that a moderate policy towards them was conducted.

Market Places

During the years of Islam, Jews in the Arabian Peninsula, especially in Medina, were active in the economy (Emin, 1950). Although there were people from the Jewish race such as Banu Qurayza, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qaynuka, there were those who adopted Judaism from the Arab tribes.

In addition to the market area of the Jewish Banu Qaynuka, where trade was carried out in Yasrib (Madina's old name) before the emergence of Islam, there were a few more (Zubala, Buthan Valley Bridge, es-Safasif and Muzahim) market places (es-Semhûdî, 1326). These markets are located to the west of Yesrib and are listed as Zubala, Qaynuka, Muzahim, and es-Safasif from north to south. The most important ones Qaynuka and Zubala were under the control of Jews, and Muzahim was under the leader of the munafiqs (hypocrites) in the Islamic period, Abd-Allah ibn Ubayy (Lecker).

With the Prophet's migration to Medina, Muslims began to trade in the existing Qaynuka market. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf was selling butter, Uthman was selling dates (Buhari, Sahih, ts, p. 722).

In order to establish economic formation by providing all kinds of political and social infrastructure, the Prophet established a tent alongside the Banu Qaynuka market according to one narration, in an area called Baki ez-Zubayr according to another narration, and declared this area as the trade ring. Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, the leader of the Banu Nadir

tribe, cut the strings of the market tent that the Prophet established. After that, the Prophet moved the market to the region of Medina Market (es-Semhûdî, 1326). Again, at that time Zubala, Qaynuka, Prophet, al-Musalla, ez-Zevra markets were located. In the following times, the Messenger gave the Banu Qaynuka market as a fief to the Az-Zubayr ibn Al-Awam (Lecker). The Prophet (PBUH) encouraged Muslims to establish new places alternative to the Jewish markets and said, "This is your market, nobody will prevent anyone and no one will be taxed" showing the market he established (İbn Mace, p. 751).

Since the long-standing wars between the Aws and Khazraj tribes in Medina and the education level of these tribes were lower compared to the Jews, the Arabs did not show an important presence in trade, agriculture, and art in Medina (Hasan, 1987). Therefore, Jews have always had a say in these areas. Besides, the Jews have worked in the field of agriculture and have made significant progress in cultivating many crops, especially wheat, barley, and date. Banu Nadir was generally engaged in agriculture, while Banu Qurayza with leather in addition to that, and Banu Qaynuka with trade and jewelry (Hişam, 1955). The Banu Qaynuka, who were so active in trade, had the mentioned market under their name. This shows how much the Jews are active in trade in Medina. Indeed, the Jews, who became very rich in trade and greatly increased their wealth, built fortresses and walls to protect their property from other tribes (Sönmez, 1984).

Economic Relations

As it is understood from one of the reasons for Banu Qaynuka Battle that is the incident about Jews treating badly on the chastity of a Muslim lady who was shopping there, Muslims were doing trade with them. The Prophet (PBUH) going to the homeland of Banu Nadir, who was a partner in the Constitution of Medina, because Amr bin Umayyah al-Damri killed two people from the Banu 'Amir tribe while coming back to Medina after surviving in the Expedition of Bir Maona, is important in terms of the topic (Vakıdi, 1984). Because it is observed here that the Prophet prioritizes relations in economic terms while making agreements. After the conquest of Khaybar, the Jews asked the Prophet to stay there, and he let them stay there so that the agriculture could be continued. The Prophet's tolerant behavior to Jews even after the war against them points to his indulgence and the importance he attaches to the continuity of economic life.

Medina's economy prior to the Hijra was based on agriculture and on small-scale handicraft. In Medina, tailoring, tannery, winemaking, butchery, veterinary, poetry, jewelry, carpentry, brickmaking, cereals, animals, perfumery sales, as well as brokerage were being made. Banking and usury were in the hands of the Jews (Tabakoğlu, 2013). There was a change in the economic structure of Medina along with the period of the Prophet. After the agriculture and animal husbandry, the economy depended on trade, crafts, as well as the booty obtained from the wars (Safa, 2015). The prophet removed the restrictions and taxes in trade and abolished the monopoly of the Jews in Medina to free the trade (Tabakoğlu, 2013). What is more, the Prophet (PBUH) encouraged the purchase of the

water well from the Jews to ensure that the water resources under the control of the Jews also benefited the Muslims. As a result of the negotiation, Uthman has purchased the half-time of the daily run time of the water well to 12.000 dirhams. The Jewish merchant, the owner of the other half, was weakened at the operating point because of the economic policy followed, and transferred his share to Uthman in exchange for 8.000 dirhams (Ahmed b. Hanbel, ts, p. 59; Buhari, ts, p. 59; Tirmizi, 1978, p. 625). Yasrib Arab community, which has lost its ability to be an economic power by fighting for years against each other due to animosity, has gained new momentum with the participation of immigrants in this structure together with the Hijra. Particularly the Muslims of Mecca, who left their wealth behind, became the supporter of the locals (Ansar) in many jobs and contributed to the supply of all kinds of goods. Everlasting wars caused great economic damage to the people of Yasrib. Therefore, the Jews have increased their effectiveness in many areas day by day. Together with the Hijra and the displacement of the elements in the socio-economic structure in the city, the Jews, who had the power in many areas, lost their effectiveness over time. For example, Aws and Khazraj tribes and Muslims living in Medina were selling the grape harvest from their crops to the Jews. As a result of the wine being haram (religiously forbidden), the prophet forbade them to sell the grapes (Tabarani, h. 1425, p. 294). This situation has weakened the Jews for being an economic power in this field.

There were also bilateral loaning relations between the Prophet (PBUH) and the Jews. It is narrated that The Prophet (PBUH) bought barley from a Jew with a pledge (Buhari,

Sahih, ts, p. 729), and wanted two clothes from a Jewish fabric trader, but the merchant rejected the request by saying “This wants to take my property and my dirhams” (Tirmizi, 1978, p. 518; Nesai, 1991, p. 91). It is also known that there are bilateral trade relations between Muslims and Jews. It is reported that Ali sold a plant called izhır, which is used for the polishing of the gold, to the Jews of Banu Qaynuka (Hanbel, ts, p. 142; Buhari, Sahih, ts, p. 736), and again worked in a Jewish-operated well for 17 buckets a day to get 1 date per bucket (Ibn Mace, p. 818) (Tirmidhi, 1978, p. 45), and that Jabir ibn Abdullah also borrowed some to pay after the date harvest (Buhari, Sahih, ts, p. 2074).

The Prophet wanted to keep the trade route to Damascus when he learned that the goods of the Muslims who had immigrated from Mecca were detained by the pagans and that they were on their way with caravans for sale. After the war permit, the caravans were confiscated. Thus, despite the changing balances, the spoils of war made a contribution to the economy at least in the first place. Not long after, booty obtained from the Battle of Badr and the small battles of the aftermath, have benefited the economic life of Medina. Particularly, the booty obtained in the Battle of Banu Mustaliq contributed to the growing population and the increasing daily needs. Because the spoils obtained sometimes used for preparing for a new jihad, supporting martyr orphans and poor families, as a means of living and support for the Mujahideen who migrated, and sometimes for helping each other. Despite this, the spoils of war and soldiers were not the main elements of the economy. However, it should not be overlooked that it has a significant effect.

Tribes that did not comply with the Constitution which was signed immediately after the Hijra, Banu Qaynuka and Banu Nadir were expelled from Medina in 624 and 625, respectively. The tribe of Banu Qurayza, who tried to attack the Muslims from behind in the Battle of the Trench, was also punished in 627 and completely expelled from this city (Bozkurt & Küçükaşçı, 2003). When the Jewish tribe Banu Qurayza was expelled from Medina, their property was shared with the Muhajirs (immigrants) who left their home in Mecca. Because the Banu Nadir was taken without war, their goods were transferred to the treasury. But the large share of it is divided among the Muhajirs as well. Also, who are poor among the Ansar, Sahl ibn Hunaif and Abu Dujana were also given shares (Bal, 2015; Brockelmann, 1992). Especially when the Jews who were active in economic life were dispatched from their lands, there was an economic revival in the society by distributing the remaining goods and the spoils to the believers. Muslims who have various agricultural fields and learned craft have had more influence in this field.

In later times, when Khaybar, Fadak, and Kura Valley, were conquered, the Jews resided in these settlements were allowed to live until a certain period of time, based on usufructuary tenancy (Apak, 2012). However, Muslims also learned about agricultural work from the Jews who were experienced in agriculture.

The income of the Islamic State of Medina is divided into two as specific and incidental. Specific revenues were alms, tribute, and jizya (poll tax). Incidental revenues were aids and charities form voluntary donations together with the spoils of wars. The tax had a flexible structure and it was a tithe of 10%

and tribute for agricultural products. The tithe was usually taken from the Muslims and the tribute from the non-Muslims. The upper limit of the tribute in the application is 50% while the lower limit is 10% (Tabakoğlu, 2013). The example of this is seen in the practice on the Jews in Khaybar and Fadak. Here, Jews accept the obedience and giving half of the crops they produce (booty) to the state. In the Islamic State, non-Muslims are responsible for paying tribute and jizya. This tax is provided for their safety. Plus, the jizya is the tax for non-Muslims to be exempted from the defense and military service.

All of these are the taxes that are necessary for the continuity of the new state established by the Prophet. They are applications aimed at the Muslim and non-Muslim living in this state, i.e., all segments of society. This shows that the prophet has a balanced policy in economic terms to all parties in the society.

Conclusion

In the period of Mecca, it is strange for Muslims to be economically incapacitated for the reasons such as the new spread of Islam, the failure to achieve an independent structure, the troubles and suffering, the relocation, and the struggle for survival. Because in this period, Muslims were subjected to a boycott, their property was seized, even the right to live was not given. It is not possible to have a commercial concern in such an environment. It is seen that the Jews did not have a significant commercial activity during this period in Mecca. With the Hijra to Medina, Muslims were able to be in commercial and economic activities as they achieved

an association. At the same time, the Arab tribes living in Medina began to be more active in the economic life through the arrangements made by the Prophet. These economic activities, which were continued under Jewish monopoly earlier, were opened to the outside with the inclusion of Arab tribes and Muslims. In addition to this, the Jews tried to be integrated to the society with the Constitution of Medina signed by the Prophet, and it has been agreed to meet the economic burden of social cohesion in any case. The Prophet (PBUH), after arriving in Medina, created a market place and asked Muslims to participate in trade and contribute to the economy. As a result of sharing all the assets and opportunities that existed between the Muhajirs who had faced up to many difficulties and the Ansar who had supported them with hosting, and as a result of the distribution of work between them in a short time, Muslims in Medina has gained a tight association. Thus, they made progress in both agriculture and craft. The Prophet (PBUH) has forbidden the usury to prevent unfair profit and creation of a monopoly, as well as to break the power of Jews in trade activities. The Messenger, who frequently inspected the markets, has warned those who do not follow the rules. There were advancements in the economic relations due to the permissions that the animals slaughtered by the Jews can be eaten as a result of the idea of bringing vitality to trade and including Jews into the society. Over time, not staying true to the covenant they have made by Jews, and negative attitudes and behaviors against Muslims, breaks in commercial relations as well as in other relations has occurred as a result. Especially the Jews of Medina, who could not digest the

development of Muslims in many ways, took part in the enemy lines who had fought against Muslims. Hence, the Jews who draw Prophet's reaction were sent from Medina and their property was confiscated. Because the conquests were realized in these lands where the Jews lived as well, such as Khaybar and Fadak, the goods of the Jews were passed on to Muslims as the right of conquest. However, in accordance with the demands of the people in these places, they were given the right to stay in their places and to take half of the work they did in agricultural activities. It is seen that the Prophet did not exclude the Jews because of their religion from both the social and economic point of view. As a result of this policy which was followed by the Prophet to the Jews who had the economic and commercial power of the period, the Prophet laid the foundations for the coexistence of all the elements of society and balanced the social economy.

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