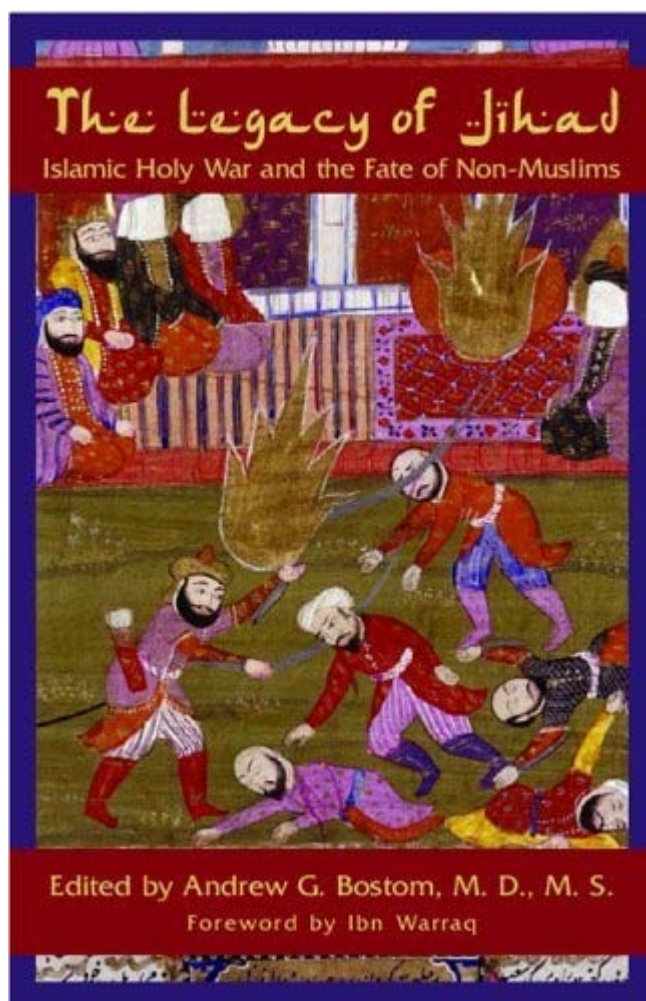


## Note on the Cover



The illustration is entitled, "The Prophet, Ali, and the Companions at the massacre of the prisoners of the Jewish tribe of Beni Kuraizah [Banu Qurayzah]"; Author: Bazil (Muhammad Rafi); Published: 19th century; Kashmiri, 17 folio 108b. Reproduced by permission of The British Library. 1

A consensus Muslim account of the massacre of the Qurayzah has emerged as conveyed by classical Muslim scholars of hadith (putative utterances and acts of Muhammad, recorded by pious Muslim transmitters), biographer's of Muhammad's life (especially Ibn Ishaq), jurists, and historians 2. This narrative is summarized as follows: Alleged to have aided the forces of Muhammad's enemies in violation of a prior pact, the Qurayzah were subsequently isolated and besieged. Twice the Qurayzah made offers to surrender, and depart from their stronghold, leaving behind their land and property. Initially they requested to take one camel load of possessions per person, but when Muhammad refused this request, the Qurayzah asked to be allowed to depart without any property, taking with them only their families. However, Muhammad insisted that the Qurayzah surrender unconditionally and subject themselves to his judgment. Compelled to surrender, the Qurayzah were lead to Medina. The men with their hands pinioned behind their backs, were put in a court, while the women and children were said to have been put into a separate court. A third (and final) appeal for leniency for the Qurayzah was made to Muhammad by their tribal allies the Aus. Muhammad again declined, and instead he appointed as arbiter Sa'd Mu'adh from the Aus, who soon rendered his concise verdict: the men were to be put to death, the women and children sold into slavery, the spoils to be divided among the Muslims.

Muhammad ratified the judgment stating that Sa'd's decree was a decree of God pronounced from above the Seven Heavens. Thus some 600 to 900 men from the Qurayzah

were lead on Muhammad's order to the Market of Medina. Trenches were dug and the men were beheaded, and their decapitated corpses buried in the trenches while Muhammad watched in attendance. Male youths who had not reached puberty were spared. Women and children were sold into slavery, a number of them being distributed as gifts among Muhammad's companions. According to Muhammad's biographer Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad chose one of the Qurayzah women (Rayhana) for himself. The Qurayzah's property and other possessions (including weapons) were also divided up as additional "booty" among the Muslims. The following details have been chronicled consistently by Muslim sources: the arbiter (Sa'd Mu'adh) was appointed by Muhammad himself; Muhammad observed in person the horrific executions; Muhammad claimed as a wife a woman (Rayhana) previously married to one of the slaughtered Qurayzah tribesmen; the substantial material benefits (i.e., property; receipts from the sale of the enslaved) which accrued to the Muslims as a result of the massacre; the extinction of the Qurayzah.

Abu Yusuf (d. 798), the prominent Hanafi jurist who advised Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809), made the following observations about the Qurayzah massacre in his writings on jihad:

Whenever the Muslims besiege an enemy stronghold, establish a treaty with the besieged who agree to surrender on certain conditions that will be decided by a delegate, and this man decides that their soldiers are to be executed and their women and children taken prisoner, this decision is lawful. This was the decision of **Sa'ad b. Mu'adh in connection with the Banu Qurayzah**; it is up to the imam to decide what treatment is to be meted out to them and he will choose that which is preferable for religion and for Islam. If he esteems that the execution of the fighting men and the enslavement of their women and children is better for Islam and its followers, then he will act thus, **emulating the example of Sa'ad b. Mu'adh**. 3

As reported by M.J. Kister 4, al-Mawardi (d. 1072 C.E.), another eminent Muslim jurist from Baghdad, characterized the slaughter of the Qurayzah as a religious duty incumbent on Muhammad. Professor Kister quotes al-Mawardi as follows: "it was not permitted (for Muhammad) to forgive (in a case of ) God's injunction upon them; he could only forgive (transgressions) in matters concerning his own person." The notion that this slaughter was sanctioned by God as revealed to Muhammad was, according to Kister, reflective of "the current (as of 1986) Sunni view about the slaughter of the Banu Qurayzah." 5.

Gairdner, also relying exclusively upon Muslim sources characterizing the slaughter of the Qurayzah, highlights the pivotal role that Muhammad himself played in orchestrating the overall events:

The umpire who gave the fatal decision (Sa'ad) was extravagantly praised by Muhammad. Yet his action was wholly

and admittedly due to his lust for personal vengeance on a tribe which had occasioned him a painful wound. In the agony of its treatment he cried out- "O God, let not my soul go forth ere thou has cooled my eye from the Bani Quraiza". This was the arbiter to whose word the fate of that tribe was given over. His sentiments were well-known to Muhammad, who appointed him. It is perfectly clear from that that their slaughter had been decreed. What makes it clearer still is the assertion of another biographer that Muhammad had refused to treat with the Bani Quraiza at all until they had "come down to receive the judgment of the Apostle of God". Accordingly "they came down"; in other words put themselves in his power. And only then was the arbitration of Sa'ad proposed and accepted- but not accepted until it had been forced on him by Muhammad; for Sa'ad first declined and tried to make Muhammad take the responsibility, but was told "qad amarak Allahu takhuma fihim" "Allah has commanded you to give sentence in their case". From every point of view therefore the evidence is simply crushing that Muhammad was the ultimate author of this massacre. 6

In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the Muslims benefited substantially from the Qurayzah's assets which they seized as booty. The land and property acquired helped the Muslims gain their economic independence. The military strength of the Muslim community of Medina grew due to the weapons obtained, and the fact that captured women and children taken as slaves were sold for horses and more weapons, facilitating enlargement of the Muslim armed forces for further conquests. Conversely, the Jewish tribe of the Qurayzah ceased to exist.

Finally, the Farsi text which borders the original illustration (above and below, but not reproduced on the cover art due to space constraints), apropos of its Persian Shi'ite context, focuses on the exploits of Ali:

Ali, who is the successor of God on the earth, and known to fight with a double-edged sword, ordered the warriors to cut off the heads of the non-believers. Zobair assisted him in finishing this job. Ali also ordered the distribution of the captives and their property [i.e., the 'booty'] among the Muslims, in accord with Sa'ad (b. Mu'adh?)'s [see above] decision regarding the fate of the defeated the Jews [i.e., the Qurayzah]. After the battle [and executions], Ali ordered everyone [of the Muslims] to return home. Sa'ad (b. Mu'adh) who had been very anxious during the battle, was now happy and praised God upon completion of his task. Then [later] they [i.e., the Muslims] celebrated and enjoyed beautiful women. 7

## References

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2. Summarized, here: M.J. Kister, "The massacre of the Banū Qurayza: a re-examination of a tradition" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Isla*
3. Abu Yusuf Ya'qub Le Livre de l'impôt foncier, Translated from Arabic and annotated by Edmond Fagnan. Paris, 1921. English translation in Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi- Jews and Christians Under Islam*, 1985, Cranbury, New Jersey, pp. 172-173.
4. Kister, "The massacre of the Banū Qurayza?", p. 69.
- m, Vol. 8, 1986, pp. 61-96.
5. Kister, "The massacre of the Banū Qurayza?", p. 70.
6. W.H. T. Gairdner, "Muhammad Without Camouflage", *The Moslem World*, Vol. 9, 1919, p. 36.
7. Translated by F. M.

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