

Musaylima

Musaylima b. Thumāma b. Kabīr b. Ḥabīb b. al-Ḥārith b. ‘Abd al-Ḥārith, a leader of the Banū Ḥanīfa and rival of the Prophet. Muslim sources derisively nickname him “Musaylima the liar” (*al-kadhīb*). Musaylima is a diminutive form of Maslama; this can be deduced from a verse of ‘Umāra b. ‘Ukayl (Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, iii, 26).

The basis of the rivalry between Muḥammad and Musaylima was the latter's claim to prophethood. Musaylima made his people believe that he was receiving revelation from God the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) through the angel Gabriel. It is essential to stress that Musaylima never denied the prophethood of Muḥammad; he rather claimed that he was destined to share this mission with him. In all their encounters, Muḥammad categorically rejected the quest of Musaylima to share his mission or be appointed Muḥammad's successor after his death. The letters exchanged between them bear clear evidence of their contrasting attitudes. Musaylima wrote to Muḥammad using the title “Messenger of Allāh” and claimed that God bestowed on him partnership in prophethood (*fā-innī qad usbriktu fī l-amri ma‘aka*). “Half of the earth was given to Quraysh and the other half was allotted to us (i.e. to Banū Ḥanīfa), but Quraysh are people who exceed their bounds.” In his response, the Prophet addresses Musaylima as “the liar,” asserts that the earth (in its entirety) belongs to God who gives it “as heritage to whomever he pleases of his servants” (Bayhaqī, *Maḥāsin*, i, 49).

Early traditions may help establish the period of Musaylima's activity and his connections with Mecca. According to reliable sources, he married Kayyisa bint al-Ḥārith of the Meccan aristocratic clan of ‘Abd Shams. Musaylima was her second husband. The Prophet met Musaylima in Medina several times (it is reported that when Musaylima arrived in Medina for the first time accompanied by a unit of Banū Ḥanīfa warriors, he stayed in Kayyisa's grove). In reference to the impertinent demands

of Musaylima, Muḥammad refused to give him “even a splinter of a palm branch” which he held in his hand. At a later meeting with a delegation of Banū Ḥanīfa, the members of the delegation decided to embrace Islam, but changed their minds after returning to Yamāma, and aligned themselves with Musaylima instead. Musaylima was held in high esteem: his companions called him “the merciful one of Yamāma” (*raḥmān al-Yamāma*). Also, as befitted the usual manner in which holy persons, soothsayers and prophets appeared, he was veiled and disguised. There are many common features and methods in the prophetic careers of Musaylima and Muḥammad. Like Muḥammad, Musaylima claimed to be the recipient of divine revelation. Further, he claimed to heal the sick and work miracles. Naturally enough, Muslim tradition describes his claims to such powers as totally baseless.

In Yamāma, Musaylima succeeded in gaining the support of many tribal groups who came under his control after the death of Hawdha, the former chief of the area in the service of Persia. In the last years before the Prophet's death, he attempted to establish a social order based on an alliance between the people of Yamāma and tribal groups which moved to Yamāma and settled there. Musaylima erected a safe area (*ḥaram*) in which certain places inhabited by his allies (*qurā al-aḥālīf*) were included. According to Muslim sources, the *ḥaram* was managed in a corrupt way and the Banū Usayyid, who served as its guardians mistreated other groups. When these groups complained, Musaylima did not redress the injustice. Instead, he read to them “the answer he got from heaven,” meaning a verse from his qurʾān: “(I swear) by the darkness of the night and by the black wolf, the Usayyid did not violate [the sanctity] of the *ḥaram*”. When the Usayyid continued their transgressions, another verse was released: “[I swear] by the dark night and by the softly treading lion, the Usayyid cut neither fresh nor dry.”

The death of the prophet Muḥammad raised the hopes of the community of Musaylima. In one of the speeches said to have been delivered in that period and which was directed to the Banū Ḥanīfa, Musaylima stressed the qualities of his people and his land in comparison with Quraysh and Mecca: “What made Quraysh more deserving of prophethood than yourselves? They are not greater in number than you; your land is wider than their land. Gabriel (Jibrīl) descends from heaven like he used to descend to Muḥammad.” Musaylima claimed that the revelation transmitted to Muḥammad had ceased with his death and henceforth it would be transmitted to him alone. The feeling that he was now the sole prophet is expressed in a verse attributed to Musaylima:

O you, woman, take the tambourine and play, and disseminate the virtues of this prophet! Passed away the prophet of Banū Hāshim, and rose up the prophet of Banū Yaʿrub (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vi, 341).

Musaylima's adherents grew in number and prestige. The situation in Yamāma inspired a feeling of security and peace. This feeling was, however, shaken by the unexpected arrival of a former soothsayer, who claimed that she had been granted revelations from heaven. Her name was Sajāḥ bt. al-Ḥārith. She was a Christian of the tribe of Tamīm but lived among the Christian Arabs of Taghlib. According to some sources, the forces led by Sajāḥ intended to attack the troops of Abū Bakr under the command of Khālīd b. al-Walīd who set out to crush the apostasy (*ridda*) of the tribes after the Prophet's death. In her forces were warriors from her people and others who joined them. After some skirmishes, she decided to fight Musaylima and conquer Yamāma. Musaylima invited her to meet him in order to negotiate a peaceful solution. He recognized Sajāḥ as his partner in prophethood and declared that the land allotted by God to Quraysh would be transferred to Sajāḥ and her people. The other half would belong to Musaylima. Moreover, Musaylima granted Sajāḥ the crops Yamāma had produced that

year and promised her the crops of the next year. Sajāḥ returned to the Jazīra after a few days. (Some reports maintain that Musaylima married Sajāḥ, but differ as to whether she remained with him until his death, or if he cast her off soon after their marriage; cf. Vacca, Sadjāḥ.)

Abū Bakr became aware of the rising authority of Musaylima and decided to send Khālid b. al-Walīd at the head of the Muslim army to fight Musaylima and his forces. He wrote a letter to Khālid b. al-Walīd, stressing the power of the Banū Ḥanīfa and their courage. The bravery of Banū Ḥanīfa is said to have been mentioned in q 48:16. On his way to fight Musaylima, Khālid b. al-Walīd informed his army of Abū Bakr's letter concerning Banū Ḥanīfa. In the clashes with the Banū Ḥanīfa, a division of the army that came from those Medinans who had assisted Muḥammad in his emigration from Mecca (the Anṣār) attacked Yamāma and fought bravely together with the Meccans who had fled with Muḥammad (the Muhājirūn). They were summoned to help out in dangerous situations in the bloody battle of 'Aqrabā'. At the outset, the Banū Ḥanīfa succeeded in repulsing the bedouin attacks. The solution of Khālid was to put the bedouin fighters of the army behind the lines of the well motivated and steadfast warriors of the Emigrants (Muhājirūn) and Helpers (Anṣār). Cases of exemplary bravery on the part of these groups are recorded in the sources. Eventually, Waḥshī killed Musaylima with his javelin in a place dubbed in the Muslim sources as "the Garden of Death." According to some far-fetched traditions, Musaylima was 140 or 150 years old when he died in 11/632.

The intense loyalty of Musaylima's followers can be gauged from the various stories that have been passed down. A woman who heard about his death exclaimed, "Alas, prince of the believers!" (*wā amīr al-mu'minīnāb*). A wounded warrior of the Banū Ḥanīfa, in his agony, asked a Muslim warrior to kill him in order to put him out of his misery.

Upon hearing of Musaylima's death, he remarked: "A prophet whom his people caused to perish" (*nabiyyun ḍayya‘abu qawmuhu*). The Muslim warrior, enraged by these words, gave him the *coup de grâce*.

The belief in the prophethood of Musaylima survived among his believers in the first decades of Islam. His adherents used to gather in the mosque of the Banū Ḥanīfā in Kūfa and the call *lā ilāha illā llāh wa-Musaylima rasūlu llāh* was heard from the minaret. ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd ordered the detention of the followers of Musaylima. Some repented and were released. Those who clung to their faith were executed.

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[Print Version: Volume 3, page 460, column 2]

Citation:

Kister, M. J. "Musaylima." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. General Editor: Jane Dammen
McAuliffe.