THE MARKET OF THE PROPHET

BY

M. J. KISTER

The reasons given by the Arabic sources for the assassination of Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf are that he stirred up the Meccans to fight the Prophet and to avenge their defeat at Badr, that he composed anti-Muslim verses defaming Muslim women or that he plotted with a group of Jews to kill the Prophet 1). These reasons are also accepted or quoted in the works of scholars, analysing the attitude of the Prophet towards Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf 2).


A passage in Samhüdi's *Wafa* al-Wafa* 1) reveals another aspect of the enmity between Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf and the Prophet and sheds some light on the economic activities of the Prophet and the Muslim community in Medina. The event recorded in this passage on the authority of Ibn Shabba 2) runs as follows:

Ibn Shabba-Şāliḥ b. Kaysān 3): “The Prophet pitched a tent in the *Baqī* al-Zubayr and said: This is your market. Then Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf came up, entered inside and cut its ropes. The Prophet then said: Indeed, I shall move it into a place which will be more grievous for him than this place. And he moved into the place of the ‘Market of Medina’ (scil. the place which was later the Market of Medina -K). Then he said: This is your market. Do not set up sections in it and do not impose taxes for it”.

The problem that faces us is why did Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf cut the ropes of the tent of the Prophet. Some conclusion can be drawn from another fragment of this tradition 4) of ‘Umar b. Shabba, stating that al-Zubayr asked the Prophet to grant him al-Baqī* after the assassination of Ka‘b 5).

---


4) Samhüdi, op. cit., II, 265.

This *Baqi* became—of course later—known as *Baqi* al-Zubayr. It is obvious that Ka‘b tried to prevent the Prophet from establishing the market on his land. This was the cause of the clash between the Prophet and Ka‘b.

Other traditions supply more details about the event of the establishment of the market, although the clash between the Prophet and Ka‘b is not mentioned. Ibn Zubala ¹) reports on the authority of Yazid b. ‘Ubayd Alläh b. Qusayt ²) that the market (scil. of Medina) was in (the quarter of ) the Banū Qaynuqā until it was moved afterwards (into another place) ³). A corroborative tradition reported by ‘Umar b. Shabba on the authority of ‘Atā’ b. Yasār ⁴) states that the Prophet decided to establish a market for Medina. He came to the market of the Banū Qaynuqā, then he went to (the place later known as -K) the market of Medina. He stamped its ground with his foot and said: This is your market; let it not be narrowed (*fa-lā yudayyaq*) and let no tax (*kharāj*) be taken on it ⁵). A tradition quoted on the authority of Ibn Asīd reports that the place of the market of Medina was proposed to the Prophet by a man (scil. one of the adherents of the Prophet); the Prophet visited the place, stamped the ground with his foot and uttered his saying that it might not be diminished nor might a tax be imposed on it ⁶).

A slightly different tradition is recorded by Ibn Mājah ⁷) on the authority of Abū Usayd ⁸). The Prophet went to the market of the

---


³) al-Samhūdī, *op. cit.*, I, 539 inf.


⁵) al-Samhūdī, *op. cit.*, I, 539.

⁶) al-Samhūdī, *op. cit.*, I, 540.

⁷) *Sunan al-Muṣṭafā* II, 28 (ed. Cairo 1349 AH).

Nabiţ looked at it and said: This is not a market for you. Then he went to a market (i.e. to another market), looked at it and said: This is not a market for you. Then he returned to this market, circumambulated it and said: This is your market; let it not be diminished, and let no tax be levied on it 1).

The place chosen by the Prophet was in the quarter of the Banū Sāʿida and served as a cemetery. The Banū Sāʿida objected at first but gave their consent later 2). It was an open space and a rider could put his saddle in the market, go round the market in every direction and see his saddle 3). Attempts to erect some buildings or to pitch tents in the market were prevented by the Prophet and later by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb 4). It was Muʿāwiya who for the first time built two houses in the market: The Dār al-Qaṭīrān and Dār al-Nuqṣān 5) and levied taxes. Hishām built a big building which included the whole market; on the ground floor were shops, on the upper floor were rooms for letting. This building was demolished by the people of Medina when the news of the death of Hishām reached them 6). The reason for this mutinous action seems to be that the people considered the building of the house in the market and the levying of taxes by the governor of the Caliph as unlawful innovations.

In fact the pious 'Umar b. 'Abd al-ʿAzīz is reported to have forbidden to levy any fee (kīrā') in the market on the grounds that “the market is a charitable endowment” (al-sūq  ṣadāqa) 7). The meaning of this utterance of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-ʿAzīz is elucidated by a report of Ibn Zubāla and Ibn Shabba, told on the authority of Muḥammad b. 'Abd

1) The text has fa-lā yuntaqasanna; the commentator reads and explains fa-lā yuntaqadanna, which seems to be an error.
2) al-Samhūdī, op. cit., I, 540.
3) ib., I, 541.
5) al-Samhūdī: op. cit., I, 541; Dār al-Qaṭīrān and Dār al-Nuqṣān appear to be pejorative nicknames coined by the people who objected to the principle of building the houses and levying taxes.
7) Reported by Ibn Zubāla on the authority of Khālid b. Ilyās al-ʿAdawī as recorded by al-Samhūdī, op. cit., I, 540; about Khālid b. Ilyās see Ibn Ḥajar: Taḥdīb III, 80 and Dhahabi: Mīzān I, 627 (No. 2408).
Allâh b. Hasan 1) stating that the Prophet granted the Muslims their markets as charitable endowment (taşaddaqa ‘alâ ’l-muslimîna bi-aswâ-qîbîm) 2). The letter of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz abolished apparently the levying of taxes imposed on the market by Mu‘âwiya.

The scanty reports about the market established by the Prophet in Medina seem to be trustworthy. They are recorded by ‘Umar b. Shabba and Ibn Zubâla, both competent authorities on the history of Medina. These reports were omitted in other sources because the event of the market was not enough important in shaping the image of the Prophet and the early community by later authors as the market itself did not survive and did not serve as place of devotion.

The establishment of the market by the Prophet a short time after his arrival in Medina 3) seems to be of some importance. There is no indication of the intention of the Prophet; but the principle to establish a new market without taxes may imply that the Prophet intended to adopt the practice of the market at Ukâz where taxes were not levied. The later interpretation of this event was the idea of al-sūq ṣâdaqâ.

The clash with Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf 4) seems to indicate that Ka‘b considered the establishment of the new market as competition to the existing one of the Banû Qaynuqa‘. The story of the market supplies us with an additional aspect of the contention between the Prophet and the Jews in Medina.


3) The date can be fixed by the date of the assassination of Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf. See Jones: The Chronology of the Maghâzi, BSOAS, 1957 p. 248, 262.

4) Ka‘b was elected as chief of the Jews, replacing Mâlik b. al-Ṣayf; see ‘Alî b. Burhân al-Dîn al-Ḥalabi: Insân al-‘uyûn II, 116.