BOOK-REVIEW

Barakat Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews (A re-Examination).* Indian Institute of Islamic Studies/Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, pp. i-x + 140, price Rs. 75.00.

This book which purports to deal with the relations of the Jews, mostly settled and living in and around Yathrib (later Madīna), during the Medinan period of the Prophet’s life is in fact an attempt to discredit or refute the accounts of such early authorities as Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa’d and al-Wāqidī etc. of the massacre of the members of the Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayṣa as a finale to the Battle of the Ahzāb or Ditch in 5/627. It is a piece of Muslim apologetics under the garb of historical research and an objective study of “an important event in both the history of Islam and of the Jews and one that has colored relations between the two groups from that day to this” as has been remarked by a Western non-Muslim scholar.

Coming to the massacre of the male adults of Banū Qurayṣa, or their fighting men only, the author says: “There is nothing intrinsically wrong in accepting that they (the Jewish muqātile) all died as martyrs (ital. ours), but it seems to be too good to be true; it has the overtones of the story of the martyrs of Najrān.” (p. 75). It is not clear from the above sentence what “seems to be too good to be true”. Does he mean to say that the muqātile of Banū Qurayṣa did not die as martyrs or that their execution was only an act of warfare and was thus devoid of the “halo of martyrdom” which is generally bestowed on those who die fighting the members of a different religion?

The simple fact is that the Banū Qurayṣa were punished for their treachery, breach of pact and open enmity towards the Muslims. They had joined the Confederacy (the combined armies of the pagan Quraysh of Mecca and the Banū Ghatafān) “who were reasonably optimistic
about their ability to take Medina” (p. 70) and thus make short work of the Muslims. The Qur’ān describes the Banū Qurayza as “the people of the Book who had backed up the Confederates” (XXXIII : 26),

who were bent upon destroying the Muslims.

According to the author “the condemnation of the B. Qurayzah, however, as reported by Ibn Ishāq and other maqḥāzi- writers does not stand to reason and it is at variance with the Qur’ān.” (p. 71). He himself quotes a part of the verse 26 of sūra al-Āhzāb (Ch : XXXIII) which describes the fate of the Banū Qurayza and reads:

و انزل الذين ظاهرواهم من اهل الكتاب من صبيحهم وقذف في قلوبهم الرعب
فريقاً تقتلون و تأسرون فريقاً (الإحزاب، 26)

(“And those of the people of the Book who aided them Allāh did take them down from their strongholds and cast terror into their hearts (so that) some you slew, and some you made prisoner.”—A. Yusuf Ali).

The next verse 27 then goes on to say:

و أورثكم أرضهم و ديارهم و أموالهم و أرضنا لم تطوها
و كان الله علي كل شيء قديراً (الإحزاب، 27)

(“And He made you heirs of their lands, their houses, and their goods, and of a land which you had not frequented (before). And Allāh has power over all things”.—A. Yusuf Ali). XXXIII : 27.

In the above quoted verse the land which the Muslims had not earlier frequented refers to the oasis of Khaybar which fell to the Muslim arms after the Banū Qurayza affair was over in the beginning of 7/628. One fails to understand how the condemnation and the subsequent dire punishment meted out to Banū Qurayza “is in variance with the Qur’ān” in view of the verses 26-27 of sūra XXXIII (a‘-Āhzāb) quoted above. Abū ‘ Ubayda Ibn Sallām quoting Ibn Shihāb says that verse 58 of sūra al-Anfal (Ch : VIII) was revealed when Gabriel came to the Prophet and told him to march to the settlements of the Banū Qurayza (see Kitāb
The Qur'ān unambiguously says that the Banū Qurayṣa after having made a pact, a convenant with the Muslims (of Medina) were guilty of going back on it. The Prophet was, therefore, asked to "retaliate by breaking off your treaty with them." And when treaties are denounced declaration of war follows. Thus the Banū Qurayṣa got in full measure what they wanted or what they had earned by their own treacherous conduct. The author also conveniently forgets that the verdict given by Sa'd b. Mu'ādh, the chief of the Aws (later Anṣār), who was appointed hakām by mutual consent after the Banū Qurayṣa had surrendered, had the full approval of the Prophet, who, in matters of religion or those concerning the entire community, either consulted his companions or spoke under inspiration but never of his own will as the Qur'ān so eloquently says:—

وَمَا يَنْتَقِقُ عَنِ الْهَوْىِ إِنَّ هُوَ الْاَوْحَىِ يُوَحِّىِ - (النَّجْمَ ٣ - ٣٥)

("Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) desire; it is no less than inspiration sent down to him") LIII : 3-4. And then the Muslims have also been enjoined upon to resort to mutual consultation in all matters of importance. The Qur'ān says: ("Who [conduct] their affairs by mutual consultation") XLII : 38; ("And consult them in [momentous] affairs") III : 159.

وَ اسْرِهمَ بَيْنَهُمْ - (الشَّورَى ٣٨)
وَ شَأْوَرُهُمْ فِي الْاَمْرِ (آل عمران) ١٠٩

Can any one believe that Sa'd b. Mu'ādh, on whose death as Imām
al-Ghazālī says in his ʿAyyūhāʾ ʿl-Walad and also the traditionists that the Throne of God shook and trembled, could dare say anything against the desire or the will or the consent of the Prophet, the leader of the community, in such a grave and serious matter as the fate of some hundreds of men who were now in the hands of the Muslims?

It is, therefore, immaterial to say: “Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim give two contradictory reports, one saying that the Banū Qurayṣah surrendered to Saʾd’s judgment and the other saying that they surrendered to the Apostle’s judgment, who in turn appointed Saʾd as hakam” (p. 78). What is he actually driving at? Granted that the Banū Qurayṣa surrendered to the judgment of Saʾd, but who appointed Saʾd as the hakam, or was he a self-appointed hakam? Ibn Ishāq, al-Waqīdī and Ibn Saʾd are all unanimous in saying that Saʾd was appointed as hakam (p. 77). Naturally he was appointed by some one and it was the Prophet: the Banū Qurayṣa tacitly agreed to this appointment and did not raise any objections. It is only L. Caetani who centuries later questioned the whole account of Saʾd’s selection by the Banū Qurayṣa as hakam (p. 80). Al-Bukhārī, among others, however, confirms Saʾd’s appointment as hakam by the Prophet. The author himself says that “the Apostle did not take hasty decisions, especially those which he could not execute” (pp. 43-44). It is now proved that the verdict given by Saʾd b. Muʿādh, although mortally wounded in the Battle of the Ditch, had the full approval of the Prophet. (cf. Abūʾl-ʿUbayd, Kitāb al-Amwāl, Urdu trans., Islamabad n.d., vol. i, pp. 271-272, 317-19).

The author remarks that the prisoners, male adults, to be accurate, who had resisted the Muslims “knew nothing about this sentence of death” (p. 83), which Saʾd as the hakam had passed against them. Does it stand to reason that the condemned men directly involved in crimes against the Muslims, reviling and abusing their leader, the Messenger of Allāh, and being guilty of flagrant breach of pact saying.

لا عقد بينا وبين محمد ولا عهد

“there is no pact between us and Muḥammad; neither there exists any agreement.” (cf. Abūʾl Aʿlā Mawdūdī, Tashīm al-Qurʿān, vol. iv, Lahore
1976, p. 60; Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Cairo 1371 A.H., vol. ii, p. 290), did not know what was to befall them?

It is strange that a woman of the Banū Qurayṣa (namely Bunāna wife of al-Ḥakam) who had killed a Muslim (Khallād b. Suwayd b. al-Ṣāmit al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī) by dropping from above a mill-stone on his head, knew that she was to be killed in requite but the male adult combatants were unaware of their tragic end. This woman was sitting and talking with 'A'isha when her name was called out, apparently from a list which had been drawn up earlier, of those to be decapitated, and was talking vivaciously and laughing heartily although she knew that her end was near. Surely all other prisoners were also fully aware of what awaited them. (cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ed. Wustenfeld, pp. 690-91; Abū Dā'ūd, *Sūnān, Kitāb al-Jihād*, Bāb Qatl al-Nisā’

Foot-note No. 9 on p. 83 of the book that “the story must be rejected; neither al-Bukhārī nor Muslim who report from 'A'ishah have accepted it” must now be put aside. Is the *Sūnān* of Abū Dā'ūd an unreliable collection of *Hadith*? It is one of the six canonical collections (*Ṣīḥāb Sītta*) and is universally regarded as authoritative and reliable. Writing of Abū Dā'ūd the author himself says that “he was a contemporary of al-Bukhārī and a pupil of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Abū Dā'ūd is less strict with his conditions (ṣhurūṭ) and where a favourable verdict has been accorded by a lenient scholar, he has “accepted, the Hadith despite the weight of adverse criticism. *This does not mean that he did not exercise proper caution.* (ital. ours). He wrote down half a million Hadith, from which he selected 4,800; he calls these authentic those which seem to be authentic, and those which are nearly so” (p. 22). The author admits that he also used the *Sūnān* of Abū Dā'ūd as one of his sources (p. 22). But in this case he strangely enough takes no notice of what Abū Dā'ūd says because it does not fit in with his scheme of disproving or belittling the historicity of the capital punishment inflicted on the hostile and treacherous Banū Qurayṣa.

Commenting on Ka'b b. Asad’s suggestion to the Banū Qurayṣa “to fight on the eve of the Sabbath and to take Muḥammad and his companions by surprise” and the reply of the Jews that “they would not like to be turned into apes by profaning the Sabbath as had happened...
to those before them who had been guilty of such an act of profanation” (pp. 75-76) the author remarks: “The reference to turning into apes is obviously an anachronism influenced by the later commentators on the Qur’ān”. (p. 76). He deliberately omits all reference to what Ibn Ishāq reports when the Prophet addressed the Jews of B. Qurayṣa who were abusing and reviling the Prophet and his household when invested by ‘Ali b. Abi Tālib and those who accompanied him. The Prophet approached the Jews and loudly addressed them:

"O brethren of the apes; Did not Allāh humiliate you and did not His punishment visit you”? Ibn Hishām, Sira.... ed. A. Salām Hārūn, Cairo 1374/1955, ii : 302; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, Ḥayāt Muḥammad, Urdu trans., Lahore 1967, p. 375).

Their reply was:

"O Abūl Qāsim; You are not unaware of (what befell us in) the past”. Ibn Hishām, op. cit., ii p. 302; Haykal, op. cit., p. 375).

This piece of dialogue clearly shows that the Jews as well as the Prophet were well aware of the fate of those Jews of antiquity who had violated the sanctity of the Sabbath and were consequently turned into apes as a punishment. It is why the Prophet addressed them as “the brethren of the apes”! Commenting further the learned author observes that “this is a reference to the Qur’ān where the word ‘apes’ has been figuratively used meaning that they became abject and humiliated men.” (p. 76). The original verse reads:

و لقد علمتم الذين اعتدوا منكم في السبت قلنا لهم كونوا قردة (البقرة 50)
("And well you know there were those among you that transgressed the Sabbath, and we said to them: Be you apes, miserable slinking" Arberry). II : 65. Referring to this humiliating and degrading punishment which was meted out to the transgressing Jews, the Qur'ān says:

قَلِيلُهُمَا نُكَالاً لَّا بِيْنَ يَدِيُهَا وَيَدَيُهَا وَمَا عَظِمْتُ لَلْسَتِينَ الْبَقرَةً (15)

("And we made it a punishment exemplary for their own times and for their posterity and an admonition to such as are God-fearing"). (II : 66).

How can 'abject and humiliated men' as the author puts it, be made an example (ناكلا) for those of the later times, the posterity, surpass comprehension? One may come across ever and anon human beings who bear a very striking resemblance with the apes, of course minus the tail. Who knows these persons may be the descendants, thousand years later, of those who were punished by God for their acts of transgression and open disobedience of Divine commands and transformed into apes?

The learned author while criticising the account of Ibn Isḥāq of the execution of the men of B. Qurayzah says:

"According to Ibn Isḥāq, 600 to 900 men of the B. Qurayzah were executed. [The books on Ḥadīth only record 400. Abū 'Ubayd also gives the number as 400. cf. Kitāb al-Amwāl, Urdu translation, Islamabad, n.d., vol. i, p. 272 line 4- A.S. B.]. It is not known what was the total strength of the B. Qurayzah. If each family is taken to consist of six persons—and this is a low average—3,600 to 4000 men, women and children must have surrendered. They were all confined in the house of Bint al-Ḥārith, a woman of the B. al-Najjār, and bound with ropes. Incarceration of four to five thousand persons can create problems even in a large town in the present age of crime, police and jails. If Ibn Isḥāq is to be believed, Medina must have been a very well-organised town which could provide detention arrangements for such a large number of prisoners. How much rope was used and what was the area of Bint al-Ḥārith's house? Were the prisoners fed? What sanitary arrangements were provided for such a large number of people in a town where there were no toilets and even women went out in the darkness for such necessities. None of these
prisoners tried to escape and the Muslims seem to have no difficulty in locking up these tame (itals. ours) prisoners”. (pp. 82-83).

According to the Population Planning authorities a family, on an average, consists of five persons; and it may be noted that this is not a low average. The total strength of the B. Qurayṣa, as calculated by the author, was on the high side 5,400 and on the low side 3,600. The average comes to 4,500 persons; of these 750 were men, the rest being women and children i.e. some 3,750 souls on an average. It is not correct to say that all of them were bound with ropes. No one would ever allow, much less the Prophet of Islam, the captive women and children to be bound with ropes. It is only the adult male combatants taken prisoner, who were bound with ropes, as happened in the case of some 70 prisoners of the Battle of Badr who fell into the hands of the Muslim to prevent their either trying to escape or committing suicide or acting in an unruly manner.

The prisoners were confined in the dār of (Kaysa or Kīsa) Bint al-Ḥārith, a woman of the B. al-Najjār, long past settled in Medina. The author asks “What was the area of Bint al-Ḥārith’s house”? The word used by Ibn Hishām (Sira, Cairo 1355/1936, vol. iii, p. 251) is dār (of Bint al-Ḥārith) which according to E.W. Lane means—” A house, a mansion; and especially a house of a large size, comprising a court; or a house comprising several sets of apartments and a court, a place of abode which comprises a building, or buildings, and a court, or space in which is no building.” (Lexicon, Book I, p. 931, col. 1). The reviewer does not possess any biographical details either about the lady or her father al-Ḥārith but it is well known that the B. al-Najjār (later Anṣār) were a well-off, prosperous, opulent tribe, which owned date-palm groves and fruit gardens and were, like other tribes of Yemenite origin belonging to the Aws and the Khazraj, agriculturists and horticulturists by profession. It may be remembered that the host of the Prophet on his migration to Medina, Abu Ayyūb Zayd b. Khālid al-Buṣūrāf, belonged to the B. al-Najjār. Bint al-Ḥārith must have been a wealthy woman whose mansion (dār) was, with its spacious courtyard, a large building comprising several sets of apartments as per Lane’s definition and meaning. It is, therefore, quite reasonable to assume that
the Prophet selected her house (dar) to be the place of over-night confinement of the males of B. Qurayza.

As to the question how much rope was used to bind the prisoners, the Arabs did never face any problem of shortage of cordage especially when we know that they manufactured their garments from camel-hair yarn as well as blankets and tentage. Camel-hair rope twined and twisted by the women-folk themselves, was freely available in any quantity with the nomad Arabs, an agricultural and pastoral community.

Whether Medina of 6/627 was "a very well-organised town to provide detention arrangements for such a large number of prisoners" the reviewer, unfortunately has no ready access to works on topography like the Wafâ‘ al-Wafâ‘ bi-Akbar Dâr al-Muṣṭafâ of Nur al-Dîn Abû’l Ḥasan ‘Ali b. ‘Abd Allâh b. Ahmad al- Samhudi (ed. Cairo 1955) and the only article dealing with the subject by Dr. Sâleh Ahmed al-‘Ali, now President, al-Majmû‘ al-Ilimi al-‘Irâqi, Baghdad published in the Islamic Culture, vol XXXV for April, 1961, is also not available to me. It is, therefore, not easy to answer this question off-hand although it has been partially answered while talking of the mansion of Bint al-Hârith where these prisoners were lodged for the night. However, just as happened in the case of the prisoners of Badr, the prisoners of B. Qurayza could have also been likewise lodged or quartered in the dwellings of other Muslims living in Medina. The probability may also not be overlooked that it were only the adult male combatants (muqātilûn) who were marched to Medina from their strong-holds (awlâm) while the women and children had been allowed to stay back over-night in their homes in the awwâlâm guarded by the Muslim soldiers. The entire problem of the lodging or confinement of the prisoners is thus rendered simplified.

The author also asks: "Were the prisoners fed?" (p. 82). Why not? Was there any dearth, shortage or paucity of food or dates (al-tamr, al-rutab), the staple food of the Arabs for which Medina is famous and which it produces, then as now, in very large exportable quantities as well as sawtâq, the gruel of parched and crushed barley, of which the Arabs were very fond and which they often stored and laid by for the rainy day.
In so far as the question of sanitary arrangements is concerned the captors should not have found it any difficult. The author must have had the opportunity of seeing thousands of pilgrims camping in vast valley of Minā on the occasion of the Ḥajj and also finding that the provision of temporary privies never puzzled or worried either the pilgrims or the muallims charged with the task, or perhaps now the Saudi Health Ministry officials. In the case of the prisoners of B. Qurāṣa it was a question of one night only; the next morning they were all executed.

These are the occasions when leniency is interpreted as weakness and mercy shown as an act of imprudence, and virtue turned into vice. The Prophet whom the Qurʾān proclaims as rahma for all creatures

وَبِاْرْسِلْنَا الرَّحْمَةَ لِلنَّاسِ لِتَعْلَمُواً

("And We have sent you naught save Mercy for all the creatures of the worlds") XXI : 107, would certainly have been the first to show mercy to the guilty men of B. Qurayṣa. But he did not, because their conduct demanded nothing but the severest and most condign punishment. Yet there were some men of the B. Qurayṣa whose lives were spared by the Prophet. Among these was also al-Zābir (‘ic) b. Bātā’ (p 83) (correct al-Zubayr b. Bātā’ b. Whahb, cf. Ansāb al-Ashrāf, ed. M. Ḥamīdullah, vol. i p. 285) who unluckily declined to take advantage of the reprieve granted to him (p. 831).

The author raises some very interesting, nice and ticklish questions. He wonders that "the disposal of nine hundred (?) bodies did not seem to have posed any problems. The trenches neatly dug were filled by the same night". (p. 85). What physical difficulty did the author envisage in disposing of the dead bodies which had already been thrown down into the trenches as soon as they were executed.

Those who could dig the trenches in a very short time could also likewise fill them—a much easier task—by the same night. Or were the Medinese Muslims short of shovels, spades and pick-axes?

It may also not be forgotten that when the victorious Muslims entered the awtam (strongholds) of th B. Qurayṣa they captured 1,500
swords, 30? coats of mail, 2,000 lances and 1,500 shields as booty. (cf. Abū’l A‘lā Mawdūdī, Tafshim al-Qurʿān, Lahore 1976, vol. iv. p. 63). And only some weeks before they had successfully dug out the ditch—where now stand the Masājid Khamsa—five mosques, near the campus of the modern Islamic University on the outskirts of the old historic town of Medina, to defend the city against the Aḥzāb—Confederates. The Jews of B. Qurayṣa had themselves supplied the Muslims with digging implement. So the Muslims were not at all short of digging implements or earth-moving equipment.

In the opinion of Dr. Barakat Ahmad “it is almost impossible that the people of Medina should have escaped typhoid, typhus, both epidemic and endemic, influenza, diarrhoea and above all cholera” after the massacre of the Jews. (p. 86). It is nothing but a flight of the author’s fancy. If the graves, pits or in this case trenches, were dug deep enough and were duly filled with earth the question of the corpses disintegrating, decomposing, putrefying etc., giving rise to the outbreak of various diseases, as might happen in the case of dead bodies lying in the open unburied and uninterred, would never arise. The books on Sira are silent on this point when describing the battles of Badr and Uḥud. Neither the village of Badr nor the town of Medina ever suffered from such epidemics as have been listed by the author. The proliferation of bacterial agents after death posing a health hazard and the healthy becoming carriers of dangerous diseases such as meningococcus (p. 86), is nothing but a figment of his imagination which has nothing to do with the description of a grave historical event.

Waxing eloquent the author at one place writes:

“There was apparently a complete absence of any sentiment among the Muslims who watched this execution. It must have been shattering experience for many and an unforgettable event for those who thought it to be fully justified. Several heart-rending incidents must have taken place during the day; some must have tried to struggle and run, others would have uttered words of
dismay and repentance, and there must have been many who either
did not die at the first blow, or died of fright even before the execu-
tioner's sword struck. Swords must have blunted and broken.
'Ali and Zubayr, who were the executioners, must have faced
several problems, and witnessed many facets of human nature
on that day. But neither 'Ali nor Zubayr, in fact no one, ever
later mentioned anything about his experience of this execution.”
(p. 85).

Is it fiction or history? Besides, being a beautiful tapestry and a
deep browse into the greenery of human physchology how else could the
above ipassage be adequately and appropriately described. In the words
of the author himself these details “are grist to story-teller's mill rather
than material for a historical examination.” (p. 99). How could the
execution of one's enemies be a shattering experience for those hardened
and doughty warriors, veterans of many battles and wars?

As to 'Ali and Zubayr they were the heroes of many battles,
especially 'Ali, the Lion of Allâh (Asad Allâh), who had seen many an
engagement during his life-time killing enemies and opponents and being
wounded in turn. The sight of the dead or the dying, in the painful
throes of death, never holds any terror or is allowed to become a night-
mare for a solidier, a swordsman or a fighter. It is only the civilians who
might have their nerves shattered, their mental equilibrium disturbed or
their physchological balance disordered on witnessing such blood-curling
scenes.

Long before the book under review was written and published the
Jews being a vindictive people, out to deal death to the Mutlims, upon
whom they look as their inveterate and avowed enemies, and fired with
the insatiable ambition to settle old scores with the followers of Islam,
raided the village of Deir Yassin, near Qastal, Jerusalem sub-district, on
April 9, 1948. They murdered in cold-blood the majority of the poor,
helpless, innocent inhabitants, numbering more than 200, (according to
Red Cross 254), including old men, women and children. Many with
folded hands and on bended knees begged for mercy, because they had
committed no crime against the Jews, but the wolf-like bestial men of the
Irgun and Stern Gang led by Menachem Begin, the old hardened terrorist
and the present-day Prime Minister of the so-called State of Israel, laughed and disdainfully rejected all such appeals. The entire male population of this small village was wiped out, the breasts of women were chopped off, the babies transfixed on spears and the edges of swords, the bellies of pregnant women slit open, the embryos forcibly taken out and cut into pieces after having been thrown up into the air. Not only that, the followers of Moses and Jacob razed all the houses to the ground and set fire to what remained of household effects. The destruction was thorough and complete! To the beastly Jews the blood of the victims of B. Qurayza shed some 1300 years ago, had at long last been fully avenged; Begin himself acknowledges in his book "The Revolt" (ed. New York, 1951) that the methods he had adopted "had satisfied an over-whelming long-held lust of the Jews for revenge".

In view of this holocaust and the numerous raids which the Jews have been making on the Palestinian Refugee Camps and settlements in South Lebanon how far the author has succeeded in his commendable effort to convince the modern Jews that the B. Qurayza affair has been bloated by Muslim maqhazī-writers is any body's guess. However, he deserves our grateful thanks for trying to bring about a rapprochment between the two historic cousins, the Israelites and the Ishmaelites i.e. the Jews and the Arabs; the children of Sara (the Saracens?) and the children of Hagar, the co-wife of Sara and the revered mother of Ismā‘īl, the elder son of Abraham and the ancestor and the forefather of the Arabs. May God crown his noble efforts with success!

The chances of the Zionists (Jews) coming in a peaceful settlement with their Arab neighbours are, however, extremely thin, slim and bleak in view of what appeared in the widely-circulated "News-Week" of June 16, 1980. Rabbi Meir Kahane, formerly head of the U.S.—based Jewish Defence League and now leader of the terrorist gang, the Kach declared according to "News-Week" "our final goal is to expel all Arabs from the land of Israel" and if that does not work Kahane advocates outright murder. Members of his gang are known to unleash vicious attack-dogs on Arab children, harass students at Bir Zatn University, near the town of Rām Allan and ransack Palestinian households.
The use of the word ‘Apostle’ throughout book for the Prophet of Islam is neither happy nor appropriate. The Qur’an uses only two terms for the founder of Islam—Prophet (Nabi) or Messenger (Rasūl). The word ‘Apostle’ has a clear Christian connotation. It is commonly and generally used to describe one of the Christ’s Twelve; one sent to preach the gospel, the most famous being Paul. The Orientalists deliberately used this word for Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh P.B.U.H because they neither recognised him as the Prophet nor as the Messenger of Allāh. Their aim was (God forbid;) to degrade and disgrace the founder of Islam and to equate him only with the apostles of Christ, because they did not consider him spiritually and scripturally equal in rank in the Biblical prophets like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses or Jesus Christ of the Evangelicus. However, the author seems to have done so in good faith, and it is hoped that in the next edition, if one is ever published, this unhappy epithet would be replaced by one of the two suggested above and this lapse condoned.

Chapter II of the book is entitled “The People of the Sahīfa”. By ‘Sahīfa’ the author means the document “which was signed in Yathrib between the Muslims from the Quraysh, the various clans of the Ansār and the Jews.” and which is regarded by scholars of all schools of thought both Western and Eastern as “unquestionably authentic.” While scholars like W. Montgomery Watt, R.B. Serjeant, Muḥammad Ḥamdullāh, Moshe Gil, et al. call it “The Constitution of Medina”, Dr. Barakat Ahmad prefers to call it the “Sahīfa”. Ibn Hishām only calls it “Kitāb”.

However, Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd in his foreword to the edition of the Sīra of Ibn Hishām (Matba‘ Ḥijāzī, Cairo) calls this document as “Sahīfa” (vol. i: 10-12). He is followed by
Ahmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf who in his work “Makka wa’l-Madina fi’il Jahiliyya Wafī Ahd al-Rasul” (Cairo 1961) also calls it the “Sahifa”. He says:

و بعد ذلك (لمؤاخذة وضع النبي دستورًا تنظيم الحياة العامة في المدينة، وتحديد العلاقات بينها وبين حيرانها وبدل هذه الدستور على مقدرة قائمة من الناحية التشريعية، وعلى علم كبير بأحوال الناس وفهم نظروههم وقد

عرف هذه الدستور بالسحيفة

ابن ابراهيم الشريف مكة والمدينة في الجاهلية وعهد الرسول نشره

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The author (Ahmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf) in this passage clearly says that the Prophet after establishing mu‘ākhā between the Muhājirūn and the Ansār framed a Constitution for the conduct of public life in Medina. He also says that this Constitution came to be known as the ‘Sahifa’. Abū ‘Ubayd Abū’l Qāsim b. Sallām simply calls it a pact or an agreement (see his Rītāb al-Amwāl, Urdu transalation, Islamabad n.d., vol. i, pp. 359 ff.). Lexically speaking the word “[Rītāb]” meant a writing, a document etc. while “Sahifa” means a sheet of paper, a leaf (of a book), a list, a letter, a book, a newspaper, a small dish (cf. Steingass, A Learner’s Arabic English Dictionary, p. 574 b). Hence those scholars who call it “Constitution” are nearer the facts than those who call it by some other name. Ibn Hishām very precisely calls it merely a “Kitāb”, a piece of writing which it really was or what we call in Persian and Urdu a “dastāiwiz” (دستاپی) a “tāhir” (تعریف), both meaning, among others, a document a “Sahifa” as an ism alam would be a misnomer and a solectism. Dr. Muḥammad Hamidullāh properly and accurately calls it “The First Written Constitution of the World” (Lahore 1968).

Concluding the discussion of this historic document the author observes:

“With his (the Prophet’s death the Sahifa and the ummah, created by it as well as the Jews who were part of the ummah, passed out of the picture.” (p. 50). In our view the key-word in this document is the word Umma with whose definition different scholars
have dealt differently. The Prophet, acting under Divine revelation, by drawing up the document under discussion set a precedent for the Muslim as to how to behave and act in a plural society composed of multi-racial or multi-ethnical groups. According to him the Muslims could join hands and enter into an agreement or entente cordiale with non-Muslim groups or blocks of people if the exigencies of time and the prevailing atmosphere so demanded.

Acting on the same analogy the so-called Nationalist 'ulamā' of undivided India agreed to cooperate with the Hindus for the liberation of the country from foreign domination. The Khilāfat and the Non-Cooperation Movements of the twenties were a direct result of this policy chalked out by the 'ulamā' (of Deoband) in the light of the Mithāq Madina drawn up by the Prophet soon after his migration to that town or some time later.

The author also makes some startling observations. At one place he writes: "Probably in the history of religious persecution Jews are, the only minority group who while secretly remaining faithful to Judaism practised another religion which they or their ancestors had to adopt to save their lives." (p. 75). So, it were the Jews who were in fact the inventors of the dogma of dissimulation (taqayya)"

Referring to the Jewish support to Medinan opposition and the part played by the leading Jewish tribes the learned author says:

"The B. al-Nāḍīr adopted a hostile posture at a time when the Apostle and his followers were in deep waters. To treat them with the same leniency which was shown to the B. Qaynuqā‘ would have been a sign of weakness, and disastrous to the Muslim prestige." (p. 66).

In this passage if the name of B. al-Nāḍīr is replaced by that of the B. Qurayza it excellently fits into the picture and poignantly describes the attitude of the latter with reference to the Muslims after the Battle of the Ditch. Professor W. Montgomery Watt remarks: "At the seige
of Medina in April 627 the remaining large Jewish clan, Qurayza, *intrigued with the enemy*, (itals. ours), and after the failure of the seige it was forced to surrender and then punished, all the men being executed and the women and children sold into slavery.” (W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam*, London 1979, p. 103). In his another work, *Muhammad at Medina*, he writes:

“The same is true of the intrigues in which the tribe of Qurayza was involved. They seem to have had a treaty with Muḥammad, though it is not clear whether, in the event of an attack on Medina, they were to help him or merely to remain neutral. They are said to have supplied the Muslims with some implements for the digging of the trench. Later, however, Huyayy b. Akhtab of an-Naḏr persuaded them that Muḥammad was certain to be overwhelmed and they changed their attitude. As they would be exposed to Muslim retaliation should the confederacy retire without destroying Muḥammad, they demanded hostages from Quraysh and Ghatafaq. Negotiations over this were protracted. A secret agent of Muḥammad’s, acting in accordance with hints from him, so increased the suspicion with which the different parties viewed one another that the negotiations came to nothing, and the threatened ‘second front’ was never opened. The importance of this diplomatic success can hardly be overestimated, for an attack from the south on the Muslim rear by Qurayzah might have put an end to Muḥammad’s career.” (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, pp. 38-39).

Intriguers do not deserve bouquets and the Jews of B. Qurayza received in full measure what they so richly deserved. To say that the punishment meted out to them, as some Jewish scholars maintain, was inhuman displays nothing but abysmal ignorance of the rules of warfare then prevalent among the Arabs. Let the Israelites look to their own atrocities which they perpetrate on the defenceless (Palestinian) Muslims from time to time.

We wholly agree with Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr that the book under review “is a solid piece of work based on serious research.” We hope and pray that Jews all over the world specially those now in occupation of Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem, Safad and other holy places in Palestine, including Nazareth, the hometown of Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, may
revise their attitude of bitterest enmity, hostility, deep-rooted hatred and dislike towards the Muslims especially those whom fate has now made their neighbours, whether they like it or not, and shed their centuries-old notions of racial superiority, pride in their Biblical genealogy, and intense prejudice against the Muslims whom they very unfortunately regard as the followers of a "false" Prophet (God forbid!). They must realize that the religion introduced and preached by the Prophet, had it not been a revealed religion, the finale of Judaism and Christianity, could not endure for full fourteen centuries and command the allegiance of 900 million followers spread all over the world including the heart of Christendom and the lost Kingdom of Judea.

A. S. BAZMEE ANSARI

Karachi
24th June, 1980.