

## THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF YATHRIB BEFORE ISLAM

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### ABSTRACT

*It is known from history that the present-day city of Medina in Saudi Arabia was called Yathrib before Islam. Jewish tribes such as Qaynuqa, Nadir, Qurayza and Arab tribes Aws and Khazraj lived there. This article highlights the pre-Islamic lives of the Jewish and Arab tribes.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Yasrib, Arab, Jew, Tribe, Elder, Utm.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The city of Madinah in present-day Saudi Arabia was once a fertile, barren oasis, called "Yatrippe" in Ptolemy's writings, "Yatrippe Polis" in Stephanus Byzantium, and "Asrib" and "Yasrib" until the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad, according to the sources<sup>1</sup>. It is also mentioned in the Qur'an by the name of Yasrib: "Then a group of them said: 'O people of Yasrib (Madina)! It is impossible for you to stand (against such a large number of enemies). So go back (to your homes)!...»<sup>2</sup>.

On its eastern and western sides were the Waqim and Wabra volcanic rock piles, and on the northern and southern sides were the mountains of Uhud and Ayr. There were many streams and valleys around the city, in the west - Aqiq, in the east - Urayd, in the north - Bathon, in the south - Muzainab and Mahzur valleys. The population of Yathrib was composed of Arab tribes who came to Yathrib after the flood of "Sailul-Arim" in Yemen, as well as Jews who moved from Jerusalem in 132-135 after their lands were conquered by the Romans<sup>3</sup>.

Arabic literature mentions the names of more than twenty small and relatively large clans of Jews, besides the Qaynuqa, Nadir, Qurayza tribes, each of which has more than two thousand people. The Jews of Yasrib usually lived in fortified utms, not in the open. Utms are of great importance in times of war, when men go to battle, protection for women, children, and the elderly; served as a warehouse for grain, weapons and other needs. The total number of utms is 59, and there are temples and houses for the meeting of elders. There is also a hint in the Qur'an that the city of Yathrib consisted of villages located close to each other<sup>4</sup>.

Jewish tribes occupied the fertile and prosperous lands of the region. Banu Nadir tribe lived in Wadi Muzaynab in the southeastern part of Yathrib, Banu Qurayza lived in Wadi Mahzur to the north of them, and Banu Qaynuqa lived in the northwest of these two tribes near the city center. Also, many other Jewish clans lived together in favorable lands<sup>5</sup>.

Surah Al-Baqara, verses 84-85 of the Qur'an informs that these tribes shed blood, banished each other and were intolerant. In our opinion, the relationship between the Jewish tribes arose from their living conditions. Because the Nadir and Qurayza tribes living in the valleys around the city engaged in agriculture, and the Kaynuq tribe living near the city center did not have land and crops, so they engaged in handicrafts<sup>6</sup>

As for the pre-Islamic Arab inhabitants of Yathrib, they mainly comprised two tribes: the Aws and the Khazraj. According to Arab genealogists, these two tribes are related by blood and belong to the Azd tribe, which originally spread from southern Arabia to other regions of the peninsula. These tribes, in turn, were divided into five large and several small clans, their total number exceeded forty. There were also a number of small Arab clans in the vicinity of Yathrib who were related by patronage to the Aws and Hazraj. The Aws tribe lived in the eastern and southern part of Yathrib, and the Khazraj lived in the middle and northern part of the city. The lands of the Aws were fertile, suitable for farming, and were adjacent to the Jewish lands. The lands of Khazraj were less productive and were only close to the lands of Kaynuq. This situation did not affect the relations between the two Arab tribes and between the Arab and Jewish residents of Yathrib. At that time, the Meccan system of administration was stable during the two pre-Islamic centuries, but in Yathrib, on the contrary, it was difficult to achieve. Accumulation of fertile lands in the hands of one tribe and ethnic-religious conflicts always led to conflicts.

The arrival of the Jews and later the Aws and Khazraj tribes in Yathrib did not significantly change the existing caste structure. After the Jews, Aws and Khazraj settled, each of them had armies and slaves. But between these two large groups, the Aws and the Khazraj, and the Jews, various new social relations began to emerge. At first these relations were friendly and led to the Judaization of some members and groups of the tribe. As a result of the adoption of Judaism, the social barriers between the two sides decreased. In time, when the Jews became preoccupied with the strife between the Aws and Khazraj tribes, some Aws established friendly relations with Bani Nadir and some Khazraj with Banu Qaynuqa<sup>7</sup>. These connections naturally made the two Arab tribes hostile to each other and constant conflicts arose. Since the Jewish and Arab tribes appeared in Yathrib one after the other, their mutual relations also went through different stages. At the beginning, the Arabs were superior to the Jews, and the rule was in their hands. But after some time, as a result of the Jews organizing conspiracies and discord between the two tribes, the relations between them were broken, and there were bloody wars for 120 years<sup>8</sup>.

Before the Arab tribes migrated to Yathrib, they were engaged in agriculture. And the Jews used their experience in the processing of their land and commercial work. At first, the Aws and the Khazraj were content to ally with and serve the Jews. The Jews were afraid that the Arabs would be outnumbered by them and lose control. In order to prevent this, they increased their utms and castles and watched the Arabs. Relations between Aws and Khazraj worsened and conflicts began to arise. Conflicts occurred 5 years before the emigration of Prophet Muhammad, during the war of Samir, Sarora, Dik, Fori', Fujjor, Buos. In such wars, the Arabs called the allied Jewish tribe for help, which helped the Jews to create a conflict between the Arab tribes.

Since the palm tree was of great importance in the multifaceted economic life of Yathrib, palm groves were established in large areas. Despite the fact that the majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, the agricultural products that are lacking in the city are mainly imported from Sham. Along with the free peasant economy, there was also serfdom and tenancy.

Depending on the productivity of the land, the fee was paid with different amounts of produce. Sometimes there were cases where he worked part of the land for himself and the other part for the owner of the land. In most cases, peasants and tenant farmers were forced to take out loans, and in exchange for that, they had to sell the produce that belonged to their share in the growing place or raw. A peasant with little land, unable to repay his debts, usually gave up his land<sup>9</sup>. Such cases have increased the gap between the rich and the poor and aggravated the social situation. In general, the Jews of Yathrib lived richer than the Arabs.

In Yathrib, cattle breeding was relatively less developed, so there was active trade with the neighboring Bedouins. The Bedouins brought camels, sheep, horses, wool, felt, oil and cheese to the city and sold them, and in return brought back ornaments and clothes for the women. Yasrib was also famous for producing weapons and agricultural implements from iron. In the Banu Qaynuqa market, located near the Wadi Bathon bridge, ornaments and valuables made by this tribe were sold. Although the international caravan route also passed through Yasrib, seasonal caravans to Syria and Yemen were not organized like the Makkans. However, goods such as yarn, silk, oil, raisins, and wine from the same countries came to Yasrib in abundance. In addition to dealing with Meccan merchants, the merchants of Yathrib also actively traded in the markets of Ukoz, Majanna, and Zul-Majoz near Mecca. In domestic and foreign trade, there was a great demand for valuable ornaments made by the Kaynuqo tribe<sup>10</sup>. It is clear from these data that the economy of Yathrib was not based mainly on commercial profit like Mecca. Yathrib differed from Makkah by its relatively advanced craftsmanship. Processing of agricultural products, production of tools and equipment for agriculture was developed here.

Usury developed in Yathrib as in Makkah. The fact that both Arabs and Jews engaged in usury is also reported in Surah Nisa, verse 161 of the Qur'an<sup>11</sup>.

In conclusion, it can be said that the social, political, religious and economic life of the population of Yasrib was fundamentally different from each other. Muhammad s.a.v. he was not the only ruler there until his emigration. It was only after the initial da'wah of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, began in Makkah that the residents of Yathrib realized that the city needed a single leader.

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