

YATHRIB JEWS' LANGUAGE(S) A Study Based on Authentic Hadiths¹

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Abstract

A controversial topic of research was the language of the Jews of Yathrib, this research tries to shed light on the controversial issue. Muslim and non-muslim scholars give different explanations. However, none of these theories could determine whether this language is spoken or written. Hadiths of Prophet Muḥammad indicate three languages; Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac. For the purpose of this study, the researchers have gathered a repertoire of the authentic hadiths of the prophet related to the topic, accredited and then analyzed them. The results indicate that the Prophet asked Zayd, his translator, to learn Hebrew, which is the language of correspondence and worship of the Jews of Yathrib. Furthermore, the study shows that the language of everyday communication of the Jews of Yathrib was Arabic, which borrowed some worship-related Hebrew terms.

[Topik riset ini mencoba mengangkat beberapa isu kontroversi yang terkait dengan bahasa orang Yahudi di Yathrib (Medinah). Berbagai teori dan penjelasan dari akademisi muslim atau Orientalis masih memperdebatkan apakah bahasa tersebut merupakan bahasa lisan atau tulis. Secara eksplisit dalam hadis Nabi terindikasi adanya tiga bahasa yaitu: Ibrani, Aramaik dan Syria. Dalam tulisan ini, peneliti akan mengumpulkan, akreditasi dan

¹ All translations of hadiths, quotations and citations from Arabic into English were done by the authors. All translations of Koranic verses into English have been cited from Saheeh International (ed.), *The Qur'ān: English Meanings* (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publication House, 1997).

analisis hadits Nabi yang autentik terkait dengan topik ini. Kesimpulannya menunjukkan bahwa Nabi memerintahkan Zayd, penerjemahnya, untuk belajar bahasa Ibrani yang mana merupakan bahasa surat – menyurat dan ritual orang Yahudi di Madinah. Oleh karena itu, tulisan ini menunjukkan bahwa bahasa komunikasi sehari-hari orang Yahudi di Madinah adalah bahasa Arab yang diantaranya meminjam beberapa istilah dalam bahasa Ibrani.]

Keywords: Prophet, Zayd bin Thabit, Medina, Hebrew, Syriac, Orientalism, Authentic Sunnah.

A. Introduction

The influence of Judaism² and many other languages in Hejaz³ on the Koran has been discussed by orientalist, Arab or Muslim researchers. The linguist 'Alī Khushaim⁴ has denied claims of such an influence by studying roots of Arabic words. On the other hand, historians such as Israel Welfinson, and orientalist such as Theodor Nöldeke have conducted studies about the history of Jews in Arabia, including Yathrib. Welfinson concluded that Yathrib Jews' language was Hebrew because the names of some Jewish tribes and the names of Jews of Yathrib are derived from old Hebrew.⁵ However, Welfinson himself acknowledged that the genealogy of Jews, upon the Talmud, has been lost when Herod the Great burnt genealogy books in the first century before Christ. Since then, most of Jews have taken Arabic surnames depending on the

² See Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed Aus Dem Judenthume aufgenommen?: Eine von der Königl. Preussischen Rheinuniversität gekrönte Preisschrift* (Bonn: Baaden, 1833).

³ See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Jalāl-ad-Dīn al Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mū 'assasat al-Risāla, 2008); Jalāl-ad-Dīn al Suyūṭī, *al-Muhaddab fī mā Waqa'a min al-Qur'ān min al-Mu 'arrab* (Beirut: Dār al- 'Ilmiyyah, 1988).

⁴ 'Alī Khushaim, *Hal fī al-Qur'ān 'ajz? Nazrā Jadīdab ilā Mawdū' qadīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ, 1997).

⁵ See Israel Welfinson, *Tārīkh al-Yahūd fī Bilād al- 'Arab fī al-Jabīlīyyah wa Ṣadr al-Islām* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah, 1914), pp. 15–6; Carl Brockelmann, *Tārīkh al-Adab al- 'Arabī*, trans. by 'Abdīl-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Cairo: A Dar al-Ma arif, 1968), p. 121.

places they inhabited.⁶ Nöldeke affirmed that the names of the eleven Jew tribes that were in pre-Islamic Hejaz have no Hebrew roots, except for Za'ūrā.⁷ These hypotheses however, have not involved the spoken or written forms of Hebrew.

Islamic sources, including the Koran, Sunnah, the Prophetic biography and history books, have confirmed that entire Jewish tribes have inhabited Yathrib and many other parts of Hejaz. These sources have also indicated that the creed of Jews is the one of the Torah, “the sons of Israel”, “Moses and Aaron”. However, the Koran has not discussed the language of these Jews. Meanwhile, a number of authentic, weak, and fake hadiths⁸ show that the Jews have spoken a variety of languages that are Semitic in origin. In addition, the Prophetic biography books have implied that Jews have spoken and written an anonymous non-Arabic language. Jews, for instance, have discussed the issue of spirit in their own language and asked Prophet Muḥammad about it.⁹ When the Prophet sentenced the Jewish Salām Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq to death, he sent to him a group of soldiers to which he appointed ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Atīq a commander. When the group of soldiers approached his house, Ibn ‘Atīq spoke to Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq’s wife in Hebrew so that she does not panic. She thought he was a Jew. When she opened the door, she was

⁶ See Welfinson, *Tārīkh al-Yabūd fī Bilād al-‘Arab fī al-Jabīlīyyah wa Ṣadr al-Islām*, pp. 15–6; Moshe Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages*, trans. by David Strassler (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 67–77; Brockelmann, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī*, p. 121.

⁷ Jawād ‘Alī, *al-Miḡṣal fī Tārīkh al-‘Arab Qabl al-Islām*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malā’īn, 1968), p. 6,12.

⁸ The authors have adopted the final definition of authentic hadith suggested by Ibn Ḥijr: “a report whose *isnād* connects to the Prophet via the narration of totally upstanding transmitters in command of what they transmit, or if not totally, supported by others like them, and is not *shādh* [irregular] or afflicted with a flaw (*mu‘all*)”. Cited by Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 249.

⁹ Muḥammad Al-Bukhārī, *Jamī’ al-Sabīh*, vol. 1, ed. by Muḥammad Zuhair b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Jeddah: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 2001), p. 37; Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim, *Jamī’ al-Sabīh*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Dār Ibn Rajab, 2006), p. 1457; Muḥammad Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 2008), pp. 704–5; Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī al-Nisā’ī, *Kitāb as-Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 10 (Beirut: Mū‘assasat al-Risālah, 2001), p. 156.

about to scream when she saw the weapons.¹⁰

Historians and commentators of the Koran including al-Wāqidi (c. 748-822), al-Ṭabarī (838-923), Ibn 'Asākir (1105-1175), Ibn Taymīyyah (1263-1328), Ibn Kathīr (c. 1300-1373) and al-'Asqalānī (1372-1449) investigated the languages which Jews spoke including the Syriac, Hebrew and Aramaic. The present study uses the second source of Islamic legislation, Sunnah as its primary source of investigation. It aims to provide a repertoire of Prophetic authentic hadiths and narrations that discuss Hebrew and Syriac. The study provides the hadiths which records the Prophet's order to Zayd Ibn Thābit to learn the language of Jews. Hadiths that may interpret previous hadiths were also studied and investigated. To repertoire the authentic hadiths, a special investigation of the chain of narration with reference to hadith principles of narration was thoroughly studied by the authors of the paper. A detailed investigation of the narrators for each hadith was carried out, and narrators were subject to discrediting and accrediting.¹¹ The texts of the surveyed hadiths were then investigated according to the principles of hadith text studies.¹² The texts were thoroughly studied to find out whether they had a default or contradict other hadiths, narrations or facts that tackle the same issue. The historical background of the sources and references that were used in this study was subject to investigation. This attempt was made to unveil the connection between the content of the hadiths and the historical background. As a result of this investigation, a new approach

¹⁰ 'Abdullāh Al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2004), pp. 330–2; Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994), pp. 409–10; Ibn Ḥajar Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 9 (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 2005), pp. 105–6; Khayr al-Dīn al-Zarkalī, *al-'Alām, Qāmūs Tarājīm li Ashbar al-Rijāl wa al-Nisā' wa al-Musta'ribīn wa al-Mustashriqīn*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malā'īyn, 2007), p. 102; Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Al-Maqrīzī, *Imtā' al-Asmā' bimā li al-Naby min al-Aḥwāl wa al-Ammāl wa al-Ḥafada wa al-Matā'*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah, 1941), pp. 186–7.

¹¹ The authors established the repertoire of the hadiths depending on the science of hadith evaluation which accredit or discredit the authentic hadiths. The science evaluates and criticizes the biography of the narrators. It distinguishes reliable hadiths from unreliable hadiths in establishing the credibility of the narrators, using both historic and religious knowledge.

¹² "Hadith Studies" is the science of the principles by which the conditions of the sanad, the chain of narration, and the matn, the text of the hadith, are known.

and method of referencing and description of hadiths narrations are proposed. The new methodology is expected to offer a new perspective into the language of Yathrib Jews. Language is a mark of collective identity. People who speak the same language have invisible ties that were sown long time ago by their mutual nature.¹³ A vivid and rich study of language must take in account the identity of those who speak it, since an identity has significance only through language.¹⁴ Language is a part of the individual's identity and is used to distinguish such individual within a collective identity. It is not part of what a person says, but part of the person himself. People would read someone's personality and try to understand it in much complicated ways depending on the language he/she speaks.¹⁵

B. The Jews of Hejaz

The immigration of Jews to The Arabian Peninsula in general and Yathrib in particular is subjected to many controversial theories. The Koranic chapter "al-Burūj" confirms that the Jews have reached Yemen. This chapter narrates the story of *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* (the people of the groove) which all exegesis relates to the massacre committed by Yūsuf dhū Nawās (517 and 525-27 CE), the Jewish king, against the Christians of Najrān. Other resources indicate that some Jews have reached Yathrib out of trade exchange which was prosperous between the Jews of Palestine and the people of The Arabian Peninsula. According to the Torah,¹⁶ ancient wars were another possible way for the existence of Jews in Yathrib. The women and children of Jews were taken slaves by Arabs. On the other hand, al-Aṣfahānī narrates in his manuscript *al-Aghānī* many stories about the origin of Yathrib Jews. The ancestors of Qurayzah, Banū al-Naḍīr and Banū Qaynuqā' fled to Yathrib from Bilād al-Shām (Levant) after having disobeyed Moses' orders. Another narrative

¹³ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. by George A. Kelly, trans. by R.F. Jones and G.H. Turnbull (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1968), pp. 190–1.

¹⁴ John E. Joseph, "Language and Politics", *The Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, ed. by Catherine Elder and Alan Davies (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 297.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 298

¹⁶ The Bible, *Ezekiel* 21, 24-27; *Samuel the First* 15; *Second Chronicles* 9, 14.

demonstrates that Qurayzah, Banū al-Naḍīr and other Israelite tribe called Banū Bahdal escaped from the Byzantine repercussion.¹⁷ Similarly, al-Ṭabarī and al-Maqdisī confirm that the Jews migrated to the Peninsula after the second invasion of Jerusalem and the triple Jew protest against the Romans.¹⁸ The Romans, led by Titus (39-81 AD), have avenged and destroyed Jerusalem. Al-Ḥamawī, in his geographical dictionary,¹⁹ has provided the details of the Jews' migration to Hejaz.

Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Asākir and Ibn Kathīr support the Torah version of the invasion of Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar in 586-7 BC. Part of the city Jews were imprisoned and the other part fled for a shelter in Yathrib,²⁰ which is a place with an oasis just like Khaybar and Fadk, which were inhabited by the Jews.

How true the above claims are is something controversial.²¹ Some scholars believe that these claims were influenced by the Jewish version of the story at that time. An authentic hadith provides us with information that contradicts the aforementioned claims. The hadith comes across

¹⁷ Abū al-Faraj Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Samīr Jābir, 2nd edition, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 110; vol. 22, pp. 112-114. Abū al-Faraj Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, vol. 3, 2nd edition, ed. by Samīr Jābir (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2002), p. 110; Abū al-Faraj Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, vol. 22, ed. by Samīr Jābir (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2002), pp. 112-4.

¹⁸ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 2, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 1967), pp. 540-1; Muṭahhar Ibn Ṭāhīr Al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bid' wa al-Tārikh*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2013), p. 211; Muṭahhar Ibn Ṭāhīr Al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bid' wa al-Tārikh*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2013), pp. 129-30.

¹⁹ Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2008), p. 15.

²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 2: 539; Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl Ibn 'Omar Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1971), p. 319; Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh Dimashq*, vol. 3 (Bairut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), p. 416.

²¹ The popular claim is that the Jews of Yathrib are the descendants of a popular Jew who are similar to Arabs in terms of traditions, morals, and poetry. 'Abdullāh Ibn Salām, for instance, is a Jew who converted to Islam. He belongs to Banū Qaynuqā', and his origin goes back to the sons of Israel. His roots go back to the Prophet Joseph who lived in Egypt. Hartwig Hirschfeld, "Essais sur l'Histoire des Juifs de Médine", in *Revue des Études Juives*, (Paris, 1882), p. 169. Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Abdallah Ibn Salam*, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/190-abdallah-ibn-salam>, accessed 28 August 2016.

some Jewish tribes that were not exiled before. Aisha, the Prophet's wife, said: "Banū al-Naḍīr's battle, a tribe of Jews, took place six months after Badir Battle. Their homes and date trees were in Yathrib (...). Prophet Muḥammad fought against them in a battle after which they had a treaty stipulating their departure to Bilād al-Shām. They were the antecedent of a tribe who had never been banished before. They were banished this time; otherwise, they would have been tortured in this life. They would have their children and women taken slaves. When Allah relates to them in the Koran by saying "the first gathering", He refers to their banishment to Bilād al-Shām".²² According to the hadith, some Jews are Arabs in origin. Aḥmad Sūsah confirms such a claim and adds that there is no connection between the Jews of Bilād al-Shām and the Jews of Palestine and they were Arabs who converted to Judaism.²³ In his book *al-Tawrāh jā'at min al-jazīrah al-arabīyyah*, Al-Ṣalībī believes that the origin of Judaism emerged from the Arabian Peninsula and spread thereof. It seems that trade has contributed to such spread of the religion.²⁴

Nonetheless, we can argue that their presence in Yathrib is a natural extension of the geographical and historical Jewish presence in ancient Yemen, which was proclaimed by recent theories. These theories dispute the biblical narrative that the formation of "sons of Israel" and "Jewish kingdom" did not depart from the geographic, historical and cultural context of ancient Yemen. Hence, placing it within the context of historical Palestine was merely an erroneous presumptions or a stunted Orientalist reading of the history of the region and misunderstanding of the biblical narrative.²⁵

²² Muqbil b. Hādī Al-Wādī'ī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994), p. 240.

²³ Aḥmad Sūsah, *Abḥāth fī al-Yahūdīyyah wa al-Ṣubūmīyyah* (Irbid: Dār al-Amal, 2003), pp. 44–6, 50, 55.

²⁴ Kamāl al-Ṣalībī, *al-Tawrāt Jā'at min al-Jazīrah al-'Arabīyyah*, trans. by 'Afif Wazan (Beirut: Mū'assasat al-Abḥāth al-'Arabīyyah, 1986), p. 31.

²⁵ Fadhil AL-Rubaiee, *Jerusalem "The Different History"*, trans. by Bassam S. Abu-Ghazlah (AL Rubaiee Foundation, 2016); Fadhil AL-Rubaiee, *The Fall of Jericho and The Myth of Crossing The River Jordan*, 1st edition edition, trans. by Bassam S. Abu-Ghazlah (AL Rubaiee Foundation, 2016).

C. Hadiths of Hebrew

Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī (810-870) includes Abū Hurayra's narrative which indicates that the language of 'Torah that Jews of Yathrib read was Hebrew: "The Jews of Yathrib were reading the 'Torah in Hebrew and interpreting it into Arabic for Muslims. So the Prophet commented: Do not believe the people of the book nor disbelieve them. Rather say 'We believe in Allah and what He descended'.²⁶" This statement may indicate that the Jews were doing an exegesis of 'Torah rather than a translation. Ibn Taymīyyah (1263-1328) justified why some Muslims understood Hebrew; it is due to the similarity of its terms with Arabic as well as the process of linguistic derivation.²⁷

The Koran approves that the Torah was written. Allah says in the chapter "al-Baqarah",²⁸ "So woe to those who write the scripture with their own hands, then say, 'This is from Allah,' in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn". *Lisān al-ʿArab* Dictionary says that whenever the Koran uses word *kitāb* in a general sense, it refers to the Torah.²⁹ Hadiths also provide clear-cut proofs that the Torah was written. In one of them, a narrator says: "I brought something to sell in Yathrib at the time of Prophet Muḥammad. When I was done, I said to myself 'I'm going to attend this man and listen to what he says'. Abū Bakir and 'Omar were walking in front of me, and then I followed them till they met a man who was reading the Torah preaching it."³⁰ The Arabic word of preach, *nashara*, is derived from the root *na-sha-ra*, which is the opposite of folding something, *nashr* of something means to unfold it. The Koran

²⁶ Muḥammad Al-Bukhārī, *Jami' al-Saḥīḥ*, vol. 6, ed. by Muḥammad Zuhair b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Jeddah: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 2001), p. 20. The prophet cited the Koranic chapter "al-Baqarah" verse 136

²⁷ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwī*, vol. 4, ed. by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Madinah: Muḥamma' al-Malik Fahd li Ṭībā'at al-Maṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1995), p. 110.

²⁸ Kor 2, 79

²⁹ Al-Bāḥith al-ʿArabī, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, entry "kataba", <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8>, accessed 8 Dec 2016.

³⁰ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albānī, *al-Silsilah al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, 1995), p. 72.

uses *ṣuḥufun munashsharah*, which means unfolded manuscripts.³¹

The Prophet Muḥammad used to respect the Jews' rituals, their sacred places and their traditions.³² In another hadith, the Torah is considered for the Prophet as sacred as the Koran, to an extent that it cannot be placed on the ground. "A group of Jews approached Prophet Muḥammad and asked him to accompany them to Alqaf [high place], so he came to join them in Bayt Midrās (School of Torah). They said: 'Oh Abū al-Qāsim, a man has committed adultery, what is the punishment?' Then Prophet Muḥammad sat on a pillow they brought to him then said: 'bring me the Torah', He took off the pillow he sat on, and put the Torah on it; then said: 'I believe in you and the One Who sent you down. Who is the most knowledgeable among you?' A young man has approached..."³³ Another hadith describes a similar story: "Prophet Muḥammad asked the Jews to bring him the Torah because they denied the stoning punishment. Then he asked for a chair on which the Torah was placed on. Then he asked someone to find the verse that proves such a punishment"³⁴ The one Prophet Muḥammad asked to find the verse was

³¹ Al-Bāḥi' al-'Arabī, *Lisān al-'arab*, entry "našara", <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8>, accessed 8 Dec 2016..

³² William Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad fī al-Madinah*, trans. by Sha'bān Barakāt (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyyah, 1952), p. 302; Nabīh al-Qāsim, *Mawqif al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah min al-Tawrāh wa al-Yabūd* (Acre: Mū'assasat Aswār, 2002), p. 71.

³³ Muḥammad Al-Albānī, *Irwā' al-Ghalīl fī Takhrīj Aḥādīth Manār al-Sabil*, vol. 5 (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1979), p. 94.

³⁴ 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 1, ed. by Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al. (Cairo: Sharikat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādih, 1955), p. 566; 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Bāz, *Majmū' Fatāwī wa Maqālāt Mutanawī'ah*, vol. 9, 19th edition (Riyadh: Dār al-Qāsim, 2013), p. 288. In another narration of the same hadith, the Prophet pointed to the verse of stunning punishment in the Torah: "Jews have come to the Prophet and brought with them a man and woman that committed adultery. The Prophet said: 'what is the punishment of adultery?' They said: 'we let them have a bath then we beat them'. He said: 'Is there a stoning punishment in the Torah?' They said: 'We find it not in the Torah'. 'Abdullāh Ibn Salām said: You are liars! Bring the Torah and read it if you say the truth'. The one who teaches the Torah pointed with his finger on the verse of stunning, then put it, skipped the verse of stunning and red everything written before and after it. He took his hand back when he reached the stunning verse and asked 'what's this'? When they saw it they said: 'it is the stunning verse'? Then he sentenced both of them to stunning and they were stunned. Muḥammad Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Musnad min Ḥadīth Rasūl illah wa Sunanib wa Ayyamih*, ed. by Muḥīy al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb

not Zayd Ibn Thābit, but ‘Abdullāh Ibn Salām. Ibn Taymīyyah indicates that Ibn Salām was one of the interpreters of Prophet Muḥammad.³⁵ The above narrative was told within a religious jurisdictional context, rather than a political one. The same meaning is founded in the Koran: “Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The Prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews, and so did the rabbis and the scholars, as they were charged to preserve the Book of Allah and were witnesses to it”.³⁶

The Prophetic biography resources provide the incident of *ṣaḥāʾif*, i.e. manuscripts, Muslims got after the conquest of Khaybar.³⁷ Lisān al-ʿArab³⁸ defines *ṣaḥīfah*, singular of *ṣaḥāʾif*, as “something written on”. *Kitāb*,³⁹ according to the same dictionary means *ṣaḥīfah* and *dawāt*, which means a manuscript and something used for writing. Muslims have given the manuscripts back to Jews of Khaybar after the battle, which means that they were not interested in getting the written Jewish manuscripts. It is further evidence that Prophet Muḥammad has asked Zayd Ibn Thābit to learn the language of Jews for political concerns. Another proof of that, ‘Abdullāh Ibn Salām was a popular Jew monk and a fully-fledged scholar. All resources confirm that he converted to Islam after the Prophet’s arrival to Yathrib. Ibn Hishām believes that he accepted Islam when Prophet Muḥammad reached Yathrib. Some other scholars however believe that he accepted Islam when Prophet Muḥammad was in Mecca. Ibn Hishām claims that the Prophet used to ask Ibn Salām to read the letters which were written in Hebrew.⁴⁰ The Prophet, however, did not choose him to be the one who writes his letters to the Jews of Yathrib.

Most scholars and researchers propose that the ones who used to know Hebrew among the Jews are the rabbis. The Prophet was keen to

(Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafīyah, 1979), n. 4556.

³⁵ Taymīyyah, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwī*, 4: 109.

³⁶ Kor 5, 44.

³⁷ Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 1: 680–1.

³⁸ Al-Bāḥīth al-ʿArabī, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, entry “ṣaḥāfa”, <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8>, accessed 8 Dec 2015.

³⁹ Al-Bāḥīth al-ʿArabī, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, entry “kataba”.

⁴⁰ Cited by al-Qāsim, *Mawqif al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah min al-Tawrāb wa al-Yahūd*, pp. 43–4.

contact the leader of the Jews through his messengers.⁴¹ This is why it was necessary that Zayd should learn their language.⁴² The Koranic verse⁴³ “and among them are unlettered ones who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking, but they are only assuming,” confirms that Jews, in general, were illiterate. Al-Balādhirī (died in 892) confirms that literacy at Hejaz was not common. Only few people of al-‘aws and al-Khazraj used to know how to write Arabic. Very few Jews have also learned Arabic;⁴⁴ probably al-Balādhirī also meant using Arabic in writing.

Midrāsūn,⁴⁵ which means the ones who read and study books,⁴⁶ have studied the Torah. The rabbis used to discuss it with *Midrāsūn* so as to deal with judgment and jurisdictional issues. Al-Ṭabarī has narrated a hadith concerning a similar issue: “Jew rabbis were gathered at Bayt Midrās when Prophet Muḥammad came into Yathrib. A married Jew man committed adultery with a married Jew lady. Prophet Muḥammad did not ask the Jew rabbis regarding the punishment; rather, he went to Jew Bayt Midrās where they were studying the Torah.” The narrator adds: “Then Prophet Muḥammad returned to these rabbis and said: ‘Oh Jew people, come to me to teach you!’ A Jew rabbi came out. He was ‘Abdullāh Ibn Ṣoryā al-A‘war. Some people of Banū Qurayzah said that Abū Yāsir Ibn Akḥṭab and Wahb Ibn Yahūdā accompanied ‘Abdullāh Ibn Ṣoryā. The Jews then said: these are our rabbis! (...).”⁴⁷

A sociolinguistic study of the language of communities that embrace a given religion indicates that such communities use some of the vocabulary of the religion in daily talk. No doubt that the Torah has influenced the discourse of Jews and the diction they use in every-day

⁴¹ Watt, *Muḥammad fī al-Madīnah*, p. 71.

⁴² Akram al- ‘Omarī, *‘Aṣr al-Khilāfah al-Rāshidah, Muḥāwalah li naqd al-rivāyah al-tārikhīyah wifqa manābij al-muḥḍithīn* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-E‘baikān, 1996), pp. 320–1.

⁴³ Kor 2,78.

⁴⁴ Aḥmad b. Yaḥya Al-Balādhirī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Ṭijārīyah, 1959), p. 459

⁴⁵ In Hebrew, they are called *Midrashūn*

⁴⁶ Al-Bāḥith al-‘Arabī, *Lisān al- ‘Arab*, entry of “darasa”, <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?term=%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3>, accessed 8 Dec 2013.

⁴⁷ See the narrative of adultery in Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta‘wīl al-Qur‘ān*, vol. 2, ed. by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Damascus: Mū‘assasat al-Risālah, 2000), p. 306.

life. Such a theory made some orientalist believe that Jews basically used Arabic with little code-switching to Hebrew.⁴⁸ Some scholars use the Koranic verse “among the Jews are those who distort words from their [proper] usages and say, ‘We hear and disobey’ and ‘Hear but be not heard’ and *Rā'imā,* twisting their tongues and defaming the religion.”⁴⁹ This indicates that the Jews have spoken Hebrew which was their mother tongue. Linguistic advocates of this claim believe that “twisting of the tongues” is used to show that the Jews were used to ridicule Prophet Muḥammad, which is also another proof that the Jews had a good command of both Arabic and Hebrew.⁵⁰ Interestingly, the ones who were aware of the word and what it means when Ibn al-Tābut used it are the Anṣār.⁵¹ This means that the Anṣār knew the language. Similarly, Leszynsky concluded that this language is either a dialect of their own which the Arabs of Yathrib knew and understood or that the Jews used this kind of Hebrew in their prayers and ritual events.⁵² To conclude, to say that the Arabs of Yathrib understood the languages of the Jews and that ‘Abdullāh Ibn Salām was a Jew mean that Prophet Muḥammad asked Zayd Ibn Thābit to learn the language of the Jews for reasons that only the Prophet and Zayd are aware of.

A question to raise is “How could Zayd Ibn Thābit learn the language of the Jews and their sacred book in two weeks? Whereas the Jews themselves could not have a good command of Arabic, unless they are Arab Jews, but analphabet?”. Some groups were immigrants

⁴⁸ Welfinson, *Tārikh al-Yabūd fī Bilād al-‘Arab fī al-Jabalīyyah wa Ṣadr al-Islām*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Kor 4, 46.

⁵⁰ See ‘Alī Burhān al-Dīn al-Shāfi‘ī Al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-‘Uyūn fī Sirat al-Amīn wa al-Mā‘mūn al-Ma‘rūfah bi al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabīyyah*, vol. 2 (Egypt: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Azharīyyah, 1932), p. 127.

⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 2: 104; Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, 1: 560; Abū-‘Abdallāh Muḥammad Ibn-Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Ahkām al-Qur‘ān*, vol. 5, ed. by Aḥmad al-Bardoni and Ibrāhīm Iṭfīsh (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣrīyyah, 1964), p. 242; Muḥiy al-Dīn Darwish, *I‘rāb al-Qur‘ān wa Bayānīh*, vol. 2 (Damascus-Beirut: al-Yamāmah li al-Nashr, 1994), p. 225; Abū al-Fida‘ Ismā‘īl Ibn ‘Omar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 2, ed. by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyyah, 1998), p. 285; Al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9: 639–40.

⁵² Rudolf Leszynsky, *Die Juden in Arabien zur Zeit Mohammeds* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1910), p. 21.

who have lived in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries. A historical study of these Jews indicates that they were influenced by the languages that were spoken in the places they lived in. For instance, when the Jews of Egypt reached Palestine, they abandoned the Egyptian language and embraced the Canaanite language.⁵³ Similarly, the Jews were influenced by the Aramaic-Babel when they were enslaved. They have written their religion in Aramaic. Economically, the Jews were occupied with trade and handcraft. They had popular markets that Arabs of Yathrib and Mecca used to attend. Traders of Hejaz and Bilād al-Shām used to pass by these markets and to bargain with them. Culturally, the Jews have left a heritage of poetry told in Arabic, which is an evidence of a deep knowledge of the tongue.⁵⁴ Needless to say is that poetry is told only by those who have a good command of the language. Some of the most popular Jew poets are Sammāk al-Yahūdī,⁵⁵ al-Ṣamaw‘il⁵⁶ and al-Rabi‘ Ibn al-Ḥuqayq.⁵⁷ The pre-Islamic poet al-Nābighah al-Dhubyanī said addressing al-Rabi‘: “Al-Rabi‘, you are the best poet”. One of the famous female Jew poets is Sārah al-Quraẓīyah.⁵⁸ Jews of Banū Qaynuqā‘, Banū al-Naḍīr, Qurayzah,

⁵³ Aḥmad Sūsah, *al-‘Arab wa al-Yahūd fī al-Tārikh* (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at Wizarat al-‘Ilām al-‘Irāqīyah, 1990), p. 158.

⁵⁴ Fīlīb Ḥattī, *Tārikh al-‘Arab*, vol. 1, trans. by Edward Jirjy and Jibrāil Jbūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kashāf, 1962), p. 152.

⁵⁵ He was a poet who lived in the pre-Islamic and Islamic era. He was a Jew of Khaybar. ‘Omar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb imprisoned him and was about to execute him and said: “Abū al-Qāsim [Prophet Muhammad] has told me to ask him about the weak points of Jews of Khaybar and he told us. Then Sammāk accepted Islam. He asked the Prophet to give him back his wife Qifla, which the Prophet did.

⁵⁶ He is al-Samaw‘il Ibn Ghurayḍ Ibn ‘Adyā‘. He is a pre-Islamic Jew and wise poet. He inhabited Khaybar. His origin is controversial. He is claimed to be of Ghassān of Azd tribe. He was also claimed to be the son of a Jew father and an Azd mother. Others suggest that he is a Jew-Arab of Banū al-Dayyān tribe. He was popular for his honesty. Arabs say: “More honest than al-Samaw‘il”. He died in 560.

⁵⁷ He is a poet of Banū Qurayzah Jews. He was one of the leaders on the Day of Bu‘āth. He was an ally to Khazraj tribe and his own people. So the leader of his tribe was al-Rabi‘. Whereas the leader of Khazraj was ‘Amr Ibn al-Nu‘mān al-Bayāḍī, and the leader of Banū al-Naḍīr was Salām Ibn Mashkam. He was a contemporary poet to the famous poet al-Nābighah al-Dhubyanī. He had a number of sons who had the same hostility to Prophet Muḥammad.

⁵⁸ She is a pre-Islamic Jew poet. She belongs to Banū Qurayzah tribe

Khaybar and Wadī al-Qurā who were banished by the Prophet to Bilād al-Shām, Palestine and Mesopotamia spoke Arabic and wrote Literature and poetry in Arabic.⁵⁹ Jew Literature includes ancient Jewish liturgical poems called “piyyutim”. These poems depict Arabic poetry in form and rhyme.⁶⁰ Some of these poems are written only in Hebrew, while others have been written using both Arabic and Hebrew.

D. Hadiths that Discussed the Learning of Hebrew by Zayd Ibn Thābit

The Prophet Muḥammad has assigned Zayd Ibn Thābit the mission to learn the language of the Jews. His full name is Zayd Ibn Thābit Ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Anṣārī. He belongs to Banū al-Najjār tribe who lived in Yathrib. When he was six years old, his father died at the battle of Bu‘āth (a war that broke out five years before Hegira). He was an orphan when the Prophet came to Yathrib and was eleven years old.⁶¹ He memorized seventeen chapters of the Koran. In *Ansāb al-Asbrāf*, al-Balādhiri says that Zayd was *ghulām* with two forelocks who used to play with the other boys.⁶² In dictionaries of Arabic, *ghulām* means a male who is very close to being mature, or a boy who did not reach the age of being a young man.⁶³ In his book *al-Ṭabaqāt*,⁶⁴ Ibn As‘ad believes that Zayd was one of those who were taught literacy by prisoners of the Battle of Badir at the second year of Hegira: “those who had no redemption were given ten *ghulmān* to be taught reading and writing”.⁶⁵ Zayd was intelligent

⁵⁹ Ṣālīḥ Darādkaḥ, *al-‘Alaqāt al-‘Arabīyyah al-Yabūdīyyah Ḥattā Nibāyat‘abd al-Khulafā‘ al-Rāshidīn* (Amman: al-Ahliyyah li al-Nashr, 1992), p. 183.

⁶⁰ See the introduction of the book of Honke Zeegred, *Shams allāb ‘alā al-Gharb* (Egypt: Dār al-Nahḍah al-‘Arabīyyah, 1994).

⁶¹ Josef W. Meri (ed.), *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), p. 874.

⁶² Majd al-Dīn al-Jazrī Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā‘ūt and Bashīr ‘Uyūn, vol. 9, 1st edition (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥalawānī, 1984), p. 48.

⁶³ *Mā‘ājim, Mu‘jam ‘arabī-‘arabī*, entry “ghulām”, <https://www.maajim.com/dictionary/%d8%ba%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%85>, accessed 22 Aug 2016.

⁶⁴ Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2: 20.

⁶⁵ Cited by ‘Alī, *al-Miṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-‘Arab Qabl al-Islām*, 8: 16.

and talented. He had a good memory, and used to excel in learning.⁶⁶ The first time he fought in a battle was at the Battle of Khandaq that took place in the sixth year after Hegira and he was seventeen years old. He had the faculty of learning languages. In books of history, Zayd is famous for being one of the most important writers of revelation and Koran collectors at the time of Rashidun Caliphs, more than being a translator. Zayd Ibn Thābit died in 45 after Hegira, during the Caliphate of Mu'āwiah bin Abī Sufiān.

The hadiths that detail ordering Zayd to learn Hebrew do not report the age at which he was asked to learn it. Most probably, however, he was asked to learn it at the age of thirteen. Historically, the first banishment of Jews was the banishment of Banū Qaynuqā' Jews in the second year of Hegira; followed by the banishment of Banū al-Naḍīr in the fourth year of Hegira, and the banishment of the Jews of Qurayzah in the fifth year of Hegira when Zayd was sixteen years old. When the Jews of Khaybar were banished in the seventh year after Hegira, Zayd was eighteen years old.⁶⁷ Al-Khuzā'i confirms that Zayd "used to write to the kings and reply to the letters in the presence of the Prophet. He was the Prophet's translator into Persian, Coptic, and Abyssinian. Zayd learned these languages by natives in Yathrib".⁶⁸ If Zayd was to learn a language,

⁶⁶ See Nūr al-Dīn Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id wa Manba' al-Fawa'id*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmīyah, 2009), p. 163.

⁶⁷ Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Hakim al-Nisaburi, *al-Mustadrak: 'Ala al-Sahibayn*, vol. 1, 1st edition, ed. by Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmīyah, 1990), p. 147; Alī ibn 'Abd al-Malik Muttaqī, *Kanz al-Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af'āl*, vol. 10, ed. by Bakry Ḥayyānī and Ṣafwat al-Saqqā (Beirut: Mū'assasat al-Risālah, 1981), p. 232; Alī ibn 'Abd al-Malik Muttaqī, *Kanz al-Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af'āl*, vol. 13, ed. by Bakry Ḥayyānī and Ṣafwat al-Saqqā (Beirut: Mū'assasat al-Risālah, 1981), p. 395; Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 2: 561; Ibn Ḥajar Al-Asqalānī, *Tabdhīb al-Tabdhīb* (Ḥaidarābād ad-Dakkan: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmīyah, 1907), p. 399; 'Asākīr, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 3: 115; Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabbān, *al-Thīqāt*, vol. 3 (Hayderabad: Wizārat al-Ma'ārif li al-Ḥukūmah al-'Ālyah al-Hindīyah and Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Uthmānīyah, 1973), p. 136; Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj Al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 5, ed. by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmīyah, 1992), p. 214; Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 2, ed. by Omar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1997), p. 63.

⁶⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Al-Khuzā'i, *Takhrīj al-Dalālāt al-Sam'īyah*, 2nd edition, ed. by Iḥsān 'Abbas (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998), p. 218.

he should have learnt Hebrew; the language of the indigenous Jewish people of Yathrib, and one of the geo-cultural languages of Hejaz, just like Arabic. The reasons why Prophet Muḥammad had chosen Zayd to be his “secret keeper and writer” of his messages to Jews may be that the Prophet had had a smart Jew to write his letters who he substituted with Zayd after the conflict Muslims had with tribe of Banū al-Naḍīr.⁶⁹ This is a proof against the resources that postulate Zayd was a Jew before converting to Islam. Had he been a Jew, the Prophet would have chosen ‘Abdullāh Ibn Salām instead. Some resources support the claim that Zayd was a Jew because of the two *dhū‘ababs*, i.e. forelocks, he used to have as mentioned in some hadiths,⁷⁰ since some researchers relate it to the payot of Orthodox Jews. There is no evidence in the Torah, however, of the forelock or payot, which means that it is not a distinguished physical feature of Jews. The fact that Book of Leviticus (19, 27) says “Do not have a rounded haircut and do not cut your forelock” is nothing but a command to Jews so that they would not look like pagans who used to have a circle-like haircut, and who used to let the sides of their beards go long while cutting the part in the middle.⁷¹ The Vulgate⁷² and Septuagint⁷³ have come with a similar command. In Arabic dictionaries, a *dhū‘abah* is part of the hair loosed on the front of the head.⁷⁴ This is further evidence that taking the forelocks of Zayd to prove that Zayd used to be a Jew is a weak claim. It is worth to mention that in another narration Zayd

⁶⁹ Zakaria Bashier, *War and Peace in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (Markfield, Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2015), p. 144.

⁷⁰ Abū Zayd ‘Omar Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Tarīkh al-Madīna*, vol. 3, ed. by Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Qom: Dār al-Fikr, 1990), p. 1006.

⁷¹ Kanīsāt al-Shahīd al-‘Azīm Murqus, *Muqadimat sifr ‘Alawīn*, p. 483, <http://www.stmarkos.org/explainbible/sefr-alaoen.pdf>, accessed 30 August 2016

⁷² The Sacred Bible: *The Book of Leviticus*, http://www.sacredbible.org/studybible/OT-03_Leviticus.htm, accessed 30 Aug 2016.

⁷³ The Greek Word, *The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint)*, Leviticus, <https://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/septuagint/chapter.asp?book=3>, accessed 30 Aug 2016.

⁷⁴ Ma‘ājim, Mu‘jam ‘arabī- ‘arabī, entry “dhū‘abah”, <https://www.maajim.com/dictionary/%d8%b0%d8%a4%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%87>, accessed 21 Nov 2016.

had only one forelock.⁷⁵ Linguistically, forelock has many equivalents in Arabic. The word *ḍafīrah* is used to refer to the forelock of women; *ghadīrah* was used to refer to the forelock of a man.⁷⁶ By analogy, *dbū'abah*, probably was used to refer the forelock of a young man, just like Zayd.

Probably, Prophet Muḥammad did not make Ibn Salām his secretary because he was a leader in his tribe and one of its scholars. On the other hand, Hirschfeld's monograph about the life of Ibn Salām indicates that he converted to Islam eight years after the immigration of Prophet Muḥammad or even two years prior to the death of the Prophet.⁷⁷ Another reason could be that the Prophet appointed young men in critical positions to prepare them for major missions and to get the trust of Muslims. Some of these young men are Usāmah Ibn Zayd, 'Abdullāh Ibn al-Zubayr, 'Itāb Ibn Usayd, 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās and Mu'ādh Ibn Jabal. The most important assignment to Zayd was to write down the Koran during the time of Rashidun Caliphs.

Authentic hadiths prove that the Prophet has asked Zayd to learn Hebrew. Zayd said "Prophet Muḥammad has ordered me to learn Hebrew. He said: 'by Allah, I never trust Jews on my letters'.⁷⁸ It took me half a month to learn it. I used to reply to the letters sent by Jews and read their letters to the Prophet". In another hadith, Zayd says: "the Prophet told me 'I receive letters which I do not wish everybody to read. Can you learn Hebrew - in another narration, the Syriac?' I said: Yes I can! I have learned it in seventeen days."

A linguistic analysis of the word *kitāb* used in the hadiths shows that the word has a range of meanings. The two hadiths, *kitāb yahūd*

⁷⁵ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 4, ed. by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1995), p. 58; Abū Na'im Al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥuḥyat al-Awliyā' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfīyā'*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1988), p. 125.

⁷⁶ Ma'ājim, Mu'jam 'arabī-'arabī, entry "ghadīrah", <https://www.maajim.com/dictionary/%d8%ba%d8%af%d9%8a%d8%b1>, accessed 18 Sep 2016.

⁷⁷ Hartwig Hirschfeld, "Abdallah Ibn Salam", [JewishEncyclopedia.com](http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/190-abdallah-ibn-salam), <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/190-abdallah-ibn-salam>, accessed 28 Aug 2016.

⁷⁸ On other hand, the term *Yahūd*, which means Jews, without the definite article al makes it a plural. It is a morphological rule that also applies to such other words as *Majūs* (Magus), *'arab* (Arabs) and *'ajam* (non-Arabs). This narrative could be understood as "I never trust Jews to write my letters". This conception of the narrative may confirm that the Prophet excluded the Jews from being his secretaries to other Jews.

and *kitāb al-‘ibrānīyyah* were both used to mean “the book of the Jews” and “the Hebrew book”, respectively. *Lisān al-‘arab* dictionary indicates that the word *kitāb* is derived from the root *ka-ta-ba* and has a range of meanings. It means “something that has been written; what has been written; a book with a secret.”⁷⁹ For those who assert that *kitāb* is used to refer to the Torah, the hadith itself provides evidence to the contrary. In the first hadith, the Prophet said to Zayd “learn the *kitāb*, i.e. language or script, of Jews, by Allah, I never trust the Jew on *kitābī*, i.e. my letters.” Both *kitābs* would give a similar meaning. In *Lisān al-‘arab*, *kitāb* refers to the Torah and the Koran alike.⁸⁰ Nowadays, people are used to say *al-Qur‘ān kitābī*, i.e. the Koran is my book, although there is no evidence that Prophet Muḥammad used this phrase. Consequently, it is unlikely that *kitābs* in this hadith means the Torah and the Koran. Evidently, it means a written letter to the Jews, which confirms that the script used in these letters is a script understood by Jews. It is a written message that used a script that neither Muslims nor common Jews can understand.

None of the surveyed hadiths has come across *lisān al-yahūd* which is an expression in which *lisān* refers to oral speech or a “language or tongue” in modern linguistics. In the Koran, *lisān* was used in the Koran in a similar sense too. Allah says: “The *lisān*, i.e. tongue, of the one they refer to is foreign, and this Koran is [in] a clear Arabic *lisān*.”⁸¹ In *Lisān al-‘arab*, the word *lisān* means speech;⁸² anything that is said or spoken just like an oral message.

One of the meanings of the word *kitāb* is a secret that cannot be revealed to others.⁸³ The Prophet started the hadith by saying “I receive [secret] kutub or letters which I do not like everybody to read.” This confirms that the text can be read by anybody. A written text that can be

⁷⁹ Al-Bāḥith al-‘arabī, *Lisān al-‘arab*, entry “*kataba*”.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Al-‘Omarī suggests that the fact that Arab Anṣār did not know Hebrew may mean that Jews did not use it in every-day-life, but they used to interact in Arabic. Moreover, Zayd did not start learning written Hebrew, except when the Prophet asked him to do so. Otherwise, he would have learned it from the Jews of Yathrib, had they used it in every-day interaction.

⁸² Al-Bāḥith al-‘Arabī, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, entry of “Lasana”, <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?term=%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86>, accessed 8 Oct 2016.

⁸³ *Ibid.*; Al-Bāḥith al-‘Arabī, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, entry “*kataba*”.

read by everybody is a text written in Arabic. Consequently, the messages sent by Jews were written in Arabic. So the Prophet ought to establish a codified messaging between him and the educated Jews. In order for the Prophet to keep the secrecy of such messages, he ordered Zayd Ibn Thābit to learn the written Hebrew only that is written in a special script. It was the Prophet who started writing in Hebrew and asked Zayd to learn it to keep the secrecy of the messages.

Ibn Taymīyyah confirms such conclusion. In his manuscript *Majmū'at al-fatāwī*, he transmits the report of Khārijah Ibn Zayd Ibn Thābit that his father, Zayd Ibn Thābit, said: The Prophet ordered me to learn Hebrew to write the letters to Jews in Hebrew and read the ones they send. Then Ibn Taymīyyah adds that letters could be written using Hebrew script and Jews could address orally using their own language which is Arabic. Sometimes an Arabic word is spelled in Hebrew script instead of Arabic or in any other non-Arabic language and the other way around.⁸⁴

E. Zayd Ibn Thābit and Syriac Language

Zayd had learned Syriac too. In an authentic hadith, Prophet Muḥammad said to Zayd Ibn Thābit: “I receive letters from people and I do not like anybody to read them. Can you learn Syriac? I said: yes. Zayd presumed: I learned it in seventeen days. I used to write the letters he sends and to read the letters he receives.”⁸⁵ In another narration of the same authentic hadith, the Prophet asked Zayd Ibn Thābit: “Do you have a good command of Syriac? I receive letters. I said: no. He said so learn it. Zayd said: I have learned it in seventeen days.”⁸⁶ In another hadith, the Prophet said: “I’m afraid that they may add or omit something to my letters, so learn Syriac.”⁸⁷ None of these hadiths shows

⁸⁴ Taymīyyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwī*, 4: 111.

⁸⁵ ‘Abd al-Ḥaḡ Al-Ishbīlī, *al-Aḥkām al-Shar‘īyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. by Abū ‘Abdullāh Ḥusayn b. ‘Ukāsha (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2001), p. 313

⁸⁶ ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Bayān al-Waḥm wa al-Iḥām fī Kitāb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 5, ed. by al-Ḥusayn Ayat Sa‘īd (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 1997), p. 219; Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, 1: 364.

⁸⁷ Ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 13 (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 2005), p. 189.

that Zayd has learned Syriac because it is the language of the Jews of Yathrib. They indicate that the Prophet used to receive letters in Syriac. However, they do not tell who sent them but he says in general *yariduny min qawmin* which means “from people”. In another hadith, Zayd said: “The Prophet ordered me to learn Syriac. It is narrated on another way: the Prophet ordered me to learn the language/script of Jews; for I do not trust the Jews to write my letters. Zayd presumed: I have learned it in a half month, so when Jews write the Prophet a letter, I write them back, and read their letters to him.”⁸⁸ Probably they are two separated hadiths which we believe were connected accidentally because they have a mutual objective.

The word Syriac has never occurred in Torah. A Syriac is a citizen of Syria or Aram. The word Syria itself was not used in Torah. Instead, people of Syria were called Aramaic.⁸⁹ This is an evidence that Syriac was a word unknown when the Torah was written and translated later into Greek⁹⁰ between the second and third century BC. Syriac was the language of the majority of Christians of the Arabian Peninsula. It was the language of the Nestorian Church, the most popular Peninsula Christian church of the time. This was reported by the exploratory groups that were sent by Prophet Muḥammad to some Christian tribes such as Ṭayʿ, Najrān⁹¹ and others. Such a fact was further reported by the messengers sent by the Prophet to the Christian kings during the age of correspondence, especially to the king of Ayla, the king of Kindā in Bilād al-Shām⁹² and to Sharḥabīl Ibn ‘Amr al-Ghassānī, the prince of

⁸⁸ Al-Khatīb al-Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, vol. 3, 3rd edition, ed. by Muḥammad Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), p. 7.

⁸⁹ “Qāmūs al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas”, st-takla.org, https://st-takla.org/Full-Free-Coptic-Books/FreeCopticBooks-002-Holy-Arabic-Bible-Dictionary/12_S/S_065.html, accessed 18 Nov 2016.

⁹⁰ Iqīlīmīs Yūsif Dawūd, *al-Lam‘ah al-Shahīyyah fī Naḥwi al-Lughah al-Siryānīyyah* (Damascus: Maṭābi‘ al-Abā‘ al-Dūmīnikān, 1896), pp. 9–10.

⁹¹ See Muḥammad al-Khuḍarī Baik, *Nūr al-Yaqīn fī Sīrat Sayyid al-Mursalīn*, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dār al-Fayḥa‘, 2004), pp. 230–3.

⁹² See Muḥammad Rawwās Qal‘ajī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Sīyāsī li al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah ‘alā daw’ Ikhtīṣār wa Tartīb tabdhīb al-Sīrah li Ibn Hishām* (Beirut: Dār al-Salām, 1979), pp. 414–25.

Bosra⁹³ among others. Islamic sources show that Waraqah Ibn Nawfal, the bishop of Mecca and the cousin of the Prophet's first wife Khadijah, knew the Hebrew script and wrote the Bible using it.⁹⁴ Therefore, the bible was not written in Hebrew.

Syriac is a Christian Aramaic dialect, and was popular during the prosperity of Christianity, especially in North Western Syria and Mesopotamia.⁹⁵ At the beginning of the third century, Syriac was so popular that it was used in authorship and translation. Many of Christian clergies used it in writing, including such Arab authors as the 6th century Assyrian monk Eliyyā al-Ḥirī or Mar Elia and the 7th century bishop Isaac of Nineveh. It was also used by Persian authors such as Aphrahat, known as the Wise Persian (died 345 AC), and some Armenian authors such as Mesrop Mashtots (died 440 AC) and Sahak of Armenia (died 439 AC). Researchers claim a continuous interaction between Syriac and Arabic as a result of immigration, trade and culture interaction between Bilād al-Shām and the Arabian Peninsula.⁹⁶ However, a profound intermingle of both languages was created after the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate.⁹⁷

The word Syriac, a language which was written in letters very similar to Arabic separated script, has replaced the word Aramaic, a language which was written in square Aramaic character, and speakers of the language started using it after the birth of Christ. Speakers of the language were pagans who converted to Christianity. Such a change in words accompanied a change in traditions. Hence, such words were completely rejected by Aramaic Christians, and replaced by Syriac

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁹⁴ Muḥammad Al-Bukhārī, *Jami' al-Sahib*, vol. 7, ed. by Muḥammad Zuhair b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Jeddah: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 2001), p. 1; Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Asad, *Maṣādir al-Shi'r al-Jābili*, 7th edition (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1988), p. 55; Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad 'Aynī, *Umdat al-Qarī li Sharh Sahib al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turā' al-'Arabī, 2006), p. 54.

⁹⁵ Maḥmūd Fahmī Hijāzī, *ʿIlm al-Lughah al-'Arabīyyah* (Cairo: Dār Gharīb, 2010); Takamitsu Muraoka, *Classical Syriac: A Basic Grammar with A Chrestomathy* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), pp. 1–2.

⁹⁶ Wadī' Bashūr, *Sūryā Ṣun' Dawla wa-Wilādat Umma* (Damascus: Dār al-Yazījī, 1994)

⁹⁷ *Ibid*

counterparts. Aram, however, was used in literature to refer to paganism that remained in Syria and Mesopotamia.⁹⁸

The era starting from the fourth century up to the sixth century was the golden age for Syriac. This age was marked by literary and scientific prosperity, and had many authors popular in literature, poetry and Astronomy. Syriac was particularly developed as a language by saint Ephrem (373 AC)⁹⁹ the Syrian who established the schools of Rahā and Nusaybin for teaching Syriac. He has poetic and musical publications written in Syriac. Moreover, many schools for teaching Syriac were established in the fourth and fifth century. The number of these schools in Mesopotamia alone was fifty schools. The schools were interested in teaching theology, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, natural sciences, history and literature.

During the same period, Syriac people have participated in ecumenical councils and the theological discussions. Both Catechetical School of Alexandria and the School of Antioch were the most popular theological schools in the Late Antiquity. Most of Christian authorships recording the history of Christianity were written in this era. Some of these authorships are the Bible of Diatessaron,¹⁰⁰ and the Peshitta, which were written or translated in the second century AC. This may indicate that Syriac was popular among Christians during the age of Prophet Muḥammad in the seventh century. We assume that the letters that the Prophet received and were written in Syriac were sent by Syriac Arabian or non-Arabian Christians and that these letters were argumentative in nature, during an era popular by correspondence among the kings.

There is no evidence that the Jews of Yathrib have used Syriac. Prophet Muḥammad has never talked about Jews in the hadiths in which he referred to Syriac. Rather, he used the word “people” with non-definite article. The passive voice was also used “I have received books”. He would say “a letter was sent”. This indicates that these letters were sent by a limited number of Syriac Christians, with special reference to the

⁹⁸ Dawūd, *al-Lam'ah al-Shahīyah fī Naḥwi al-Lughah al-Siryānīyah*, pp. 9–10.

⁹⁹ See Books LLC (ed.), *Syriac Writers: Ephrem the Syrian* (Tennessee: General Books, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ “Tatianus al-Sūrī”, *Al-Mansū'a l-'Arabīyya l-Masīḥīyya* (2010), <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/1god/padri/tazianoilsiro.htm>, accessed 27 Jan 2016.

Christians of Syria and Mesopotamia, during a time when theological and ecumenical discussions and arguments were popular. The Surveyed hadiths prove the Prophet's concern of secrecy when it comes to learning Hebrew and Syriac. The Prophet was very precise and conservative. He used to use the passive voice and say: "Letters were received which I like nobody to read." He used to say "I'm afraid they may add to it or omit something."

F. Concluding Remarks

Arabic was the language of every-day discourse of the Jews of Yathrib. Some of these Jews were originally Arabs who embraced Judaism, while the others were the Jews who immigrated to Yathrib and settled down there. They spoke Hebrew, the language of the Torah and worship that was used by the rabbis. In times of peace with the Jews of Yathrib, the translator of Prophet Muhammad was 'Abdullāh Ibn Salām, a former Jewish rabbi who converted to Islam. Later, when the Jews were in political disputes with the Arabs that resulted in sending the Jews into exile, confidential correspondence with the rabbis in a language anonymous to Jews and non-Jews who speak Arabic alike was necessary. Having this purpose in mind, the Prophet Muḥammad asked Zayd Ibn Thābit to learn how to write the Hebrew script. It could be the case that he used the Hebrew script to write Arabic words. The Jew rabbis used to write-back in the same way.

At the same time, this study rejects the assumption that the Syriac is one of the Jews' languages. Most probably, it was the language that the Prophet used to correspond with the Christian Syriac in Arabian Peninsula and Levant. Zayd Ibn Thābit learnt to write it during the era the Prophet corresponded with the non-Yathrib religious and political leaders to preach Islam. Syriac has a long history of interaction with Arabic due to immigration, trade and cultural interaction that took place in Arabian Peninsula and Levant. Throughout the pre-Islamic and later Islamic history, this language was used by its Christian speakers to write down their literature, sciences and religious believes.

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