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A Different Approach to the Narratives about the Tear of the Boycott Document Placed inside al-Ka'bah

By

İsrafil Balcı•

I

When the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) began to preach Islam, he was subject to a great reaction by Meccan idolaters. The decision of the isolation seems to be one of the most serious of these reactions. Although it is generally called as boycott, in my view it is more appropriate to call it isolation. This decision was not only applied to the Muslim community, but also to those who were non Muslims and supported the Muslims. By this decision, the Prophet Muhammad and His close relatives were subject to isolation in an area called "the District of Abu Talib" for two-three years. Later, this event was described in deep consideration by the Muslim historians.[1]

In order to be more effectively against Muslims, the idolaters posted this declaration on the wall of Ka'bah. However, when this event bothered the close relatives of Muslims who were subject to a great distress, this decision was annulled and then Muslims were free. Because of this tragic application, some Muslim writers gave some rhetoric and mysterious knowledge in their writings. For example, some writers claimed that the paper of this isolation decision was eaten by desert ants or tree worms except the word of God and Messenger. One of the most important points in relation to this isolation decision from past to contemporary is that it has conveyed mysterious and miraculous side.[2] In my opinion the writers tried to present Prophet Muhammad as a supernatural human being and

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[1] Ibn Ishaq, *Sîratu Ibn Ishaq*, thk. M. Hamidullah, Konya 1981/1401, 141; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabakât al-Kubrâ*, Beirut, nd. I, 209; Said Havva, *Al Asas Fi's Sunna; Siyratun Nabawiyya*, trans. into Tukish. A. Ali Ural, Aksa Publ., Istanbul 1991, I, 342.

[2] Said Havva, I, 343; Muhammad Hamidullah, *İslâm Peygamberi*, trans. into Tukish. Salih Tuğ, İrfan Publ. Istanbul 1993, I, 114; Sabri Hizmetli, *İslâm Tarihi; İlk Dönem*, Ankara 1999, 271.

wanted to give the event a miraculous side, therefore narrated this event in this way. However, there are very different narrations concerning both the abolishment of the decision and its corruption. For both the narration of decision and its corruption was based on a dream. Although some writers gave place partly to these various narrations, the great majority of the writers continued to narrate this event in a mysterious way. This article examines the question of the corruption of the paper in light of these mysterious narrations and then aims to put forward the efficient conclusion.

II

After the Prophet Muhammad's preaching Islam, some developments concerning the Muslim community had extremely annoyed the idolatries. These include the increasing number of Muslims, migration of Muslims to Abyssinia and their successful adaptation the unsuccessful attempts of idolaters about Muslims' returning to Mecca, the becoming Muslim of Omar and Hamza etc. Some leaders of idolaters came to Abu Talib who cared of Muslims several times and asked him to stop Muhammad proclaiming Islam, but they could not get any result from their requests. After these developments, the idolaters finally came to Abu Talib and asked him to leave Prophet Muhammad or to hand him over to them. However, Abu Talib rejected their request once again.[3] Upon these developments, they organized a new strategy in the seventh year of the Islamic mission, and began to put more pressure on Muslims who lived in Mecca. They discussed the matter among them and took some decisions about Muslims. Among these decisions, they would stop getting married to Muslims who believe the Prophet Muhammad and the sons of Hashemite and Muttalib who rejected to hand over the Prophet Muhammad to themselves; they would cut all kinds of commercial activities with Muslims; they would not talk to them and, all other kinds of social relations would be ended. The idolaters wrote the decisions and posted it on the wall of Ka'bah.[4] In addition, they took an oath that they would keep their promises until the Prophet Muhammad would be handed over to them.[5] Martin Lings asserts that approximately forty leaders who belonged to the tribe of Quraish, signed this decision.[6]

Upon the extreme pressures of the idolaters, Abu Talib had to move the sons of Hashemite and Muttalib who wanted to take care of Muhammad and Muslims the valley of "Abu Talib quarter" close to Mecca.[7] The Muslims and their close relatives had to live there under the restrictions of idolaters for two or three years.[8] Meanwhile Abu Leheb who belonged to the sons of Hashemite supported the decisions of idolaters, and took the side of Prophet Muhammad with his sons.[9] As happened before, the Prophet Muhammad was protected very strictly by Abu Talib and his relatives from aggressive behaviors of the idolaters in this process.[10] It is even said that Abu Talib had stayed with Prophet Muhammad sometimes during this restriction.[11] Abu Leheb who was together with the idolaters said: "Muhammad speaks to me some invisible entities, and asserts that these will be actualizing after dying. What is of its benefit after my death? After blowing on his hands, he said to those who believe

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[3] Tabari, *Târîh al Umam wa al Mulûk,* Beirut, t.y., II, 225.

[4] Ibn Ishaq, 137; Ibn Hisham, *Sîra al Nebî*, ed. M. Muhyiddîn Abdulhamîd, Kahire 1963/1383, I, 234; Ibn Sa'd, I, 208-209; Yakûbî, *Târîh al Ya'kûbî*, Beirut, t.y., II, 31; Tabari, II, 225; Ibn al Jawzi, a*l-Wafâ bi Ahwâli'l-Mustafâ*, ed. Mustafa Abdulvahid, Matba'a al Sa'âde, Egypt 1966/1386, I, 197; Ibn al Athir, *al Kâmil fî al Târîh*, Beirut 1965/1385, II, 87; Ibn Sayyid al Nas, *Uyûn al Atahar fî Funûn al Magâzî wa al Samâili wa al Siyar*, Beirut, t.y., I, 166-67; Said Havva, I, 343, 345; Hamidullah, II, 113; İbrahim Sarıçam, *Hz. Muhammed ve Evrensel Mesajı*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Publ. Ankara 2003, 106.

[5] Buharî, *Hac*, 45; Ibn Mâce, *Manâsik*, 26.

[6] Martin Lings, *Hz. Muhammed'in Hayatı*, trans. into Tukish. Nazife Şişman, İnsan Publ. 21. ed. Istanbul 2000, 129.

[7] The house of the sons of Hashemite was in this quarter. The Prophet Muhammad was born here. Since the head of tribe was Abdulmuttalib before Abu Talib, the name of the quarter was mentioned by the name of Abdulmuttalib. Later, it was mentioned by the name of Abu Talib. See for. Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Peygamber Efendimiz (s.a.s.)*, ed. M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, Istanbul 2002, 52.

[8] Ibn Ishaq, 140; Ibn al Jawzi, I, 197.

[9] Ibn Ishaq, 138; Ibn Hisham, I, 235; Ibn Sa'd, I, 208; Tabari, II, 220, 225.

[10] Tabari, II, 223.

[11] Ibn Ishaq, 141; Ibn Sayyid al Nas, I, 127.

Muhammad: "Shame on you, I cannot see anything that Muhammad said about you. It is narrated that after this speech, the surah of Tebbet[12] was revealed by Allah.[13]

Muslims faced very difficult times for three years under this restriction. Concerning this event, very dramatic and emotional scenes were written, for example, it is said that because of hunger, children so cried that their voices were echoed in the valley.[14] During these restrictions, Muslims were deprived of everything, for they could not trade with others, and had to consume all of their food. The idolaters besieged Muslim's territories. They forbid to receive any kinds of food to the place were Muslims lived.[15] Muslims could go out only during the seasons of pilgrimage to Mecca and thus they could obtain some food.[16] Moreover, the idolaters came to the bazaar and suggested to people to sell their food high prices to Muslims so that they could not purchase their needs. For instance, Walid b. Mugira said to the sellers that "when you see any Muslims who buy any kind of food, rise the prices, if they don't have any money, give them money at high interest as much as possible.[17] When the pressure of idolaters became unbearable, the Prophet Muhammad gave permission to the Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia.[18] However, when these restrictions against the sons of Hashemite and Benu Muttalib became very unbearable, some idolaters began to disapprove this application. Some began to talk against this decision, some said that they were totally against the application. Some of the idolaters began to help secretly to those who were under the blockade. For example, an idolater, Hakim b. Hizam b. Huwaylid brought some food for his aunt who was the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. In the same way, Hisham b. Amr b. Rebi who was one of the relatives of the sons of Hisham brought some food and clothes with his camel at night to those who were under the blockade.[19] When he approached to that area, he left the camel and she went to the district.[20] Once, while Hakim b. Hizam[21] brought some food to her aunt, he was caught by Abu Jahl. Abu Jahl asked him: "Do you take food to the sons of Hashemite?" If you take those food to the sons of Hashemite, I swear in God's name that I make you publicly disgraced", wanted to prevent him take food. Upon this conversation, Abu al Bahtari b. Hisham said to Abu Jahl: "Why do you want to prevent him from this help? The food belongs to his aunt, and he wants to take it to her. What is the problem about this?" When Abu Jahl resisted, they fought with each other. According to a narration, Abu al Bahtari wounded Abu Jahl by a bone of camel. During that time, Hamza who was the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad looked at them a bit far from.[22]

The Prophet Muhammad did not want to kill those who did not participate in the war of Badr. Abu al Bahtari was one of those people.[23] For, he was the one who defended the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca. He not only defended the Prophet Muhammad himself, but also prevented the idolaters' harm other Muslims. He was also the dignified person who was against the decision of isolation

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[12] Tebbet 111/1-5.

[13] Ibn Hisham, I, 235.

[14] Ibn Ishaq, 140-41; Ibn Sa'd, I, 209; Mawlana Sibli, *Asr-ı Saadet (İslâm Tarihi*), trans. into Tukish. Ömer Rıza Doğrul, Istanbul 1973, I, 180; Abu al Hasan Ali al Hasan Nadwi, *al Sîre al Nebeviyye*, trans. into Tukish. Osman Keskioğlu, Otağ Publ. Istanbul 1981, 94.

[15] Ibn Sayyid al-Nas, I, 126.

[16] Ibn al Athir, II, 88; Said Havva, I, 343.

[17] Ibn Ishaq, 140.

[18] Ibn Sayyid al-Nas, I, 126.

[19] Ibn al Jawzi, I, 197.

[20] Ibn Hisham, I, 251; Ibn al Athir, II, 88.

[21] The name of Hakim b. Hizam is mentioned in the army of idolaters during the battle of Bedr. However, he saved himself at the battle of Bedr and he continued his life as a sincere Muslim. According to a narration, when he came to a well with a group of idolaters to take some water, Muslim soldiers wanted to intervene with them, but the Prophet Muhammad prevented the intervention of Muslim soldiers. Thus, they could drink water safely. Upon the failure of idolaters at the battle, he rode his horse and went away. See, Tabari, II, 277; İbrahim Sarıçam, 'Hakîm b. Hizâm', *DİA*, Istanbul 1997, XV, 187.

[22] Ibn Ishaq, 142; Ibn Hisham, I, 236; Tabari, II, 225; Ibn al Athir, II, 88; Ibn Sayyid al-Nas, I, 128; Abu al Bahtarî was a sincere person and he took place always in the side of oppressed. For example, he saved Abu Ubayde from the idolaters' torture that was one of the notable people of Medina and took care of the Prophet Muhammad. Ibn Hisham, II, 308.

[23] Ibn Hisham, II, 459; Tabari, II, 282-83.

towards the sons of Hashemite and Muttalib. When he met with Mujazzar b. Ziyad, Abu al Bahtari who was from Medina, he reminded the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, that he did not kill him. However, when he wanted to capture him, Abu al Bahtari rejected his request. Upon this event, Mujazzar b. Ziyad killed him.[24] In spite of the instruction of the Prophet Muhammad, Abu al Bahtari who was one of the closest friends of Muslims was killed at Badr Battle.[25]

III

So far some information has been given concerning the blockade taken by idolaters. In addition to this information concerning the abolishment of the decision on the wall of Ka'bah, there are also rhetoric and mysterious narrations about it. In a way, the examining of narrations will contribute to illuminate the abolition of the decision on the wall. There are two different narrations concerning the destroying of the decision on the wall of Ka'bah. Both of these narrations take place in the oldest sources of Islamic History, namely Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham. In addition to, the other sources also talk about these narrations slightly different. I give place two different narrations here so that I reach a correct conclusion. In the first narration, Ibn Ihsaq gives the following information: In order to destroy the isolation decision which was written by Quraish against the sons of Hashemite and Muttalib, a group from the tribe of Quraish rebelled. Particularly, Hisham b. Amr b. Rabia showed a great endeavor in this matter. He was an honorable man, and was courier of the sons of Hashemite. He took some food and clothes to those who were under the restrictions by his camel at nights. When he approached to the valley, he pushed his camel from her back and sent her alone. One day he went to Atika bnt. Abdullah b. Zuhayr b. Abu Ubayya and said: "You eat, wear clothes and live at your home. Do you know how your maternal uncle is? No body trades with them, nobody gets married to them, and nobody trusts them. I swear in the name of God, if they were the maternal uncle of Abulhakem (Abu Jahl), and if you wanted him to help for your relatives, he did not listen to you." Zuhayr asked: 'What can I do? I am only one person.' Hisham said 'I found the second person.' When Züheyr asked who the second person was, he said that the second person is me and I am with you. He said: 'then find the third person for us.' Hisham went to Mut'im b. 'Adiy[26] and said to him: "O Mut'im. Do you accept that the whole descendants from the sons of Abdulmanaf will be destroyed? You see their situation, is this right? I swear that if you give this chance to them, you see that they will run to him.' Mut'im said that 'You are very pity. What can I do? I am the only one and alone.' Hisham said that 'you have now found the second person'. Mut'im said 'who is he?' Hisham said that 'I am.' Mut'im said that 'find the third person.' Hisham said that 'the third person is Zuhayr b. Abu Umayya.' Later, he said to 'find the fourth person.' Hisham went to Abu al Bahtari b. Hisham and explained the situation: He said that "Is there any body else to help in this matter? Hisham said 'yes, Mut'im b. 'Adiy and Züheyr can do this.' Abul Buhteri said 'Find the fifth person.' Hisham went to Zem'a b. Aswad and explained the situation. When Zem'a joined them, they became five people and agreed that they would be together at a place called al-Hacûn at the upper side of Mecca in a midnight. They had arrived to the place they had promised and discussed about destroy of the paper, and had organized a new strategy. Zubayr said that "I want to begin to work on this project and want to be the first person in this matter." In the morning, he wore new clothes and went to Quraish' community. Later, his friends came over there too. After circumambulation of Ka'bah seven times, he made the following speech for the people that had gathered: "O Meccan people: While we eat, drink and dress, the sons of

[24] Ibn Hisham, II, 459; Tabari, II, 283. According to the detailed information given by Ibn Hisham, Mujazzar b. Ziyad met with Abu al Bahtari and his friend. He remaindered the instruction of the Prophet Muhammad that he would save himself but would kill his friend. But Abu al Bahtari told that he would not leave his friend alone because women might say in the future that he sacrificed his friend for his own life. Thus, they discussed and then fought each other. At the end, finding a chance, Mujazzar killed him, and talked about this event to Prophet Muhammad. He said: "I swear that I wanted to take to him as a captive. However, since he rejected to come with me and fought with me, I killed him." But, the Prophet Muhammad did not like this news. Ibn Hisham, II, 459-60; Tabari, II, 283.

[25] Ibn Hisham, II, 470; Tabari, II, 286.

[26] Mut'im b. Adi b. Nevfel was one of the notable people of Quraish. He was one that he came with those people who wanted to prevent from the preaching of the Prophet Muhammad (Tabari, II, 220). At the same time, he gave reliance for the Prophet Muhammad when he came back from Taif to enter Medina. Ibn Hisham, II, 255; Ibn Sa'd, I, 212.

Muttalib and Hashim are in a misery. Neither do we sell any commodities to them, nor do we buy anything from them. Neither we get not married to them, nor get them married to us. Unless I do destroy the paper that divides us, I cannot take any pleasure from my eating and drinking. Abu Jahl intervened with him and said that the paper could not be destroyed. Zem'a told him that "you are lying. In fact, we did not accept your decision when it was written. Abu al Bahtari also said that "Zem'a is right, when it was written; we did not approve its contests. We did not know all of its details." Later Mut'im b. 'Adiy said: "You two are right. But the third person (Abu Jahl) is wrong and he is lying. We refuge to God from the writing and its contents. Hisham b. Amr also supported them. Then, Abu Jahl said that their attitudes were organized before and they had a plan for this event. Abu Talib also came over there and listened to them near the mosque. During these conversations, Mut'im b. 'Adiy brought the paper and tore it. When he took it in his hand, he saw that the whole paper was eaten by small worms except the phrase of *bismikallahumma* in the name of God.[27] These quotations that we summarize from Ibn Ihsaq are also narrated in the same way by Ibn Hisham, Tabari and other writers.[28] According to the narrations, this paper had been written by Mansur b. Ikrime b. Amir.[29]

From the above -quote, it is understood that there was a remarkable resentment against the boycott decision but nobody did dare to touch on the document due to fact that they abstained from those who wanted to keep on the implementation of this boycott. At last a group of five people began to feel unhappy about the injustice of the boycott, and decided to go to Ka'bah and tear the document and end to the boycott. All members of the mentioned group had an indirect relationship with those who were subjected into boycott. For example Zuhair is of Banu Makhzum. But his mother was Atiqa bint Abdullamuttalib, the aunt of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Hisham b. Amr from Amr clan was not of Hashemite descendants but his family had the bonds of marriage with them. It can be argued that the sense of close relationship and social cohesion (asabiyah) among the members of the tribes presumably had generated the resentment against the boycott resolution. However in this article we attach more importance to developments with regard to the disappearance of the document rather than the causes of the resentment towards boycott. From the evidence mentioned above, it becomes quite evident that Mut'im b. 'Adiy tore the document into shreds. Referring to this incident, Ibn Ishaq says: ثم ان المطعم بن عدى قام الى الصحيفة فشقها '… and then Mut'im b. 'Adiy had approached to the document and tore it into two shreds' and فلما مزقت 'When it was toren…'[30] But it quite interesting that in this narration it is indicated that the statement such as باسمك الله *In Your name, O Allah* remained on the top of the document and the rest of which had been eaten by small worms. Indeed, if this narration is true, in that case, this phenomenon can be interpreted as supernatural occurrence as some did. But it is quite questionable to concede whether or not this sentence had existed on the document. Mut'im b. 'Adiy who rushed into Ka'bah to collect the document turned back with a small piece of document tending to rot. The document bearing the terms and conditions of agreement applied for the boycott is understood to have tended itself to rot. Many reasons have been put forward to explain this process. As known the leather had then mostly been used for writing material.[31] It is probable that the leather paper had incidentally rotted under the hot desert circumstances within this time. In addition, it can be asserted that the larvae of many insects might have contributed to speed up the rotting process of the document. But what is remarkable here is that the sources have reflected this natural incident as quite supernatural occurrence. The reason for it might be that the people than were not familiar with the idea of chemical deformation or that the larvae of insects could have caused the rotting process of the paper.

In addition to this, another question can be raised about how those people could not notice the deformation of the document which is said to be strictly protected. Evidently Mut'im b. 'Adiy noticed

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[27] Ibn Ishaq, 145-47.

[28] See, Ibn Hisham, I, 252-53; Tabari, II, 228-29; Ibn al Jawzi, I, 198-99; Ibn al Athir, II, 88-89.

[29] Ibn Ishaq, 147; According to a narration, since the Prophet Muhammad cursed him, his fingers were paralyzed. Ibn Hisham, I, 235, 253; Ibn Sa'd, I, 209; Ya'kûbî, II, 31; Ibn al Jawzi, I, 199; Ibn al Athir, II, 89.

[30] Ibn Ishaq, 147; Ibn Hisham, I. 253; Tabari, II 228.

[31] For instance Abu Bakr, Hkuffas is indicated to have written a letter to his people on leather. See al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, nd. Mustafa Fayda, Ankara, 1987, 106.

this situation when he held it and then tore the rest part of it. Ibn Hisham therefore said that "a group from the tribe of Quraish did what they wanted to deform of the document."[32] He also uses the verb مزق in the meaning of "tearing off" and subsequently mentions Abu Talib's poem praising those who tore the document. From this information it is understood that the document already tending to rot had been intentionally damaged as against the idea that it disappeared miraculously.

Ibn Ishaq said that on the rest of the document there was a phrase like *in Your name, O Allah* and the small worms or moths did not damage this part.[33] But different narratives specify that only the word "Allah" remained instead of above mentioned phrase.[34] As seen, there is contradictory information in the sources concerned about the remaining statements on the document. These contradictions also add to increase the existing doubts. As known, both words have fundamental places in the Islamic faith. If taken at face value, it is hardly possible that the pagan Arabs used these statements but a narration in Tabari's book helps removing the doubts about this issue. According to this narration, the Arabs were accustomed to add phrase باسمك الله at the beginning of all their papers they had written in Jahiliya period.[35] But another account took place in the sources appears to be contrary against this information. As remembered, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) entered into a vineyard for a short break and Addas, a Persian slave of the owner of the vineyard, gave him some grape upon his master's request. The fact that the Prophet said باسمللە before beginning to eat the grape attracted the attention of the slave since the Arabs did not use these kinds of phrases and asked him where he is from.[36] If this narration is correct, then it is highly doubtful whether or not the phrase which is claimed to be on the top of the document had existed. But the different statements in variouse narrations increase the doubts in this subject.

Ibn Sa'd mentions various narratives about the deformation of the document and argues that it was eaten by gypsy moths or desert ants.[37] He refers to a different report that God sent down an animal named دابة 'dabbah' and it ate all the words of the document except Allah. He also narrates another account pointing out that what remains only from the document is the phrase *in Your name, O Allah.*[38] Likewise Ibn Ishaq[39] and Ibn Hisham also narrate that the document was eaten by gypsy moths or desert ants (الارضة).[40] It can be thought that the reports about that the document was eaten by gypsy moths might have been to do with the fact that timber material used for the reparation of the Ka'bah. As known the walls of the Ka'bah had been built by stones.[41] It was indicated that the Arabs repaired the Ka'bah in a time very close to the beginning of the Prophet's Muhammad divine mission and during this reparation they used the wooden material they saved from the Byzantine ship disintegrated on the shore of the Shuaybah port for building the ceiling.[42] But this evidence is not so strong to prove that the document was eaten by gypsy moths or desert ants. The claim that the document was eaten by desert ants is neither convincing. So the very fact that there are different conflicting reports for both situations was the main factor to raise a critical stance to the issue.

Some report indicates that only the word 'Allah' was eaten[43] while the others claim that it was only the word 'Allah' which had remained uneaten.[44] But most of the reports designate that nothing remained on the document other than the phrase *in Your name, O Allah*.[45] In that case it should be

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[32] Ibn Hisham, I, 253.
[33] Ibn Hisham, I, 253, 254
[34] Ibn Ishaq, 142.
[35] Tabari, II, 229; Ibn al Athir, II, 89.
[36] Ibn Hisham, II, 286.
[37] Ibn S'ad, I, 210.
[38] Ibn S'ad, I, 209.
[39] Ibn İshaq, 142, 147.
[40] See, Ibn Hisham, I, 253.
[41] Ibn S'ad, I, 145-46; Tabari, II, 200.
[42] Tabari, II, 200.
[43] Ibn Sayyid al-Nas, I, 27.
[44] Ibn al Athir, II, 90.
[45] Ibn Hisham, I, 253; Ibn S'ad, I, 209; Tabari, II, 229.

accepted that the document had been completely eaten. But if the document was completely eaten, it would become too hard to understand why a group of five people were organized to put the plan for tearing off the document into effect. From these explanations it is understood that the document made of leather tended naturally to rot rather than complete deformation. Furthermore, Muhammad Hamidullah maintains that the words 'Allah' and 'Rasul' remained on the document.[46] But it seems to me that it is not likely to accept that the Quraish, a severe enemy of the Prophet, referred to Muhammad as a Rasul in any decision they might have taken. As remembered, the Quraish had strongly opposed to the title 'Rasul' in Hudaibiyah treaty and as a result of this opposition this word was omitted from the treaty paper.[47]

If we accept that the document was completely eaten except the phrase *in Your name, O Allah* or 'Allah,' one can interpret this phenomenon in a supernatural way. Since these reports had presumably been uncritically accepted, the historical sources reflected this aspect of the event. In addition, the distress and oppression those who had been subjected to the boycott suffered might have led the authors to develop some mysterious interpretations in their imagination. It is interesting that these interpretations have been transmitted to the present day with different versions.[48] But if we take the reports about the document that was eaten by gypsy moths or desert ants for granted, we would miss the point of the group of five people were seeking while putting the plan for tearing off the document into effect. This also means to ignore the possibility of that the leather material of the document bearing the terms and conditions of the boycott might have tended itself to rot. What seems to me more realistic is that the boycott document with its terms and conditions had lost its function and the society wanted to end this action. Even Abu Jahl, a strong supporter of the boycott, was probably no longer able to resist the tearing off the document. It appears that the very natural process was perceived as miraculous development by later authors in connection with the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). This seems to me the main reason why a number of contradictory and inconsistent accounts had been generated with regard to this event. At the end the group who tore off the document tending to rot is understood to ensure lifting the ban from those under the blockade in the town.[49]

IV

The second narrative with regard to distortion of the document and revoking the boycott resolution seems rather to have been invented with reference to the Prophet's dream that he saw that the document had been eaten by small worms. Ibn Ishaq narrates the following information about this issue. We quote it briefly: "Allah sent a small worm to the document written by the Quraish to the sons of Hashemite. It ate the word "Allah" on the document. Words referring to aggression, breaking of the relations and slander remained intact. Allah revealed this fact to his messenger. He also reported this to his uncle. Abu Talib told him: "O my cousin, who gave this information to you. Nobody came to us and neither did you go to someone. I am also sure that you would not tell lie." The messenger replied that Allah had revealed this message to him. Thereupon Abu Talib assembled the members of the family but he kept the news secret taking into consideration that they might have spread it and the pagan Arabs would prepare a plot for the document."[50] The report also adds that Abu Talib went to Ka'bah with his cousin and family members. When the pagans saw Abu Talib, they thought that he brought Muhammad there to kill. Abu Talib requested them to bring the document to him. They thought that if they gave the document to him, he would have submitted Muhammad to them. When the pagans brought the document, Abu Talib said: 'Here is the document. My cousin told me that the document suffered from a small worm by Allah and it ate all words 'Allah' except some words referring to aggression, breaking of the relations and slander. If he is telling lie, surely I would give him to you to kill. If he is telling true, let's take it as a means to end your behaviour which would be in

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[46] Hamidullah, I, 114.
[47] Waqidi, *Kitab al Maghazi,* ed. Marshen Jones, Bairut, 1984/1404, II, 610-611.
[48] See, Hamidullah, I, 112; Said Ramadan al-Buti, *Fikh al-Siyar,* trans. into Tukish, Ali Nar-Orhan Aktepe, *Peygamberimiz (s.a.v)'in Uygulamasıyla İslam*, İstanbul, nd. 126.
[49] Ibn S'ad, I, 210.
[50] Ibn Ishaq, 142.

fact against you.' The Quraish accepted the Abu Talib's suggestion and thus they agreed. When they opened the document they established that it was as exactly as was revealed by Muhammad. Abu Talib and those with him enjoyed it quite a lot. And then he said: "It has become clear whoever among us deserves more to be deceived, deserted, and accused of." Thereafter Mut'im b. 'Adiy b. Nawfel, Amr b. Lueyy, and his brother Hisham b. Amr opposed the boycott resolutions by declaring that: From now on we have nothing to do with this document which entirely breaks the family ties and inspires aggression. We cannot help anybody to perish ourselves and our ancestors. Some people from the Quraish followed them. Thus Abu Talib and those suffering a lot from the boycott became free from the restrictions.[51] The similar information is taking place in Ibn Hisham,[52] Ibn Sa'd[53] and subsequent historical sources.[54]

This report apparently includes a number of serious contradictions. Firstly, it is well known that Abu Talib used to protect Muhammad strongly, and therefore it does not seem probable that Abu Talib would have accepted the suggestion to surrender Muhammad to the Quraish to be killed relying entirely upon such a trivial reason. Secondly in the report we see that Abu Talib called all his relatives to come together in order to let them known what the Prophet told him about the document, but he later concealed the news from them fearing from its disclosure. It is obvious that there is a contradiction within this narrative. In addition from the report Abu Talib is understood to have taken his cousin and relatives to Ka'bah and initiated to make a deal with the Quraish for the blood of the Prophet. However, it is known that in any occasion Abu Talib used to proclaim that he would not surrender his cousin even under the most difficult circumstances. We observe how he was so strong-minded in this matter in the following poems:

> The paper you have hanged is something evil for you. I swear by the Lord of Ka'bah that we will never surrender Muhammad to anybody for the fear of terror of the time. We will carry on struggling with you until you are finally fed up with us. We are not complaining about what we are facing.[55]

As become clear from these sayings, it is impossible for Abu Talib to surrender his cousin to the Quraish for killing. The mysterious information presented by this narrative is understood to have played major role for the later miraculous presentation of this event and thus the narratives with more reasonable information became shadowed. Therefore we hold the opinion that the second narrative about the deformation of the document is not convincing. Some authors, most probably for the same reason, gave the accounts of boycott resolution in details but they never referred to this narrative and they shaped their accounts relying on the first one.[56]

As explained above, the more consistent and well organized information has been provided in the first narrative. Likewise the information has been reported in a more realistic way. On the other hand, in the second narrative it has been said that only the words Allah on the document were eaten while the remaining ones left intact. But it is highly probable that the word Allah took place at least once at the top of the document. The statement such as "all words Allah were eaten" itself reveals it was fabricated. In fact the more realistic narratives point out that the word eaten by small worms was not Allah but the boycott resolution imposed by the Quraish. Furthermore, while part of this narrative indicates that the only word 'Allah' was eaten by small worms, the other part signifies that it was the statement of باسمك الله that was eaten. But there was almost a consensus among the authors about that the mentioned statement had remained on the document. [57]

When we take all these into consideration there seems to be no contradiction in accepting that Mut'im b. Adiy, one of the five people, grasped the page and tore it during their arguments with Abu

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[51] Ibn Ishaq, 143.
[52] Ibn Hisham, I, 253.
[53] Ibn Sa'd, I, 210.
[54] Ibn al Jawzi, I, 197-98; Ibn al Athir, II, 89-90; Ibn Sayyd al-Nas, I, 127-128.
[55] Ibn Hisham, I, 235-236.
[56] See, Shibli, I, 180-81; Nadwi, 94-96; Lings, 129-134.
[57] Ibn Sa'd, I, 209; Tabari, II, 229; Ibn al-Jawzi, I, 198.

Jahil and other pagans. This view is also supported by a verse of the poem written by Abu Talib which praises those who took initiative about this issue: "inform them of the fact that 'the document was torn off."[58] Likewise when Mut' im b. Adiy died, the poet Hassan b. Thabit wrote a poem in praise of his immaculate stance as follows: "If the honour means to let the people live forever, today his honour will live forever."[59] Hassan also had "written a poem for Hisham b. Amr, another person who initiated to undertake tearing the document as follows: "As the promise of Hisham was fulfilled a group, I wonder whether or not the sons of Umayyad fulfilled their promise."[60]

V

The pagans were in great and serious expectations from the boycott resolutions which understood to have lasted roughly two or three years. But these expectations were not realized and the boycott provisions were violated in due course. The blockade had been imposed not only to the Prophet but to his then non-Muslim relatives who did not want to surrender him to the Quraish as well. To me, their stance can be explained more with reference to the concept of tribal solidarity in Jahiliyyah period rather than advocating the teachings of the Prophet (p.b.u.h).

We can assert that the troubles and maltreatments were emotionally dramatized by the narrators and during that process some unnatural motives were likely added to the narratives and even some baseless scenarios were invented. Particularly the unfounded narratives seem to result in producing certain mysterious interpretations. We observe that this kind of interpretation has come to the present day. But it appears that there is a possibility that the document of the resolutions had been deformed by itself within approximately three years time. It is evident that the document half of which had most likely been rotten was worn to shreds by a group of five persons and after this incident the Muslims became released.

Tending to derive a mysterious or miraculous result from these events seems in a way to fail to see the real nature of this phenomenon. The information signifying that the words "Allah" or "bismikallahumma" remained on the document can be thought as a sign of miracle. But the existence of different conflicting narratives about the rest raises doubts about this issue. On the other hand, there is no any evidence showing that the pagans neither gave up their blockade nor did believe the prophet in groups. As a result, we think that the former one of two narratives mentioned in the sources with regard to the deformation of the document seems to be more realistic and the latter reflects a scenario. We also hold the opinion that all mysterious interpretations in this matter depend on this second narrative.

Abstract

A Different Approach to the Narratives about the Tear of the Boycott Document Placed inside al-Ka'bah

This article examines the narratives with regard to lifting the boycott decisions imposed upon the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. There are basically two narratives about this event. While the first one relies on more accurate knowledge, the other contains a speculative scenario. However, since these two narratives were mixed with each other in time, some contradictory information was narrated, especially information based on a speculative scenario became most popular among the people. At the end, it is understood that the document that included the decisions of boycott was not destroyed in a mysterious way, but torn by a group of people.

[58] Ibn Ishaq, 147.
[59] Ibn Hisham, I, 255.
[60] Ibn Hisham, I, 256.