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Muhammad's Jewish Wives

Rayhana bint Zayd and Safiya bint Huyayy in the Classic Islamic Tradition

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Abstract

During his life, the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) married 12 different wives among whom were two Jewish women: Rayhana bint Zayd and Safiya bint Huyayy. These two women were widows whose husbands had been killed in wars with Muslims in Arabia. While Rayhana refused to convert to Islam at first and did so only after massive pressure, Safiya converted to Islam immediately after being asked. Rayhana died a few years before Muhammad, but Safiya lived on after his death. Classic Islamic sources claim that the Muslims did not like Rayhana because of her beauty and so made an issue of her Jewish origin, with Muhammad being the only one to treat her well. After Muhammad's death, Safiya lived among his other wives in Mecca, but did not take part in the political intrigues at the beginning of Islam, in contrast to the other wives, especially the most dominant and favorite wife, Aisha.

Introduction

[1] According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad married 12 different wives and had even more concubines. The custom of taking concubines was widespread in ancient times and therefore also was practiced in Arabia. Concubines were often taken in the context of war booty, and it seems that this is the reason for including in the Qur'an: "(you are forbidden) the married women, but not the concubines you, own" (Q 4:24; al-Qurtubi: 5.106). The reason for Muhammad's polygamy, like that of other Muslims at that time, was a concern for the fate of Muslim concubines. Their husbands had died for their faith during the Jihad conducted by the Prophet Muhammad, and so after four months and ten days – the minimal time needed to know if a woman was pregnant – the Qur'an allowed the concubines to remarry (Q 2:234). Besides the important social aspect of its regulation, polygamy had great importance in the development and modeling of Muslim society at its

starting-point by expressing the social values of the religious principles the Prophet tried to bestow on his followers (Levy: 244).

[2] As opposed to other men, the Prophet himself, being a religious and political leader, enjoyed great freedom in choosing the women he wanted for wives. In addition to the widows he married, the Prophet married for both political (e.g., his marriage to Aisha bint Abu Bakr and Hafsa bint Umar) and practical reasons. The most prominent of these marriages was, undoubtedly, the Prophet's first marriage to Khadija bint Khuwaylid (Worrbll: 136; Bennett: 252). Muhammad's marriage to Khadija occurred in 595 when he was 25 years old and she was about 40. Khadija was the most important of his wives; she was a wealthy and respected woman of high standing. She was also the first to believe in his mission when he started to prophesy in 610, encouraged him to carry on, thereby, raising his self-confidence, and for this she attained the title of "Mother of the Believers" – a title that was later applied to all the Prophet's other wives. Even though this title is in the Qur'an ("The Prophet is worthy of being a protector of the believers more than they are themselves and his wives are mothers to them . . ." [Q 33:6]), one can assume that its origin was, in fact, from Khadija. Most likely, after her death, when arriving at Medina in 622, the Prophet made use of this title for the rest of his wives and only then was it included in the Qur'an. In any case, it seems that the Prophet's intention, when calling his wives "Mother of the Believers" was to differentiate them from other Muslim women ("The wives of the Prophet are not like other women" [Q 33:32]) and, according to Ascha, perhaps even to prevent them from marrying other men after his death (85-103). The premise is simple: if the wives of the Prophet are not as all women, then they are not worthy of any Muslim man.

[3] While Muhammad was married to Khadija, he did not marry another woman according to an agreement that probably existed between them. However, after the death of Khadija in 619, the Prophet was freed of any previous marital obligations and began to take more wives, and so became married to a number of women simultaneously. In the following years, he married six new women, two of whom were Jewish: Rayhana bint Zayd and Safiya bint Huyayy. In marrying Jewish women, the Prophet was not deviating from Islamic laws, which permit a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or a Christian woman (after she converts to Islam; Q 5:5), but prohibit the marriage of a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim man. Sunni Islamic interpreters saw no problem in these marriages, while Shiite interpreters opposed them (Levy: 138; al-Qurtubi: 6.79; al-Halli and Jalal: 136).

[4] The purpose of this article is to examine the Prophet Muhammad's marriage to the two Jewish women according to the Islamic classical traditions. In addition, the article will examine what brought Muhammad to marry them, whether they received decent conditions from the Prophet and his wives, and what implications these marriages had on Islamic society, if indeed there were any implications at all. I do not intend to explore the Prophet's relations with his wives in general, nor do I intend to discuss the relations existing between him and the Muslims or between the Muslims and the Jews in the Arabia.

Rayhana bint Zayd

[5] In 627, Muhammad decided to destroy the third Jewish tribe residing in Medina, Banu Qurayza. The two other Jewish tribes in the town, Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadir had already been forced to leave. Part of the Jews from Banu Nadir arrived at Khaybar, where

there was a large Jewish settlement of Banu Nadir, while others continued north and reached the Syrian area. The reason given for eliminating Banu Qurayza was the Prophet's contention that they had collaborated with people from Mecca during the siege on Medina (battle of al-Khandaq in 627) and so were not loyal to the Muslims in Medina. This is attested in the Qur'an: "With these people, you have arranged a contract under oath, and they violated it without any fear each time" (Q 8:56; al-Halli and Jalal: 236; Faizer: 470).

[6] The incentive for a war against the Muslims in Medina came from Banu Nadir leaders at Khaybar, who had succeeded in establishing an anti-Muslim coalition, which included the people of Quraysh in Mecca, Banu Wa'il (a sub-tribe of Banu al-Khazraj that had connections with the Jews), and Banu Ghatafan. Overall, the anti-Muslim force included about 10,000 men against 3,000 Muslims (al-Waqidi: 2.441-43). The Muslims succeeded in driving the attack away by means of trenches they had built. During the siege on Medina, Abu Sufyan, the leader of the people of Quraysh, suggested to Huyayy b. Akhtab, one of the Banu Nadir leaders, that he should contact the Banu Qurayza in order to join them in the alliance and so achieve a decisive victory in the war. After talks between the Jewish leaders, the leader of Banu Qurayza, Ka'b b. Asad, decided to join the anti-Muslim alliance, violating his commitment to remain neutral and thereby infuriating the Muslims (Ibn Hisham: 2.690; al-Waqidi: 2.456; Ahmad: 70; Faizer: 472).

[7] After the attack failed, Muhammad decided to focus the war effort on the Banu Qurayza. When they heard that Muhammad's army was arriving, they managed to entrench themselves in their fortresses. After 25 days of siege, their leader, Ka'b b. Asad, asked the Prophet to consult Abu Lubabah. Abu Lubabah was one of the leaders of Banu Aws and an ally of Banu Qurayza. Abu Lubabah advised the Banu Qurayza to surrender, but at the same time, he pointed at his throat to warn them that the meaning of this surrender was death. Despite this warning, they decided to surrender, probably because they believed that their fate would be similar to that of the two previous Jewish tribes – deportation (Ibn Hisham: 2.690; Lings: 229-33).

[8] However, this time Muhammad was much more determined and decided to destroy them. So, that people would not perceive him as being the one who issued the order to murder the people of the Jewish tribe, he decided to appoint an advisor, an ally of Banu Qurayza, Sa'd b. Mu'ath. Muhammad asked him to decide what to do with the Jews. Sa'd answered, "Kill the men and take the children and women as captives." This advice was then carried out. Muhammad's men executed about 700 men of the tribe, but the children and women were sold into slavery and their property was distributed among the Muslims that had participated in the battle. Later, the Jewish captives (the children and women) were redeemed by Banu Nadir from Khaybar (Ibn Hisham: 2.684-89; Ahmad: 72; Lings: 233). The Muslims executed only one Jewish woman, who had tried to kill a Muslim soldier. Her execution was ordered by Muhammad, who also ordered a trench to be dug in which she was then beheaded (Anwar: 48-50; Ibn al-Athir: 2.128; al-Tabari: 3.1496).

[9] Islamic interpreters believe the punishment of Banu Qurayza was to be expected and was foreseen in the Qur'an: "Allah brought down in a flash from their fortresses the book owners that helped them [those of the nonbelievers] and cast a fear onto their hearts. A group of them you shall kill and another group you shall take into captivity" (Q 33:26; al-

Halli and Jalal: 553; al-Tabarsi: 12.128-30). However, it should be noted that the custom of capturing women and children while killing men was part of the rules of war introduced by the Jews, as stated in Deuteronomy 20:10-14. It is clear that Muhammad, who considered himself a Prophet as those who came before him and as continuing their prophecies, agreed with Allah's word as given in the Qur'an and treated the Jewish captives the same way that the Jews had treated their enemies in the Bible.

[10] Amongst those who had lost their husbands in the massacre was Rayhana bint Zayd b. Umar b. Khinafa of Banu Nadir. She had been married to a man named al-Hakim from Banu Qurayza and had now become a widow. Islamic sources say that she was so young and beautiful that she impressed Muhammad, who immediately offered her the opportunity of converting to Islam and marrying him. "If you chose Allah and his Messenger," the Prophet told her, "I shall take you for myself." However, Rayhana had loved and respected her husband very much and said, "I will not exchange him for any other man" (Ibn Sa'd: 8.129-30; al-Salihi, 231-32). Furthermore, she clung to her Judaism, refusing to convert to Islam, saying that she preferred to live the life of a slave as long as she stayed a Jew. Nevertheless, Muhammad did not relent and she agreed to consider his offer (Ibn Sa'd: 8.131; Ibn Hisham: 2.693).

[11] It did not take long for Rayhana to decide that she was better off converting to Islam than living the life of a slave in Hijaz. Ibn Sa'iya informed the Prophet, when he was sitting with his friends, that Rayhana had converted to Islam. The Prophet commanded her release and married her immediately. The hasty marriage of Muhammad to Rayhana contradicts the Qur'an, which commands widows to wait for four months and ten days before remarrying in order to ensure that they were not pregnant. Some modern historians, who noticed this discrepancy, claimed that Muhammad waited the required time (Hisham and Bakhtiar: 393; Lings: 233; Anwar: 51); classic historians did not pay any attention to this issue.

[12] An examination of the period indicates that it is unlikely that Muhammad waited the required time before marrying Rayhana (al-Tabari: 3.1359-64; al-'Asqalani: 4.309: Ibn Hisham: 2.693). The siege on the city of Medina began in March–April 627 and the massacre of Banu Qurayza was carried out immediately after its completion (Ahmad: 68). The Prophet's wedding to Rayhana was in the month of the Muharram in the sixth year of the Hijra (May-June 627) (al-Salihi: 232; Hisham and Bakhtiar: 392). This means that the time that had passed from the massacre until Muhammad's wedding to Rayhana was at the most two months and that there is no doubt that Muhammad did not wait the required time before the wedding.

[13] The Prophet gave Rayhana a dowry before the wedding, as he had given all the other women he had married – 12 head of cattle. He also instructed her to cover her face with a hijab (veil), just as he had instructed the rest of his wives (Ibn Sa'd: 8: 130; al-Salihi: 232). The hijab also distinguished the wives of the Prophet from the rest of the Muslim women and bestowed them with a special position, as is attested in the Qur'an, "when you borrow (from the wives of the Prophet) any object, ask for it over the screen" (Q 33:53). However, the hijab originated only in 626, when the Prophet married Zaynab bint Jahsh. Prior to this, the Prophet's wives did not wear a hijab. When Muhammad realized that his tactless and impolite friends sat with him alongside his wife, he preferred to draw her away from them by

means of a hijab and then instructed the rest of his wives to wear it (Mernissi: 86-87; al-Bukhari: 7.49).

[14] Even though Rayhana kept declaring her love to Muhammad before his friends and saying that she would not take another man in his place, Muhammad decided to divorce her because she was very jealous. After a short time, he relented because of his love for her and agreed to bring her back to his house (Hisham and Bakhtiar: 392-93; al-Salihi: 232). The reason for this was his great love for Rayhana and his growing yearning for her during the time she had been banished. Therefore, he was ready to forgive and have her return to him (Hisham and Bakhtiar: 392).

[15] Rayhana's behavior – her banishment and her return – was not typical of the wives of the Prophet. Some of the Islamic historians and others claimed that Rayhana's position was more that of a concubine than of the Prophet's wife and remained such until the day of her death (Ibn Sa'd: 8.130; Bennett: 251; Ascha: 90). They maintained this even though other historians, including the writer of the Prophet's biography, Ibn Ishaq, claimed that Rayhana's position was similar to that of the rest of Muhammad's wives (Ibn Hisham: 2.693). In 631, about a year before the death of Muhammad, Rayhana died and was buried at al-Bak'i – the principal cemetery in Medina (Ibn Sa'd: 8.131).

[16] In contrast to the paucity of knowledge about Rayhana, knowledge about Muhammad's second Jewish wife, Safiya bint Huyayy is much greater.

Safiya bint Huyayy

[17] After the Hudaybiyya treaty in 628, which began a ceasefire that lasted for 10 years between Muhammad and the people of Mecca, Muhammad decided to go into battle against the Jews of Khaybar. Islamic sources recount that a punitive expedition against the Banu Nadir encouraged Quraysh and Ghatafan to wage war against Medina. Muhammad and his men probably thought that they would gain large plunder from the Jews residing there, because Khaybar was known as a rich and fertile oasis (Lings: 263).

[18] Rumors concerning the intentions of the Muslims to attack Khaybar had been heard before, but the Jews there refused to believe these rumors and therefore did not ask for help from their allies. In June 628, the Jews were entrenched in their fortresses and after 14 days their leader Kinana, the owner of the al-Qamus fortress, decided to carry out negotiations with the Prophet concerning surrender. According to the agreement, the Jews were to surrender without any of them being killed or taken into captivity and their property was to be given to the Muslims. The agreement would be annulled if the Jews were to hide any property. After the conditions were agreed upon, the Muslims found out that the Jews were hiding the treasure that they had brought from Medina and it was in the hands of their leader Kinana. When asked where the treasure was, he denied that any treasure still existed. He insisted that he had sold it on arriving at Khaybar in order to buy weapons and armor. A short while after the treasure was found, Kinana was executed and his family taken captive. After the fall of the al-Qamus fortress, the Jews in two other fortresses agreed to surrender under the same conditions. Eventually, the Prophet decided to leave them in Khaybar so that they would be able to cultivate their lands and in return give half of the yearly crop to the Muslims (al-Baladhuri: 37; Ibn al-Athir: 2.148-49; Muir: 375-77).

[19] Safiya (or Habiba) bint Huyayy b. Akhtab was born in Medina in 611 to a Jewish family of Banu Nadir (al-Salihi: 213-14; Anwar: 64). When the Muslims banished the Banu Nadir from Medina in 626, some of them, including Safiya's family, arrived at Khaybar and settled there alongside the Jews already living there. By the battle of Khaybar in 628, Safiya, although being only 17 years old, had already been married twice: to Salam b. Mishkim who she divorced quite soon afterwards and then to Kinana b. al-Rab'i b. Abi al-Huqayq, who was killed in the battle of Khaybar. Safiya did not have a child with either of them (Ibn Sa'd: 8.120; Hisham and Bakhtiar: 393).

[20] According to the story by Anas b. Malik, after Safiya was caught with her family, Dahya b. Khalifa (or al-Kalbi) asked the Prophet for one of the prisoners and the Prophet told him: "Go and take yourself a slave girl." He then went and took Safiya (Ibn Hisham: 2.763; Ibn Kathir: 4.197). Soon afterwards a man arrived and told the Prophet about the beauty of Safiya. He claimed that she "was not suitable for Dahya, and should be with you." The Prophet then asked for her to be brought to him and when she arrived, her beauty so impressed him that he immediately paid Dahya seven head of cattle for her (al-Qushayri: 9.219-21; al-Salihi: 215).

[21] This story is repeated in various versions in classical Arabic literature, with each version recounting that Muhammad was impressed by the beauty of Safiya and therefore chose her. However, this story seems quite strange. She may indeed have been beautiful, as the stories said, but certainly Muhammad knew Safiya beforehand. Safiya, as mentioned before was the daughter of Huyayy b. Akhtab, one of the Jewish leaders at that times, and the wife of Kinana, the leader of the Jews at the al-Qamus fortress.

[22] It is difficult to believe that Muhammad had not run into her, seen her, or knew her before that. It is more reasonable to assume that when Muhammad negotiated with Kinana concerning the surrender of the Jews, he saw her, and when Kinana was executed after lying about the treasure, his family members, including her, were captured. Muhammad knew that and so sent Bilal to search for her. Bilal found her with Dahya and brought her to Muhammad (Muir: 377; Anwar: 63). It may be that immediately after the battle, Muhammad devised a plan to humiliate the Jews further by marrying one of them, as Worrbill believed (Worrbill: 146).

[23] After the Prophet saw Safiya, he decided to marry her. Knowing he could not marry her unless she converted to Islam, he agreed to release her in return for marrying him. "If you do not accept Islam, but prefer to remain Jewish," Muhammad threatened her "You will join the fate of the rest of your people." Safiya's answer was that she had nothing to loose, as all her family had been killed and there was no memory left of them. Therefore, she was willing to convert to Islam (Ibn Sa'd: 8.123).

[24] Safiya's quick conversion to Islam, as opposed to Rayhana's hesitation, raises the question whether she had agreed to convert to Islam and marry him only because her relatives were dead, or whether other motives brought her to do so. Ibn Kathir argued that her conversion derived from a feeling of respect and esteem for Islam (Ibn Kathir: 4.197), but her choice to convert to Islam and marry Muhammad was not necessarily because of this or the high respectable position that she could acquire as a "Mother of Believers" among the Muslims. This was likely the reason that other women married Muhammad and did not leave

him, except for one case known from Islamic sources about a woman who did leave him (Ascha: 92; Abbott: 39).

[25] Meanwhile, Muhammad decided to marry her as a wife without telling anyone about it. In contrast to the rest of Muhammad's wives, he did not give Safiya any dowry. Islamic historians explain that Safiya's release was in fact her dowry (Ibn Sa'd: 8.124; Ibn Kathir: 4.196; al-Bukhari: 8.8). In Islam, one is not compelled to give a woman a generous dowry. It is permitted to give a symbolic sum of money, a modest gift, or an item of clothing, in place of a dowry (Levy: 113-14). Therefore, if Muhammad did not give Safiya any dowry, then her release is to be interpreted as being a dowry.

[26] Safiya's conversion to Islam and later marriage to Muhammad seem quite strange, due to the fact that she was the daughter of one of the prominent Jewish leaders, who had conducted wars against Muhammad and even tried to kill him. When Safiya was brought before him, Muhammad reminded her of that and told her "Your father was one of my most bitter enemies until Allah killed him" (Hisham and Bakhtiar: 403).

[27] There is no doubt that the animosity between Safiya's father, Huyayy b. Akhtab and the rest of the Jewish tribal leaders and Muhammad was religiously based, as they refused to believe in Muhammad's calling and conspired against him. The Qur'an, Ibn Hisham's Sira, and also Islamic historical literature describe the Jews as persecuting Muhammad at the beginning of his mission, and hoping that he would find his death in one of the battles (al-Hufni: 382-385; Ahmad: 55). The origin of the animosity is, of course, rooted in the Islamic belief that the Jews concealed the prophecy that announced the future appearance of Muhammad as a prophet. The Qur'an explicitly explained it as: "Those we gave the Book to know it as well as they know their sons, but one group amongst them hides the truth intentionally" (Q 2:146). Ibn Hisham claimed the same thing (1.13-15; Faizer: 467).

[28] Safiya's conversion to Islam might be explained by saying that she was different from the rest of the Jews, in that she believed in Muhammad's calling, and therefore found it easy to convert to Islam. This is plausible when we know that Islamic sources allude to Jews who had converted to Islam, when given the chance to thereby save their lives, and that there were even those who out of their own free will and initiative had converted to Islam, such as 'Abd Allah b. Salam and Ka'b al-Ahbar. Some Islamic sources claim that the marriage of Safiya to Muhammad was foreseen in a dream she had while still married to Kinana. According to this, she told Kinana her dream, whereupon he hit her, alleging that her dream expressed what she wished to happen. From the story, we can surmise that Safiya knew or had heard about Muhammad and perhaps was not as hostile to him as were other Jews (Ibn Hisham: 2.763; Ibn Kathir: 4.196; Ibn Sa'd: 8.121).

[29] According to Ibn Sa'd's description, the Prophet did not immediately marry Safiya in Khaybar, but rather married her after he had taken her outside Khaybar. In this version of the story, when they arrived at Tubbar, Muhammad decided to marry her there, but Safiya refused to get off the camel, wishing to continue riding. Muhammad did as she requested, but wanted to know why she had refused to marry him there. Safiya explained that the place was too close to Khaybar and that she was afraid of the Jews there. Eventually, Muhammad married her at a place called al-Sahaba. His delay in marrying Safiya immediately after she had converted to Islam together with the long distance to al-Sahaba indicate that in this case

Muhammad acted differently than with Rayhana. Here, he waited the time required by Islamic law (four months and ten days), before marrying her (Hisham and Bakhtiar: 393; Anwar: 64).

[30] Umm Salam prepared Safiya for the wedding with the Prophet. She hid Safiya from the rest of the women with a cloth. She combed her hair, oiled, and decorated her for the ceremony. According to Anas b. Malik, the Muslims, even in the early times of Islam, well understood the Prophet's customs concerning his wives. He recounted that people did not know what was the Prophet's intention concerning Safiya's future – whether he would take her as a wife or to leave her as a concubine. They did know that if he commanded Safiya to cover her face with a veil (hijab), then he would take her for himself. Immediately after the wedding, he told Safiya to cover her face with a veil, which more than anything else symbolized the fact that she had become his wife just like the rest of his wives (al-Qushayri: 9.224).

[31] Mernissi also argues that the people were interested in Safiya's fate and therefore wondered if Muhammad would take her as a wife or leave her as a concubine, that is, as an Umm al-Walid (a mother of his children). This question had more significance for Safiya than for her children. "Umm al-Walid" was a new institution Islam created enabling men to take concubines the children of whom were free, enjoying all privileges. Therefore, whether Safiya became a lawful wife of Muhammad or not, her children with Muhammad, would, in any case, be free (Mernissi: 176-77; Levy: 64; al-Salihi: 216).

[32] Muhammad's marriage to Safiya was considered strange, as Muhammad was already married to four women: Aisha, Hafsa, Zaynab bint Jahsh, and Juwayriya. He kept on marrying more women till he was married to nine women simultaneously, according to Anas b. Malik (al-Bukhari: 7.4). Apparently, Muhammad went against what is written in the Qur'an: "And if you are afraid that you will not do justice with the orphans, marry the women that please you, two and three and four. And if you fear that you can do no justice, marry only one, or make do with concubines that you own" (Q 4:3). This is not the place to discuss the question of Muhammad's polygamy, but it seems that exceeding the number of women allowed by the Qur'an was not acceptable even in the classic period and this was the reason that various excuses were made among Islamic historians and interpreters of the Qur'an.

[33] The prevailing argument among Islamic historians was that the verse was put into the Qur'an later and was therefore not valid in the days of the Prophet (Stowasser: 86; Bennett: 252). In contrast, Muslim interpreters of the Qur'an and the supporters of the classic tradition claim that the Prophet had a natural right, as part of the rights that Allah had bestowed on him, to marry a large number of women. This, they claim, is similar to the Biblical kings David and Solomon, who also married a large number of women. The reason for this, they maintained, was that a large number of women was good for the soul of every Prophet and therefore Muhammad the Prophet also had permission (al-Halli and Jalal: 110; al-Baydawi: 1.195; Armstrong: 207; Anwar: 64).

[34] Stowasser argues that the followers of the classic school rely among other things on the verse in the Qur'an, in which there supposedly is permission for the Prophet to marry a large number of women: "Oh Prophet, we hereby allow you to have your wives, for whom you

paid a dowry and the maid servants you own, from the plunder that Allah gave you and your cousins from your father's side and the girls . . . and every woman that believes, who gives herself to the Prophet. If the Prophet asks to marry her, this privilege will be given only to you of all the believers" (Q 33:50; Stowasser: 86). However, the interpreters of the Qur'an did not interpret this as permission for polygamy, rather they agreed that the verse speaks about allowing a woman to offer herself to the Prophet – a right reserved for the Prophet alone (see al-Qurtubi: 14.210; al-Halli and Jalal: 110).

[35] In the accepted version of the legend, Muhammad and Safiya spent the first night after the marriage together in Muhammad's tent. According to Abu Hurayra, Muhammad's bodyguard, Abu Ayub did not sleep the whole night guarding Muhammad. Abu Ayub was afraid that Safiya, whose entire family Muhammad had killed, would take revenge and kill him in his sleep. Neither did Muhammad sleep that night, out of excitement and happiness, spending the whole night speaking with her, according to Umm Sulaym's recounting of Safiya's words (Ibn Sa'd: 8.126; Hisham and Bakhtiar: 392).

[36] The legend continues that after the wedding, the Prophet arranged a meager meal for his guests and formally introduced Safiya to his wives (al-Bukhari: 8.8). According to Umm Sinan, when the Prophet's wives saw Safiya, they were amazed by her beauty and started to whisper about her. "I am afraid," said Zaynab bint Jahsh to her friends, "that this woman will be with Muhammad more than we will be." Juwayriya tried to calm her saying. "Do not worry; she is not the Prophet's type" (Ibn Sa'd: 8.126). It was important to Muhammad to hear the opinion of the woman he loved more than all others, Aisha. When Muhammad introduced Safiya to Aisha, she turned and went out of the room. Muhammad ran after her and asked her opinion. Aisha answered that Safiya was Jewish. The Prophet was angry at Aisha's words and told her, "Do not say that she is Jewish, as she has already converted to Islam and is now a good Muslim" (Ibn Sa'd: 8.126).

[37] Most likely Aisha's response, even though it reminded Muhammad of Safiya's Jewish origins, was not directed against her personally. It probably was a response given in anger at Muhammad marrying yet another woman. According to Ghassan Ascha, Aisha led the group of wives who had tried to prevent Muhammad from marrying more wives (Ascha: 97). Nevertheless, close relations between Aisha and Safiya developed to such an extent, that Safiya asked her more than once to speak on her behalf with Muhammad when she felt that she had fallen out of favor. Safiya promised to give Aisha her "turn" with Muhammad in return. This indicates that personal background was not the reason for any animosity between them, and if indeed there was such an animosity, it did not last for long (Abbott: 43).

[38] Despite this, Safiya's Jewish origins were an obstacle for her in her relations with the Prophet's other wives. Every time that they wanted to anger her, they would remind her about her origin, which also angered Muhammad. Therefore he taught her to answer back "How can you condemn me when Aaron is my father, Moses is my uncle and Muhammad is my husband" (according to Arab historians, she was directly connected to Aaron, the son of Amram, the brother of Moses) (al-Salihi: 213). Muhammad's wife Zaynab bint Jahsh hated Safiya more than his others wives did. The reason was probably the death of Zaynab's family

in the battle of Khaybar, which was fought against the Jews, and Zaynab's blaming Safiya directly for it (Muir: 379).

[39] The hatred between the two women is well described in the *Hadith* that Aisha told, according to which during the journey of the Prophet's convoy, Safiya's camel weakened and the Prophet saw this and became worried. Because Zaynab had additional camels, he asked her to give Safiya one of them. Zaynab refused firmly, and claimed, "Do I have to give something to a Jewess?" He was very angry with her and therefore refused to visit her for two to three months (Ibn Sa'd: 8.127; Hisham and Bakhtiar: 405). As opposed to his wives, Muhammad did not deprive Safiya of anything and treated her as he did the rest of his wives (al-Salihi: 213).

[40] Safiya was married to Muhammad for four years, during which she bore him a daughter – Fatima. According to Islamic sources, the love between them was great and Muhammad asked Allah to bless Safiya. On the eve of his death in 632, when all his wives gathered around his bed, Safiya was the only one who expressed her loyalty to him. She talked about her admiration for him: "I wish that I had what is in you," she told him, resulting in hostile looks from the rest of his wives. Safiya's admiration to Muhammad was constant and lasted through out their shared life. She used to say that she had never seen a man as good as he (al-Salihi: 213).

[41] After the death of the Prophet, Safiya continued to live in Mecca with the rest of his wives and received a yearly pension of 5000 *derham*, according to the pension law Caliph Umar instituted in the year 641 (Abbott: 95). Safiya's life after Muhammad's death was not easy despite the money, as the abuse against her continued. Abu Umar related the story that one of Safiya's slave girls went to the Caliph Umar and told him. "Safiya is observing the Sabbath and keeping good relations with the Jews." Umar called Safiya and asked her if this were true and she answered, "I do not keep the Sabbath since Allah changed it for me with Friday, and my relations with the Jews are only those with my family." Afterwards, Safiya asked the slave girl what had made her lie to Umar and the slave girl answered, "the devil!" (al-Salihi: 213).

[42] Unlike the rest of Muhammad's wives, Safiya did not interfere in the politics of the Arab Muslims, except for one case mentioned in Islamic sources where she tried to help the Caliph Uthman b. Affan in 656 when rebels surrounded his house. Safiya died about the year 670 and was buried in the cemetery in al-Bak'i (Ibn Sa'd: 8.129). She ordered her property, estimated at about a hundred thousand *derham*, to be left to her sister's son. However, when they found out that the person about to inherit was a Jew, the Muslims refused to give him the inheritance. Only due to the intercession of Aisha, did the nephew of Safiya receive a third of the amount. Caliph Mu'awiya sold Safiya's house for 180 *derham* and the money was transferred to the treasury of the Islamic empire (Ibn Sa'd: 8.129).

[43] It is difficult to know why Aisha interceded for Safiya's Jewish relative. Perhaps it was because of her good relations with Safiya, some humanitarian feeling, or Islamic scripture (based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad) as told by 'Abdallah b. Umar b. al-Kattab that "the Muslim ruler is obliged to help people in his jurisdiction even if they are Jewish or Christians" (al-Bukhari: 3.77).

[44] There is no reference in the inheritance laws of the Qur'an (4:7-12, 33) of a case where a Muslim leaves property to a Jew; it is difficult to understand the position of Muslim law in such cases. In actuality, it is illegal for Muslims to inherit from non-Muslims, but non-Muslims can inherit property from Muslims, if the Muslim ordered this before his death (Levy: 322; al-Jinn: 5.48). There is no doubt that Safiya's nephew was eligible to inherit Safiya's property and Aisha's intervention was because she knew this. The decision to give him only a third of the property was probably not because he was Jewish, but was based on Muhammad's advice to leave only a small part of one's property to one's beneficiaries so that they would not waste it. The rest of the property had to be left to the Islamic state as *waqf* (al-Jinn: 5.48).

Conclusions

[45] Muhammad chose Rayhana and Safiya, his two Jewish wives, mainly because of their beauty, as Islamic sources indicate. Nevertheless, he loved them: he returned Rayhana even though he divorced her and he comforted Safiya when the other wives abused her. He did not discriminate between the status of the two Jewish women the status of his other wives. They received fair treatment and all the privileges the other wives received. They received the appellation "Mother of the Believers," wore a hijab, and received a pension after Muhammad's death. When Muhammad married them, they received a dowry identical to that of the other wives. It is possible that Safiya did not receive any dowry, as a few Islamic sources mention, as her release from captivity could be interpreted as her dowry.

[46] Despite the apparent similarity between Rayhana and Safiya – both were Jewish widows – it seems that there is nevertheless a difference between them. Rayhana did not convert to Islam immediately, but kept her Judaism, indicating her piety. In contrast, Safiya immediately converted to Islam, indicating that she was an opportunistic or pragmatic woman. In contrast to Rayhana, whom Muhammad married immediately without waiting the necessary time fixed in the Qur'an for marriage with widows (four months and ten days), he waited the necessary period before marrying Safiya.

[47] Despite the claim that Rayhana was a concubine and not a wife of Muhammad, this was not so, in light of the status and the privileges that Rayhana had (the appellation of "Mother of the Believers," wearing a hijab). These indicate she was a wife like the rest of his wives. As for Safiya, there was no such doubt and she was thought to be a lawful wife in all ways, even though she was his fifth wife. It seems that Muhammad committed the crime of taking more than four wives. The Islamic religious solution to this problem can be found in an interpretation of the Qur'an that claims that Muhammad, by being a Prophet, was entitled to take more women, as prophets before him did.

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