Tamīm al-Dārī

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Tamīm al-Dārī was one of the Prophet Muḥammad’s companions and an early convert to Islam from Christianity. His name is most closely associated with the eschatological traditions concerning the Dajjāl (the Muslim Antichrist), and various early ascetic ideas. The best known story involving him is in fact his meeting with the Dajjāl, after he and others of his tribe are shipwrecked on a mysterious island. He is taken by a creature called al-jassāsū to meet a chained man in a monastery, who asks the tribesmen a number of questions about the state of the outside world, most of which are related to the area of the Rift Valley in Syria. After they answer him, he proclaims himself to be the Dajjāl and announces that he is about to be let loose on the world. Somehow Tamīm and his companions manage to leave the island and come to visit the Prophet, who hears their story and relates it to the populace of Medina. However, in spite of this story, historical material about him, as is common with the Prophet’s companions in general, is hard to come by. In this article I will explore some of the historical traditions connected with this figure and try to establish which material is reliable and which is not.

His tribal affiliation is said to have been to the well-known Iraqi tribe of Lakhm, though according to the genealogical tradition he is said to have come from the Palestinian branch of this tribe, which fled there after its chieftain converted to Christianity in the sixth century. As far as his genealogy goes, we are for the most part presented with a unified version with few variants. His nisba of al-Dārī is said to have been connected to a monastery (dayr) in which he worshipped. There is little information available about Tamīm’s early life so we are obliged to concentrate on the event which dominates the biographical material about him: his conversion to Islam and his meeting with

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the Prophet Muhammad. It will be noted immediately that there are several mutually exclusive accounts of this event which need to be dealt with separately.

The first involves a classical deputation story in which Tamim al-Dari and ten members of his clan come to visit the Prophet Muhammad in Medina in 9 A.H./A.D. 629-30. The members of this delegation are all listed by name, though there is a good deal of variation as to the correct version (see Appendix), and they all, with the exception of Tamim himself and his immediate family, remain shadowy characters in the biographical material. It is assumed that the delegation came from the area of Palestine, though this is not stated directly. Tamim is said to have given gifts to the Prophet (including a horse, a skin of wine and an embroidered cloak), and to have converted to Islam, along with his clan. In his turn, Muhammad assigns them shares from the spoils of the oasis town of Khaybar which he had recently captured from the Jews. As W. M. Watt noted, unlike most delegations, the Daris did not return to their native lands, but settled with the Prophet in Medina. During his audience with the Prophet Tamim is said to have asked him for a deed to two, three or four villages or estates in the area of Palestine, close by the city (probably at that time destroyed) of Hebron. This aspect of the visit, while not unique to the Dari clan, is unusual. They in this manner were given the absolute rights to a piece of territory then far distant from the Prophet’s control, something for which there are few other extant examples. One of the variant texts is quoted to give the general tenor:

In the name of Allâh, the Merciful, the Beneficent. Mentioned in this deed


10 Not all of the sources cited in footnote 7 mention the land-deed.


12 All the variants are quoted in M. Hamîdullâh, Majma‘ al-wathâ’iq al-ṣiyâsîyya (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafîyya al-Mînîyya, n.d.), 51–6. The text translated above is located on p. 52.
(kitāb) is what the Messenger of Allāh [=Muhammad] bestowed upon the Dārīs. Since Allāh gave to him [the Prophet] the earth,13 he (then) bestowed upon them [the Dārī clan] Bayt ‘Aynūn, Ḥiḥrūn [or Ḥabūn], al-Maṣṭūm and Bayt Ibrāhīm14— whoever is (living) inside them—forever.


Several points should be noted about this version. First, the ultimate source of the story is one ‘Ubaydallāh b. Yazīd b. Rawḥ b. Zīnba’ 15 al-Judhāmī, who is the scion of a family with whom the Dārīs had close connections during the first century of Islam. Rawḥ b. Zīnba’, this man’s grandfather, was a local leader of the Palestinian Muslim aristocracy,15 and is recorded having dealings with Tamīm in the years after the Muslim conquest of Syria.16 The first witness to this deed is none other than the Prophet’s uncle al-‘Abbās, who was the ancestor of the Abbasid dynasty. This rather suggests a late date for this tradition, perhaps at the beginning of the second century. I will return to this issue later. It is also rather suggestive that according to the tradition the Dārī delegation came to the Prophet in the year 629–30, which was just as the Byzantines were reoccupying Syria-Palestine after defeating the Persians, who had ruled there from 614. The fact that in this account Tamīm and his companions did not return home, but stayed in Medina, could mean that they had been sympathetic to the Persians and thus could not continue to live under Byzantine rule (if we accept this version, that is).

Slightly different, but belonging to the same family of traditions, is the version in which the number of participants is said to have been six.17 Included

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in this group is one Abu Hind, who is said to be the half-brother of Tamim, and on whose authority his descendant, Sa‘id b. Ziyād b. Fā‘id b. Abu Hind al-Dārī (possibly this genealogy has been shortened by several links) relates the tradition. The two versions are quite close until we reach the point where the land deed is asked for. Tamim then asks for some land in Syria and the Prophet agrees, but leaves the group to deliberate as to which territory they wish to ask for. During these deliberations Tamim and Abu Hind are the only two members of the group to speak. Tamim proposes various places (Jerusalem, Bayt Jibrīn and so forth), which Abu Hind rejects until they agree on the area of Hebron. There was no need to inform the Prophet of their decision since, though he was not physically present, he was fully cognizant of the result (as Tamim discovered when he went to inform him) as a result of his prophetic abilities.

All in all, it is rather difficult to accept these deputation stories and, indeed, few Western scholars have. They can too easily be made to serve the obvious interests of the family of the Dāris, which, as will be noted below, did not always have an uncontested hold on the area of Hebron specified by the deed. In addition, there existed (and still exists) a need to ‘prove’ that the Prophet knew about the conquests that were to take place shortly after his death, and for him to approve of them. What better way to accomplish this than to assign a piece of land not then in his possession, so showing that he saw (as it were) it falling into the hands of the Muslims soon after his death? A number of Muslim hagiographical sources mention this as one of the ‘proofs of prophetic office’ (dālā‘ il al-nubuwwa), and even modern Muslim scholars have not hesitated to use it as an example of Prophetic foreknowledge. The second tradition especially, would seem to belong to the genre of tribal ‘praise’ traditions designed to strengthen the hold of the Dāris on their property.

In one of the optional endings of the second delegation story there is an attempt to harmonize the two versions (the ‘ten’ delegation and the ‘six’ delegation), by assigning to the latter the Meccan period of the Prophet’s ministry (!), and to the former the Medinan period. For some unknown reason, according to this version, the land deed needed to be reconfirmed. This account has to be dismissed since it does not seem very likely that any delegation would have visited the Prophet before the Hijra in 622. If this is not an attempt to harmonize accounts, then the aim is to establish a very early conversion date for Tamim and his clan, which would add immensely to their prestige.

The second family of conversion traditions is quite different from the first.

18 F. Krenkow, ‘The grant of land by Muḥammad to Tamīm al-Dārī’, Islamica, 1, 1924–25, 530–32; Watt, Muhammad at Medina, 112; i. Hasson, ‘The penetration of the Arab tribes in Palestine during the first century of the Hijra’, Cathedra, 32, 1984, 61 [in Hebrew]. Donner alone, (Conquests, 97) appears to accept the idea of Muhammad granting a deed to somewhere far outside his control, for which he has been criticized by E. Landau-Tessaron, ‘Review of Donner’s Early Islamic conquests’, Cathedra, 32, 1984, 67 claims that Tamim received tax collecting rights from the Prophet, not a deed to land.


These are to be found in the exegetical tradition connected to the quranic verse 5:110. It is unfortunate that the details are tantalizingly few, but the situation given is that Tamim is a merchant who travels between Mecca and Syria. It is not clear, however, in what exactly he trades.21 His partner on the trip in question is one ‘Adi b. Badā’,22 and they are both said to be Christians at the time of the story.23 They are accompanied in their travels by a Muslim called Budayl b. Abī Marya (or Maryam)24 whose name suggests that he, too, was a convert from Christianity. This man is a mawla (a client) of the Qurashi clan of Banū Sahm, whose official patrons are said to be ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (the future conqueror of Egypt)25, and al-Muṭṭalib b. Abī Wādāʾa26 (both of Sahm). Tamīm, ‘Ādī and Budayl travel to Syria. During the course of the journey Budayl becomes ill, makes out his will (orally) and dies. Tamīm and ‘Ādī then make free with his goods, and when they return to Medina (where Budayl’s family is said to have lived), his heirs complain to the Prophet that a silver cup (sometimes other goods are mentioned as well) is missing from the deceased man’s possessions. Nothing, however, can be proved until Tamīm feels guilty about the matter, converts to Islam, confesses, and returns his half of the stolen goods. Budayl’s two patrons then ‘extract’ from ‘Ādī the other half. These connections reveal what may have been a group of business partners.

We find evidence to support this in a rare tradition that Tamīm was accepted into the family of al-Ḥārith b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib by means of a hilf alliance.27 This is a most interesting tradition because it connects Tamīm with a first cousin of the Prophet. As al-Ḥārith died before the Prophet was born,28 which makes it unlikely that Tamīm was his contemporary, perhaps we might understand from this that Tamīm made the alliance with the descendants of al-Ḥārith, to whom he was also connected by his marriage to Umm Hakīm bint Nawfāl b. al-Ḥārith.29 This, of course, shows that the family accepted him as more than just a client; he was literally a member of the family. At the same time we find that Abū Wādā’a (the father of Budayl’s patron) also married a member of the family of al-Ḥārith, Budayl’s daughter ‘Arwa.30 Thus Tamīm became an in-law of his travelling companion’s patron, which suggests that the relationship between them was more than just casual. Later on, after the

21 One should note that one possible interpretation of Tamīm’s nisba, Dārī, is that it is connected to a perfume manufacturing house in Mecca: al-Sam‘ānī, Ansāb, ii, 443. See in general, P. Crone, Meccan trade and the rise of Islam (Princeton, 1987).

22 On him see Ibn Hajār, Isāba, ii: 467. Muslim scholars in general denied him the rank of saḥabī since he died a Christian.


24 Ibn Hajār, Isāba, i, 140–41.


26 Ibn Hajār, Isāba, iii, 425.


29 ibid., 302.

30 Ibn Habīb, Munammaq, 65; and al-Baladḫūrī, Ansāb, iii, 301–2.
conquests, ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās took estates close by those of the Dāris. Further possible connections are revealed by Tamīm’s other recorded marriage, to the sister of Abū Bakr (the future caliph), Umm Farwa. Abū Bakr’s eldest son, ‘Abd al-Rahmān, is said to have delayed his conversion to Islam because he used to travel to Syria on business, and married a woman from the Christian Arab tribe of Ghassān. Budayl’s status as a mawla is not a problem since M. J. Kister has proved that it was the custom of the tribe of Quraysh to allow foreigners with this status to rise to a certain level of prestige, and the clan of Sahm was noted for its wealth and the fact that a number of its clients became Muslims at an early stage. The wealth that Budayl is described as having would indicate a certain amount of independence, as does the fact that he was a Muslim client to non-Muslim patrons (though given that he lived in Medina, the independence was perhaps due to other factors).

If this story is historical, then Tamīm’s connections to the Prophet long predate the Hijra. It would be possible, though not very plausible, to harmonize this sub-version with the delegation accounts above, since Tamīm here is a Christian and the story clearly takes place after the Hijra. That would at least explain why the Prophet gave Tamīm and his companions shares in the spoils of Khaybar, and why they stayed on in Medina after their ‘delegation’ was over. However, there is another version of this story that is not so easily reconciled. In this account, Tamīm and ‘Adī accompany Budayl to Ethiopia, Budayl dies at sea and is thrown overboard. After completing their business the pair return to Medina, where they are caught red-handed trying to sell the pilfered items. The Prophet then remonstrates with Tamīm (‘Adī somehow drops out of the story) and tells him to convert to Islam, which he does. This obviously cannot be harmonized with the delegation accounts since no one can convert to Islam twice. The group of business connections described earlier appears to be strong evidence that Tamīm was indeed in the Hijaz some years before the Hijra and probably knew the Prophet personally (given that he was related to him by marriage and married to Abū Bakr’s sister).

Tamīm’s life after his conversion is just as vague as before it. It is said that he stayed on in Medina, until the Muslims conquered Palestine, whereupon he pressed ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb to give to him the estate which the Prophet had

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32 A. Sprenger, Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammads (Berlin: A. Effert, 1869), 1, 408, who does not mention his source; and Ibn Habīb, Kitāb al-muhābbar, ed. Ilse Lichtenstadter (Beirut: Dār al-‘Anāq al-Jadīda, n.d.), 452. Tamīm is the first of her listed husbands, so the marriage must have been early.
33 Mus‘āb al-Zubayrī, Kitāb nasab Quraysh, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1953), 276.
deeded to him. After the murder of ‘Uthmān he is said to have gone to Jerusalem, to Palestine in general, or to Damascus, and to have participated in the conquest of Egypt. He is said to have died in the year 40/660 and was buried in Bayt Jibrīn.

II: The Tamīmī waqf

No account of Tamim would be complete without mention of the famous waqf (inalienable land concession) that his family received in the city of Hebron, whose basis is discussed above. It is rather difficult to trace the history of this property because the city of Hebron is rarely mentioned in the Muslim historiographic literature. None the less, there are several notices of individuals or groups who contested the rights of the Dāris to the area. The first recorded instance concerns the Umayyad caliph Sulaymān (715–17), about whom it is said that he wished to harass the Dāris, but was frightened off by a curse mentioned in one of the versions of the land deed from the Prophet. This is rather a revealing story and would seem to indicate that the curse was perhaps designed to fend off greedy rulers. One hundred years later, during a visit to Damascus, the caliph al-Mā’mūn (813–33) summoned the then proprietor of the fief, Sa‘īd b. Abī Zayyād (ṣīrāf), and ordered him to produce a copy of the deed, which he did. Presumably the version given to al-Mā’mūn was the one quoted above in which the name of al-Mā’mūn’s ancestor, al-‘Abbās, figures prominently as a witness. It would seem likely that it was for this very purpose that this version was put into circulation as it seems hardly likely that the name of al-‘Abbās would carry much weight with the Umayyad dynasty.

Especially during the years after the Seljuq Turks began to be dominant in Palestine (466/1073), the Dāris’ claims to the area of Hebron began to face serious challenges (reflecting, in certain cases, the desire of the new rulers to dispossess them). In the years just before the Crusaders conquered Palestine one Abū Ḥātim al-Harawī al-Hanafi, the qadi of Jerusalem, issued a fatwa stating that since the area of Hebron was outside the Prophet’s jurisdiction at the time of the grant, he did not have the legal right to give it to the Dāris in the first place. This is an extremely audacious argument whose legal basis would seem to rest upon the political exigencies of the time rather than on Muslim jurisprudence, and it has been refuted at length by everyone who has...
written on the subject since then. At the time, the Dāris’ case was taken up by none other than the great mystic and scholar al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who happened to be in Jerusalem during this period. From this time forward we find a pattern emerging: the Dāris are continually defended by Shafi’īs (al-Ghazālī, of course belonged to this rite as well), while their rights are contested by Hanafis (who were frequently instigated by Turkish rulers). For example, David Ayalon states that ‘as early as 660/1262 Sultan Baybars I ordered the return to their original status of those parts of Abraham’s waqf in Hebron which had been turned into military fiefs’.48 He further points out the ‘existence of a constant antagonism between the financial interests of the army and the institution of religious endowments’.49

These factors led to a constant stream of pamphlets during the Mamluk period (1250–1517) and the early Ottoman period defending the rights of the Dāris, all from Egyptian Shafi’īs. These included al-Maqrīzī’s al-Daw’ al-sārī (written 841/1437), Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s al-Bīnāʾ al-jallī (written before 853/1449), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-‘Aql al-‘amīm (written before 911/1505) and the Ottoman al-Ghaytī’s al-Jawāb al-qawām (written before 963/1555). It must be assumed, though it cannot be proved, that each of these pamphlets was a response to some adverse situation. The Tamīmī family responded to this by strongly supporting the Shafi’ī rite—all members of the family that could be traced were described as Shafi’īs. In all likelihood, the Shafi’īs, being the inveterate defenders of Muslim tradition, were drawn to the defence of the Tamīmī family because of the fact that the land deed provided a unique precedent dating from the time of the Prophet, in writing, for the system of the waqf, which is so central to Islam. Therefore, the Shafi’īs needed to uphold the Tamīmī family’s absolute territorial rights in the face of the greed of the Turkish Mamluk overlords. This is a unique case of a family both supporting the framework of Muslim tradition and being supported by it at the same time.

APPENDIX

The names of the delegation members

[Those names with no sources attached to them are generally attested.]

1. Tamīm al-Dārī.


4(a) al-Fākhī b. al-Nuʿmān: Ibn Ḥajar, Isbāb, ii, 198–9 (no. 6954); Ibn Hishām, Sīra, iii, 409; (b) al-Fākhī b. Safārā: Ibn al-Kalbī, Nasab, i, 208.

5. Yazīd b. Qays.

6(a) al-Ṭayyib b. Barāʾ (the Prophet changed his name to ‘Abdallāh): Ibn Hishām, Sīra, iii, 409; Ibn al-Kalbī, Nasab, i, 208; (b) al-Ṭayyib b. Barāʾ: Ibn Ḥajar, Isbāb, ii, 236 (no. 4300); (c) al-Ṭayyib b. Dharr: al-Sallūṭī, Subul, vi, 508;

48 D. Ayalon, ‘Payment in Mamluk military society’, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, 1, 1958, 292 (quoting from Muḥi al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, Sīrat al-Zāhir Baybars). One of the few times when the Tamīmī Dārī family is mentioned is in a quote in Ibn al-Ṭāhir, Taʾrikh, ed. Tornberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1864– repr.), x, 560, whose source is stated to be Ḥamza b. Ṣād al-Tamīmī, and it is said there that he composed a Taʾrikh. It is rather curious, though, that the incident mentioned (the discovery of the non-decomposed bodies of the Patriarchs) must have taken place during Crusader rule when the Tamīmī family was not present (they went into exile).

49 Ayalon, 291.


