

# Muḥammad and His Followers in Context

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# Muhammad and His Followers in Context

*The Religious Map of Late Antique Arabia*

*By*

Ilkka Lindstedt



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Cover illustration: An undated but possibly second/eighth-century Arabic inscription found in NE Jordan during the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018 led by Ali Al-Manaser and Michael Macdonald. The writer of the inscription, one 'Ammār, asks God to bless Muḥammad and to forgive the male and female believers. The writer also asks the prophet's words and intercession to be accepted. Photograph by the author.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lindstedt, Ilkka, author.

Title: Muhammad and his followers in context : the religious map of late antique Arabia / by Ilkka Lindstedt.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2023. | Series: Islamic history and civilization, 0929-2403 ; volume 209 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023045430 (print) | LCCN 2023045431 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004687127 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004687134 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Muḥammad, Prophet, -632--Biography--History and criticism. | Islam--History--To 1500--Historiography.

Classification: LCC BP75.3 .L56 2023 (print) | LCC BP75.3 (ebook) | DDC 297.6/3092--dc23/eng/20231002

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023045430>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023045431>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 0929-2403

ISBN 978-90-04-68712-7 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-68713-4 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004687134

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# Acknowledgements

Over the years, I have written various articles on early Islamic identity, as well as pre-Islamic Arabia; this book brings together the different strands of research I have been pursuing. However, writing this book ten or twenty years ago would not have been possible. Much of the (in particular epigraphic) evidence that I rely on has been published in the 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s. I have had the privilege and pleasure of learning from and socializing with the great Arabian epigraphists, linguists, and historians Ahmad Al-Jallad, Iwona Gajda, Michael Macdonald, Laila Nehmé, and Christian Robin. I am truly grateful for their collegiality throughout the years and for the painstaking scholarly work that they have done to revolutionize the field. It is a real pity that their work is still not always acknowledged by Arabists and Islamicists.

I am grateful for receiving funding from various outlets. I was working with a research grant from the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation in 2015–2016. During 2016–2019, when the bulk of the research that has resulted in this book was carried out, I was a Fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. I have the fondest of memories of the time spent there. My fellowship period allowed for an immersion into the world of Arabic (and more generally Arabian) epigraphy.

In 2019, I joined the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. It is here that I have found my intellectual home and received the warmest of welcomes. This book has been written in the framework of the Finnish Cultural Foundation-funded project “The mediation of identity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” led by Jutta Jokiranta. I am extremely grateful to Jutta and the other scholars in the project for valuable feedback that they have given on the manuscript of this book. Extra special thanks to Nina Nikki, who got me interested in the social identity theory in the first place. During the writing of this book, Nina, Riikka Tuori, and I also edited a volume with the title *Religious Identities in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Walking Together & Parting Ways* (Leiden 2021), which was, in turn, based on a symposium we organized (with Maijastina Kahlos) at and with the kind financial help of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, “Ideas and Identities in Late Antiquity: Jews, Christians, and Muslims,” March 12–13, 2018. The symposium and the volume explored many of the same themes that this book discusses.

My *Doktorväter* Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila and Kaj Öhrnberg read the whole manuscript of this book and proffered numerous invaluable comments and suggestions. Without them, I would never have become interested in early Islam; and without their help on the manuscript, this book would have been

much less detailed. Jaakko pushed me to engage with Arabic poetry, which I was at first hesitant to do but which, I now think, became significant for my arguments. Throughout the years, Kaj has had the patience to read and comment on my studies. What is more, without his tips, I would have missed many valuable pieces of secondary literature.

I also thank Riikka Tuori, whose brain I picked more than once on Judaism in late antiquity and the medieval era. Anna-Liisa Rafael, always providing an insightful discussion on all things late antique, helped me with, in particular, Syriac texts and expressions, for which I am grateful.

There are many important colleagues at the Faculty of Theology and Faculty of Arts in Helsinki to be mentioned, but I should in particular single out Mulki Al-Sharmani and Teemu Pauha. Mulki has been an extremely important friend and colleague to me. Collaborating and teaching with her has been an absolute joy. Moreover, without her, I would never have gotten interested in modern Qur'ānic exegesis. Teemu, too, has been such a significant friend and colleague. He has taught me a myriad of things concerning the social identity theory and social psychology more generally—and I will never forget the hiking and camping trips we have done together, often during the coldest time of the year.

Mikko Autere, Janne Mattila, and Inka Nokso-Koivisto have been significant colleagues and friends for many years. I have discussed with them many facets of Islamic history, including the themes of this book.

I want to thank the wonderful PhD students that I have been supervising. I will especially mention Amira Abou-Taleb and Katja von Schöneman, who both work on the Qur'an and its classical exegesis. Working with them has significantly increased my knowledge.

Of particular importance are numerous colleagues outside of Finland whom I have met at conferences or other places and continued to be in contact with via email, Facebook, or other means. I am extremely grateful to, in particular, Sean Anthony, Mohsen Goudarzi, Hagit Nol, Mehdy Shaddel, Tommaso Tesei, Peter Webb, and Marijn van Putten for important discussions concerning the topic of this book (and other matters).

In spring 2021, I taught a course titled “The biographies of Muḥammad and social memory.” Throughout the course, we discussed how the biographical literature constructs a portrait, or rather many different portraits, of the prophet Muḥammad, and how those depictions aligned, or not, with what scholars have recovered of pre- and early Islamic Arabia. Thanks to the students, it was an extremely rich course. The students put forward ingenious and creative readings of the biographical texts that we went through. Quite a few of the insights presented in this book are due to these inspiring classes.

This book reproduces some passages from my published articles. I am very grateful to the publishers for permission to do this. These articles are: “‘One Community to the Exclusion of Other People’—A Superordinate Identity in the Medinan Community,” published in a book by de Gruyter; and “Religious Warfare and Martyrdom in Arabic Graffiti (70s–110s AH/690s–730s CE),” published in a book by the Oriental Institute, Chicago (for exact references, please refer to the bibliography of this book).

I also want to warmly thank Heli Alamaunu and Petteri Koskikallio for their invaluable assistance with the formatting of the book. Without their help, this book would probably have not seen the light of day.

The most influential person with regard to this book is yet to be named: Professor Fred Donner. I spent the year 2014 as a visiting postdoctoral researcher at the University of Chicago with a grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation. The importance of Fred’s studies to me is probably visible to every reader of this book, on every page of it: in a way, this book is simply an extended footnote to his research. It took me a long time to start to understand and appreciate the importance of Fred’s studies: when I read his books and articles as a student, in the 2000s, the ideas struck me as rather outlandish. I was so hardwired to read the Qur’ān as a text that must talk about “Muslims” and “Islam” and cannot say anything good about Jews and Christians. It took me quite some time to see the Qur’ān, and early Islamic history more generally, with a new set of goggles. However, over the years, Fred’s influence got me thinking of, in particular, social categorizations and their development in early Islamic times.

My stay in Chicago in 2014 had very much importance for my scholarly outlook and thinking. The PhD students that Fred advised comprised the brightest young minds in the study of early Islam. I should mention in particular Suleyman Dost, Richard Heffron, Nathaniel Miller, Jessica Mutter, and Jeremy Vecchi for friendship, discussions, and good times during my sojourn in Chicago.

Fred’s scholarship, learning, hospitality, and kindness characterized my year 2014, forming memories that I often go back to. It is to Fred Donner that I humbly dedicate this book.

# Figures

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## A Note on Style

I have tried to keep my book as reader friendly as possible: pre-modern texts are given in English translation; transliterated passages are adduced somewhat sparingly. The idea in this is to present the evidence and arguments of this book in plain English and in a way that would make the book readable for scholars, students, and others with backgrounds in different academic disciplines. The Bible citations are given in accordance with the NRSV translation. The Talmud is given in the translation from Sefaria (<https://www.sefaria.org/>). The Qur'ānic passages are given in an English rendering of my own. I have, however, often consulted the English translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem and am often indebted to him. I have also used the Finnish translation of the Qur'ān by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, which has affected my renderings significantly. The translations of other texts (from Arabic and other languages) are also my own if I do not specifically mention where the translation is taken from.

The reader should note that, in the case of Safaitic and Sabaic inscriptions, for example, it is often impossible to give the vocalizations of the personal names present in them with any certainty. Because of this, personal names sometimes appear as consonants only, as “Ḥmd” or the like. Transliterations of Sabaic, Safaitic, and Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions follow the conventions of the respective fields, which differ somewhat from how Arabic is transliterated in this book. I should also remark that, because of the meter, Arabic poems are often transliterated in full vocalization, in contrast to prose: in the latter case, the case endings are not given, as is common in the field.

Since this work deals with a rather large number of themes which are usually seen as rather distinct but which, I argue, should be understood as interlinked, I have been somewhat restricted in giving references to the existing scholarship, favoring recent studies to the exclusion of older ones. The bibliography of the work is already rather long and would have been even more outsized if I had included more copious notes and discussion of earlier works.



FIGURE 1 The map of the localities mentioned in the book  
THE MAP WAS DRAWN BY NORA FABRITIUS; USED WITH PERMISSION

# Abbreviations

## Book Series

AAIW	Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World
AKM	Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
AOS	American Oriental Series
ATS	Arabistische Texte und Studien
CCME	Culture and Civilization in the Middle East
FCIW	The Formation of the Classical Islamic World
IPTS	Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
RSHIT	Routledge Studies in the History of Iran and Turkey
RSMEH	Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern History
SILS	Studies in Islamic Law and Society
SLAEI	Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam
SPCH	Studies in Persian Cultural History
SSL	Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics

## Journals & Periodicals

<i>Arabica</i>	<i>Arabica. Revue d'Études Arabes</i>
ARAM	<i>ARAM Periodical</i>
BEO	<i>Bulletin d'Études Orientales (de l'Institut Français de Damas)</i>
BJMES	<i>British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>Der Islam</i>	<i>Der Islam. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
IOS	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAIS	<i>Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies</i>
JAL	<i>Journal of Arabic Literature</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JIQSA	<i>Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association</i>
JIS	<i>Journal of Islamic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQS	<i>Journal of Quranic Studies</i>

<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Muslim World</i>
<i>Oriens</i>	<i>Oriens. Zeitschrift der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Orientforschung</i>
<i>Qanṭara</i>	<i>al-Qanṭara. Revista de Estudios Arabes</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>

### Encyclopaedias & Lexica

<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān</i> , Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006
<i>CSAI</i>	<i>Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions</i>
<i>OCIANA</i>	<i>The Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia</i>

### Handbooks

<i>CHI</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of Islam</i>
<i>ThG</i>	van Ess, Josef, <i>Theologie und Gesellschaft</i> , 6 vols., Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991–1996.