

Şurahbîl b. Hasane

182002

Journal of
Near Eastern Studies



MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

01 Ekim 2020

04157



The Tribal Affiliations of Shurahbîl ibn Ḥasana

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Introduction

Shurahbîl ibn Ḥasana (d. 18/639) was an early Meccan convert to Islam who became a leading commander during the Arab conquest of southern Syria.¹ This article does not discuss Shurahbîl's military career, the contours of which are reasonably well known.² Instead, it examines his tribal origins and the circumstances of his move to Medina, topics that have received little scholarly attention. The significance of accounts concerning Shurahbîl's tribal connections and life in Medina lies in the fact that they reveal reliable information on the territories and alliances of some of the clans of the Anşār (the Medinan "helpers" of the Prophet Muḥammad). The article thus focuses on genealogy on the one hand, and geography on the other, and aims to demonstrate that

combining the two is a useful method to advance our knowledge of the early Islamic period.

This article is divided into three parts. First, I discuss Shurahbîl's origin, including his genealogy, for which information in Muslim sources is both abundant and contradictory. The preoccupation of the sources with genealogy is quite typical, and oftentimes the large body of information—sometimes real, sometimes fictional—that can be found concerning the family origins of prominent figures stands in sharp contrast to the sparse details provided about their lives and activities. The large amount of genealogical material available on Shurahbîl renders his background worthy of close examination. Although the numerous contradictions do not allow us to gain a definitive picture of Shurahbîl's lineage, they illustrate the level of genealogical detail that can be extracted from the sources about individuals of obscure origin.

The next part of the article discusses Shurahbîl's stay in Medina with his maternal half-brothers among the Khazrajî clan of the Banū Zurayq. A careful examination of the tribal affiliation of Shurahbîl's half-brothers and of the territory of the Khazrajî group to which they belonged shows that the information provided by the Muslim sources in this regard can be considered trustworthy.

* Some of the arguments of this article were presented at a conference held at Princeton University on May 10–11, 2019. I thank the organizer, Khodadad Rezakhani, for the invitation to speak there. I am grateful to Michael Cook, Simcha Gross, and Michael Lecker for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article. Citations from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* follow the 2nd ed. online, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (Leiden, 1960–2005) at: <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>, accessed November 2019.

¹ C. E. Bosworth, "Shurahbîl b. Ḥasana," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

² See *ibid.* for references to scholarly treatments of this topic.