

AL-SĪRA AL-NABAWIYYA BY IBN ISHĀQ — IBN HISHĀM: THE HISTORY OF THE TEXTS AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP

This article draws attention to the earliest and most famous of the extant texts composed in the medieval Arabic genre (*al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*). For a long time the text has been known as known as *Sīrat* of Ibn Hishām [1], and it commonly is associated with with the name of Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām — whose name usually appears on the title pages of many modern editions [2].

However, the first publication of this monument, wonderfully prepared by F. Wüstenfeld, is given the Arabic title *Sīrat sayyidinā Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh. Riwāyat Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām ‘an Ziyād b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bakkā’ī ‘an Muḥammad b. Ishāq* (“Life of Our Lord Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allāh, as communicated by Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām — from Ziyād b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bakkā’ī — from Muḥammad b. Ishāq). The trimeric listing of the authors in the given title, which is put together according to the medieval tradition of “reverse” chronology, means that Ibn Hishām was the last one in the history of this text. And yet the text is inseparable of the names of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), al-Bakkā’ī (d. 183/799), and Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833 or 213/828). The authorship line was “turned over” in German by the publisher, and Ibn Ishāq came first, and the name of Ziyād b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bakkā’ī was omitted: “Life of Muḥammad from Muḥammad b. Ishāq, processed by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām” [3].

Naturally, alternative reading of the titles does not just boil down to simple change of the “reverse” chronology to the “direct” one. It ultimately deals with the issue of the authorship of “Life of the Prophet”. If the name of Ibn Hishām is in the beginning of the Arabic line, even though the roles of two other links are not diminished — but are not magnified either, — then it is natural to expect that in time the analyzed work gained in popularity in the medieval Arabic society, as did “*Sīra* of Ibn Hishām”. (And that is exactly what happened). In laying down the “direct” chronology in German, F. Wüstenfeld does not just place Ibn Ishāq first, but contrary — in certain sense — to the medieval tradition, he makes him the primary author, whereas Ibn Hishām is given a role of the “processor”, the editor of the precursor [4].

Even preliminary cursory inspection over the publication's titles and translations of “Life of the Prophet” is enough to understand how complex and intricately inter-related are the issues of the history of this monument and of its authorship. In this current work we would like to sum up some of researches relating to these issues. With this end in view, we intend to roughly trace the changes the original text of Ibn Ishāq has undergone over time, and determine whether the text of Ibn Hishām was the result of mechanical communication, exact reproduction-copying of the two preceding links, or an independent version, distant from the original text of Ibn Ishāq.

We begin with ascertaining the fact that “Life of the Prophet” that we are analyzing is a monument of medieval Arabic written tradition with special features, which are first of all determined by a complex set of its elements. Here is the list of those.

Prose elements of *Sīra*:

1. Out-of-plot prose elements.

a. Qur’ānic citations:

— the passages with the so-called *asbāb al-nuzūl* (circumstances of the sending down of the *āyāt* and *sūras* of the Qur’ān).

— elements of interpretation (*tafsīr*) of *sūras* and *āyāt* of the Qur’ān [5].

b. *Aḥādīth*.

c. The speeches of the Prophet and his associates, official documents.

d. Various kinds of lists of names (enumerations).

2. Plot prose elements.

a. Narratives of “miraculous” events and phenomena.

b. Stories (*akhbār*) [6].

Poetic elements of *Sīra* are presented with the plays of various sizes. These elements, according to their purpose, may be divided into following groups.

3. Verses — out-of-plot elements of *Sīra*.

a. Verses — the object of philological discussions about debated authorship of poetic works.

b. Verses — “genealogical” *testimonies*.