Illustrations

Fig. 33. Qur’an A 5. Paper, 13.7 x 8.7 cm, 306 ff. Kota Batu, 1845. Christie’s, first page. Courtesy of Christie’s.

Fig. 34. Qur’an B 2, beginning of sûrat “al-Baqara”. Paper, 43 x 33 cm, 499 ff. 1777/8. The British Library, BL Or. 16277, ff. 3v—4r. Courtesy of the Library.

Fig. 35. The same MS, colophon copied by Murid. F. 497r.


Fig. 37. Qur’an B 4. Paper, 35 x 21 cm, unfoliated. 1870/1. The Jabatan Muzium dan Antikuiti, Malaysia, MNJ.MDN.655.02.A1.45. Courtesy of the Museum.

Fig. 38. Qur’an B 8, beginning of sûrat “Maryam”. Paper, 39.5 x 30 cm. 502 ff. 19th c. The British Library, BL Or. 16033. Ff. 253v—254r. Courtesy of the Library.

Fig. 39. Qur’an B 9, beginning of sûrat “Maryam”. Paper, 35.5 x 21 cm. 308 ff. 18 Qa’ib 1299 (5 July 1882). The British Library, BL Or. 16595. Ff. 1v—2r. Courtesy of the Library.

TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

A. Kudelin

Leaving out the discussion of fundamental differences between historiography and hagiography let us indicate two major distinctions between them (after A. Ia. Gurevich). Historical narration follows the chronological order of events, while in hagiographical literature it is rare that the dates of birth and death of saints as well as other dates are pointed, since he “exists beyond time belonging to the world of eternal truth and virtue”. The second distinction is related to different views on causality of the events described. As a rule medievial historians were looking for “rational causes of the events and chronological order itself presupposed such explanation”. On the contrary a hagiographical narration on miraculous events and deeds of a saint was devoid of a causal structure. Due to the fact that a saint acted in accordance with the will of God, the miracles that he performed were casusali, i.e., they were breaking the earthly causality.

However it is worth noticing that in Surah, as well as in many other medieval texts, historiographical and hagiographical components are closely related to each other creating a unique character of the record. A story about a real historical event often gradually transforms into the description of a miracle. In its turn a description of miracle events can precede an accurate and detailed documentation of a certain episode.

Let us consider “Life of the Prophet” by Ibn Isqaq— Ibn Hisjam. In the chapter describing the battle at Badr (2624), where the Muslims won the first significant victory over the pagans of Makka, a special paragraph contains “eye witnesses’ accounts” of the angels fighting on the side of the people from Madina. The elements of miraculous are so skillfully included into authentic documentation of the battle progress that they acquire a historical character.

1. One “pagan” told: “And my cousin and I went to the mountain top, where the whole field of Badr was spread before the eyes. We were polytheists then. We waited for...
In Madina an armed and dangerous "enemy of Allah" seeking a meeting with the Prophet. While we were standing there, a cloud approached us and we heard a horse neigh. I heard a voice that exclaimed, "Go, Hayyattum! My cousin's heart burst and he fell dead. I was struck too, but I managed to control my fear.

Fare overcame the polytheists as they immediately realized that the horse called Hayyattum could take orders only from one owner—archangel Jibril—who arrived in Badr to help the Muslims.

2. Abu Usaid Malik b. Rab'a, from al-Ansar, told already after he got blind, "If I were at Badr and if I could see, I would show you the gorge where the angels came from. I had neither doubts, nor hesitations about who they were.

3. Abu Dwiid al-Muzinî from Madina who took part in the battle at Badr told: "I followed one polytheist in order to get hold of a blade. Suddenly, even before my sword touched him, his head fell off his shoulders. I realized that somebody else killed him."

4. Finally, 'Ali b. Abi Talib is told to have witnessed the following: "... a white turban lowered to the back was a sign of angels on the day of Badr. Only Jibril had a yellow turban" [5].

Thus, apart from authentic information used by contemporary historians, information includes other elements characteristic of hagiographical texts. Both types of information become integral within one mostly belleslettish narration. Thus, assorted cultural, religious, and traditional events, and mythical actions exist to everlastings acts of sacred history. Let's give some more examples. It is natural that a significant part of miraculous elements in Sirr is directly related to the Muslim community leader. Let paper illustrate with several examples from the chapter "The great battle at Badr."

The two first episodes tell about a god-given miraculous power of the Prophet of Islam to learn those things about past and future that are hidden from the men of monochrome. The first episode describes conversion to Islam of Muhammad's vigorous critic 'Umar b. Wahb, namely, the miraculous circumstances under which the latter decided to become Muslim.

The son of 'Umar b. Wahb was taken prisoner by Muslims in the battle at Badr. Soon after the battle he told the following in a conversation with another Meccan Sufwân b. Umayya.

If it wasn't for the debt that I can't pay back, and if it wasn't for the children that I'm afraid would die without me, I swear to Allah that I would go and kill Muhammad. Even have a reason to do it—my son is held captive there. Untold him: "I take your debt and I will pay it for you. You children will be like my own children. I will take care of them and they will have everything that I have."

On this condition 'Umar agreed to go to Madina and the companions decided to keep their arrangement in secret.

This deed demonstrates to the true believers the ability of Allah's power to work miracles. While we were standing there, the Prophet turns a wooden pole in the hands of a valiant Muslim soldier into a smashing sword.

'Ukkhâh b. Mîshân b. Ibrâhim al-Madîlî—was fighting with his sword till it broke in his hand at the battle of Badr. 'Ukkhâh came to Allah's messenger, may the prayers and peace of God be upon him, and the Prophet gave him a wooden pole and said: "Fight with this, 'Ukkhâh!" He took it from the hands of Allah's messenger, may the prayers and peace of God be upon him, shook it and turned it into a long, heavy and glaring sword in his hand. 'Ukkhâh was fighting with it till the Almighty granted Muslims with victory..."[10].

Other chapters of Sirr also include descriptions of miracles performed by the Prophet. Let us mention just several examples. In the course of a battle known as "The Battle of the Trench" (5/627) the Muslims dug a trench 6 km long in quite a short time period to protect Madina from the Mecceans. When digging, the Muslims dashed against a large rock that could not be cut into pieces. The Prophet of Islam said a prayer to Allah and poured a bucket of water onto the rock turning it into sand dunes. During those days in the presence of Muhammad a handful of dates and, then, a roasted lamb multiply into an abundant meat helping to restore many Muslims who had fainting attacks due to a lack of food[11].

At least twice during war campaigns (Hudaybiyya 6/628, Tabik b. 9/630) the Prophet provides soldiers with water in a miraculous way according to Sirr [12].

Without an "Life of the Prophet" aimed at glorifying Islam and actions of the Muslim community leader attributing to them special meaning of sacred form, historical time inquisitive minds called for sophisticated theoretical conceptions of a prophetic miracle in view of interpreting these episodes as acts of Divine Providence.

It is worth mentioning that medieval Muslim scholars had no uniform concept of miracle. Without openly disputing traditionally accepted miracles performed by Muhammad's followers, and of course this is due to the fact that these miracles were ambigously declared that Muhammad performed no miracles at all. Only the miracle related to him being the Qur'an. Another group of scientists developed theoretical grounds to support an opposite point of view. Beginning with the 5/11th century scholars of this group started to form combined stories about miracles in the Prophet's life into narratives of hagiographical genre (al-li, a'tâm or umârat al-mawâlî, literally meaning: "signs, indications of Prophecy").

Overview of the first group position can be found in the book "Perfection in Qur'anic Sciences", Diversification in interpretation of certain provisions makes no essential difference for us. Most important is that the followers of this tradition joined hierarchies of the Prophet's miracles and placing Muhammad on top of it, one way or another they recognize the Qur'an as the main, if not the only miracle of the Prophet of Islam.
Let us consider the position of their opponents now. Those who argue that all the miracles performed by the Prophet belong to 'Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamadani (325—936/1032), Abū Nu‘aym al-Jasharī (336—436/946—1036), Abū Dun'ayn al-Baghdādī (364—450/974—1066) and Ahmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bagdhājī (384—458/994—1066). In works of Ahmad b. Ṭaymiyya (661—728/1263—1328) some essential provisions of the second group are generalized.

Taking into account that in the course of time this approach underwent many changes we will mention only the landmarks of its evolution.

In the work Al-lāmin al-nubuwwa ("Indications of Prophecy") by a renowned Shafi‘ī faqih al-Mawardi [18] we find a description of two groups of miracles: the first includes only the Qur'an, the second contains other miracles performed by Muhammad at Allah's will.

Al-Mawardi characterizes the Qur'an as the first miracle (mu‘āzim), with the help of which the Allāh called Muhammad to prophecy. Unique characteristics of Qur'an (inimitability) single Muslim out among other messengers making the Qur'an the most evident of all miracles (qāʾīr) of the Almighty. Then, al-Mawardi develops his idea. Miracles performed by any messenger totally corresponded to the idea of miracle in people's minds at that time. Being sent with a mission in the epoch of Haumāyūn's dominancy, Mūsā put all magicians to shame with his miracle of dividing the Red Sea and turning its staff into a snake. Īsā was also shown miraculous medicine dominance and, by curing incurable patients and resurrection of the dead, amazed all doctors. When in the epoch of eloquence Muhammad was granted the Qur'an, neither pompous orators nor the ruminators of I necessity were capable of belittling it. Even the "Indications of Prophecy" singles out in every possible way their similarity to miracles of Mūsā and Īsā. Al-Mawardi underlines the fact that the prophets performed by the "Indications of Prophecy" are performed by the Qur'an himself. In other words, Mūsā and Īsā are not being inferior neither inferior nor superior to those prophets recorded in the Qur'an.

However, as the author of "Indications of Prophecy" unfolds his viewpoint, it significantly departs from that of theologians making a hierarchy of miracles "perceived in the mind". After all, the indications of the Qur'an inimitability [20] al-Mawardi turns to detail enumeration of actions and events related to Muhammad. Here we find already mentioned events during preparation to the "Battle of the Trench" with a reference to Abū al-Kalīfī (194—256/810—870) one of the most renowned sunnī hadīth collectors, namely, getting over an obstacle in the form of a rock, multiplying small quantities of food for as many as 600 or 800 diggers. Al-Mawardi noted that the latter "could be compared with the multiplication of food with word" [21]. We also find mentioning other miracles like finding of water in the desert. The author of "Indications of Prophecy" points out again that Muhammad's miraculous actions here are exceptional. In the words of Ahmad Ḥanbalī, it would be more difficult to see a miracle in any extraordinary phenomenon. Soothsayers (khiyāum), magicians, doctors, astrologists, theologians, and grammarians know and perform things that are more than ordinary practices. For instance, people "in a certain region used to predict the time of the solar or lunar eclipse as they do not possess the same knowledge, but still there is no prophetic miracle in this event. In the same way monumental work "The Book" by a great grammarian Sibawayh (2nd/8th century), Hippocrates' knowledge in medicine, erudition of a renowned Muslim scholar surpassing the abilities of common people, will not indicate their prophecy. Here we are talking only about high degree of professionalism in a certain field of human activity that can be attained by other people with the same kind of professional training. In contrast to the abovementioned examples one of the main characteristics of prophetic miracle is that "all humankind apart from prophets can't "operate" with it. Asserting that miracles can be performed and repeated only by prophets, Ibn Ṭaymiyya draws another clear distinction between prophetic miracles and magic actions of false prophets and magicians. Magic of the latter only has an appearance of a miracle. On the contrary, miracles of prophets and messengers have little to do with magic despite speculations of their detractors [28].

Then, Ibn Ṭaymiyya compares miracles performed by the prophets of Abrahamic monotheism. We realize that in certain respects al-Mawardi places the Qur'an higher than Mūsā and Īsā's miracles. The author of "The Book of Prophecies" assumes a different position that allows him to overcome the weak point of al-Mawardi argument. "All mirages" that claimed the prophets be simultaneously equal and non-equal in relation to the performed miracles.

Ibn Ṭaymiyya takes the following statement as an initial point in his conception: "Miracle of any other prophet is a miracle for all prophets". In other words, if a prophet performed a miracle at Allāh's will, then other prophets perform the same sort of activity. In the words of Abū al-Kalīfī, all the three figures being prophets of the so-called Abrahamic monotheticism [26], were eliminated in the work Al-Baqi‘i al-Nubuwwa ("The Book of Prophecies") by a renowned Ibn Ṭaymiyya scholar Ahmad b. Ṭaymiyya [27]. Without claiming to give an exhaustive analysis of this point, Ibn Ṭaymiyya shows that all the above-mentioned prophecies of Abrahamic monotheism are allowed to perform a similar miracle. For instance, a miracle of resurrection was a distinctive feature of the prophets before Muhammad as well as of the prophetic mission of Muhammad himself [29]. In an analogous way Ibn Ṭaymiyya turns to the discussion of miraculous inimitability of the Qur'an from the prescriptive viewpoint of his conception of prophetic miracle.

The Qur'an as a sacred scripture is indeed immutable in many respects and any attempt to imitate it is condemned to failure. However, this statement refers to ordinary people and ordinary texts. It is inconsistent in relation to the prophets of Abrahamic monotheism that are also called "prophets of the Scripture" [30]. Being a sacred Scripture the Qur'an is not only unique, but this circumstance cannot impair the Muslims, since it is evident that the prophets of Abrahamic monotheism can be equally involved and actually were involved in performing miracles including that of the Sacred Scripture. According to Ibn Ṭaymiyya the Tawrāt, the Injīl and the Zabur constitute a miracle from the viewpoint of the Almighty and the Zabur with the miraculous status of these scriptures as compared to the Qur'a n can be questioned in terms of nāqīm, i.e., certain features of language constructions used. However, even in this case before making such conclusion about the Tawrāt, for example, one should consult with the connoisseurs of Hebrew (oḥh al-lugha al-ḥibrīyāt) and conduct considerable research. In other respects the abovementioned scriptures of the prophets without any doubt present a miracle. To fully convince his potential opponents Ibn Ṭaymiyya brings forward the last argument that hardly any Muslim would dare to call in question. These scriptures constitute a miracle already for the reason that at the will of the Almighty they predict Muhammad's prophetic journey before he started to perform his mission: "miracles performed by Mūsā, Īsā and other actually indicate Muhammad's prophecy as they help other prophets to notify Muhammad of his prophecy."

Final discussion leads Ibn Ṭaymiyya to an important conclusion that these facts make no sense, when we consider miracles performed by prophets of Abrahamic monotheism or "prophets of the Scripture". The author of "The Book of Prophecies" sums up his arguments in the following statement:

Our purpose here is not to show preference to one prophet among others (wafīl ba‘d al-ambīdā‘ ‘alā ba‘d ba‘d) but to emphasize that any of them can be performed by a unique ability to perform miracles, which serves as an evidence of their prophecy for reasonable people [31].

Ibn Ṭaymiyya was probably the most important figure in the group of theologians, who in the course of time created a theoretically valid and consistent Islamic theological conception of prophecy. The point is, in the light of this conception that for a long time educated Muslims have been interpreting numerous miraculous elements in the life of the Prophet Ibn Isḥāq — Ibn Ḥālid (6).
Archival materials indicate that the Qur'an was included in the personal libraries of such Russian Tsars as Ivan the Terrible (1530—1584), Peter the Great (1672—1725), and Catherine II (1729—1796). The fate of publications, translations, and rare manuscripts of the Qur'an was also bound up with the personal decisions of the supreme rulers of Russia. As in the East the Sacred Text have been widely used by the local powers for the purposes of both inner and foreign policies. The history of most important Qur'anic manuscripts can only prove this statement [3].

Recently there has been increased interest in the ancient manuscripts of the Qur'an and a particularly interesting part of them — the group of manuscripts called "the Qur'ans of 'Ulimān". This topic was actively discussed in Cairo during unprecedented meetings between European and Egyptian specialists organized by Professor Sergey Noya Noseda in 2006 and 2007. It was reflected in a recently published article by Professor Noya [2]. An article on the "Qur'ans of 'Ulimān" circled in Arabic Spain and Northern Africa is being prepared by Professor David James [3].

The manuscripts in question are among the most ancient. They are seriously damaged, and frequently damaged no less than those which were regularly removed from circulation in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH. In most cases, these copies made their way to special repositories in large mosques where they slowly decayed. They could also be "burned" with a special ritual [4]. However, the manuscripts we are discussing now were preserved. Why? Firstly, at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries AD, evidently the Qur'anic copies were preserved which corresponded to the jamā'ī canon adopted for that time [5], and secondly, they began to be seen as a symbol of supreme power equal to the khalīfa of the Prophet, and there is numerous evidence of this. Dr. David James has found a reference to the Qur'anic manuscript attributed to "Ulimān" which shows that it was last preserved around 870. All other references to it date from after 1150. While working on the "history of it" — how and why it came to Cordova — he found reference to another "Qur'ān of 'Ulimān" which belonged to Ibn al-Ḥumrān, the founder of the Kingdom of Granada and which he gave as a present to the Almohad sāliḥ. The Cordova manuscript was lost when the ship carrying it from Tunis to Morocco sank in the 14th century.

In 1243, the Egyptian sāliḥ Baybars sent the khalīfa of the Golden Horde Berke a letter of "accession to citizenship and subscription" [6]. Soon the Egyptian ambassadors brought presents to the Horde: clothes of honour, a throne incrusted with ebony, ivory and silver and the "Qur'ān of 'Ulimān". The book was bound in red satin embroidered with gold and placed in a case of dark red leather padded with silk. Additionally, a stand (lambā) for the Qur'an was sent, which like the throne was encrusted with ebony and ivory and silver [7]. It is not difficult to note that inscriptions were sent from Egypt to the Horde [8]. Surprisingly enough, in sources connected with the Golden Horde we do not find another line about this important relic and symbol of power. Today, however, it is obvious that the history of this manuscript did not end with the demise of the Golden Horde. The facts show that this copy continued to have the status of a symbol of power for several centuries to follow. Its history is linked with the name of Timur, and subsequently with the names of "religious masters" — famous mā'ṣūḥ Shaykh. But all this will be discussed in its turn.

For several years I was studying two Qur'anic MSS, which were venerated by the Muslims of Central Asia as "Qur'āns of 'Ulimān" [9]. The analysis of the historical sources shows that both MSS were preserved as the most valuable sacred relics and were transmitted inside the structure of Sufi brotherhoods. The history of the first one, so called "Samā'ānd khalīf Qur'ān" had been studied in detail, but only since early 15th century. Nobody ever has written a line on the history of the MS before this date. It is well known that for decades it was one of the most important relics belonging to the Naqībādīyya brotherhood. Existing traditions insist that its appearance in Mā'ṣūḥ al-Mā'ṣūḥ is connected with the name of Khāṭā'ī Ahrār (1404—1490) one of the most prominent religious and political leaders of the region of Timurid times. He was inconstantable authority. He brought up Timurid princes, was in friendly correspondence with such famous poets as Nawātī and Jāmī. Khāṭā'ī Ahrār was an influential political figure and one of the richest patrons of the Naqībādīyya order. The rise of Naqībādīyya influence both in Mā'ṣūḥ al-Mā'ṣūḥ and beyond its frontiers as well as
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