

## THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

ARIF ALIEV. IN SEARCH OF THE NATIVITY OF THE  
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From the time of the pre-Islamic "ignorance" (jahiliya) until  
the introduction of the Moslem calendar, the inhabitants of the  
Arabian Peninsula counted time from memorable days that  
reflected various significant events. The representatives of the  
Quraysh, the tribe that inhabited Mecca and its environs, to  
which the prophet Muhammad belonged, were no exception.  
During his lifetime, such events included, in particular:

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- the year of death of the ancestor Qusayy ibn Kilab (the first historically reliable person in the Quraysh genealogy),
  - "year of the elephant",
  - al-Fijar war period,
  - the year of the rebuilding of the Meccan temple of Kaaba.

Later dating, which takes the date of the migration (Hijra(h) of the first Moslems from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) in 622 as the beginning of the counting of years, was probably carried out by lunar months (12 lunar months were 354 days) without correction inserts prohibited in the Quran. However, it is not known exactly how the years were counted in the time of jahiliya. This circumstance allows modern orientalist historians to assert that almost none of the events in the Arabian history can be accurately dated before the Hijra.

There is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that the real date of the birth of Muhammad was not known even to his relatives and associates. This ignorance was most pronounced in the third year of the reign of the second righteous Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab (634-644), when he decided to introduce the Moslem calendar.

The impetus for this was the appeal he received in 637 from the commander, Governor of Basra Abu Musa al-Ashari, which stated that there were no dates in letters and documents. The Caliph realized that the lack of a unified chronology was confusing not only the management of troops in the midst of a war with Byzantium and Sasanian Iran, but was also an obstacle to the development of a young Moslem state. He gathered the companions of the Prophet and other knowledgeable people and asked their advice on this matter. Among them was a captured Shah Governor (Satrap) of the province of Khuzestan from the Sassanid family named Hurmuzan, Hurmuzan advised 'Umar about the order of chronology adopted by Byzantines and Persians.

Some of those present agreed with the suggestion of Khurmuzan not to invent anything and to keep track of the years

according to the chronology adopted either in Byzantium or in Sasanian Iran. In these countries, the date of the beginning of the reign of Seleucus I Nicator (the era of the Seleucids, or the era of Alexander) and the day of the accession of the next shahinshah (such as Yazdigerd III, crowned at the turn of 632 and 633) were taken as the point of chronological reference, respectively. However, 'Umar rejected these considerations, as he was inclined to introduce a "proper" Moslem calendar, different from that followed by the Gentiles, the Christian Byzantines, and the Zoroastrian Persians.

The Caliph rightly believed that the beginning date of the Moslem era would be more appropriate to coincide with some epochal event associated either with the life of the Prophet or with the birth of Islam. At the same time, Umar considered it unacceptable to keep track of the time since the death of Muhammad, although it was well known (only five years have passed since the death of the Prophet): it is not appropriate to make the day of mourning for the deceased Prophet of Islam a holiday. The fact that at this time Iran practiced the counting of years from the beginning of the reign of Yazdigerd III, which happened to coincide with the year of the death of the Prophet of Islam (632), also played a role.

There was no objection to the decision to start calculating the Moslem calendar from the day when the first Quranic revelation was sent to Muhammad. It was known that this event took place at night near Mecca in a cave on mount Hira. This night, called the "night of Predestination / Power," the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad for the first time and called him to preach a new religion.

The trouble was that the exact date of this event remained unknown. Later, when compiling the first biographies of the prophet Muhammad, most Moslem historiographers agreed that his first meeting with Gabriel took place on the 17th of Ramadan, 920 ad, i.e. in 610 ad, in the fortieth year of the Prophet's life. But

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the Caliph 'Umar could not have known this, for he was no longer alive.

The ideal option was to start the Moslem era from the day or at least the year of the birth of the Prophet of Islam. But then there was a problem, which was summed up in the book "Monuments of past generations" by the famous encyclopedist from Khorezm Abu Raihan Muhammad al-Biruni (973-1048): '...About the time of [Muhammad's] birth and his speech as a Prophet," he wrote, "there is such a disagreement that does not allow us to put [these events] as the basis of the matter where contradictions should not exist" (2, p.41-42). What was known for certain was that the future Prophet of Islam was born during the long reign of the shahinshah of Sasanian Iran, Khosrow I Anushirvan (531-579), whose name was pronounced by the Arabs as Husri or Kisra.

And what should 'Umar do in this situation, even though centuries later, when numerous authoritative biographies of the prophet were written, there was still no complete clarity about the date of His birth? The Caliph's entourage included perhaps the only person who could attest to the Prophet's date of birth. Such was Hakim Ibn Khizam, the nephew of Khadija, the first wife of Muhammad, who died in 670 or 674 and lived, according to his own words, 120 years. However, by the end of the 630s, he was already a very old man and did not remember exactly when the significant event in the history of Islam occurred. As noted by the famous Russian orientalist O. G. Bolshakov, "... it is difficult to believe that the date of birth of one of the numerous, inconspicuous babies is remembered" (3, p. 64). Here we can add that in those years, the Arabs did not have a tradition to remember birthdays. And the person telling about his age could answer: "I was born after the elephant's March" or "during the reconstruction of Ka'by," etc.

As a result, Caliph 'Umar decided to start the Moslem reckoning with the Hijra - the day of the resettlement of Moslems from Mecca to Medina. "The clearest and most distant date,"

wrote al-Biruni, "was hijrah and [the Prophet's] arrival in Medina. This happened on Monday, when eight nights of the month of Rabi the first passed and the beginning of the year hit Thursday. 'Umar stopped on this era and began to count from it what he needed ..." (2, p. 41). It should be clarified here that Muhammad, according to such estimates, arrived in the vicinity of Yasrib on September 20, 622, the eighth of the third month of the rabbi 'I Rabi the first. Along with this, other dates were also called: the second and twelfth numbers of Rabbi 'I (2, p. 374; 5, p. 278; 10, p. 302; 16, p. 366; 17, p. 281). However, this was not so important, since the beginning of the first Moslem New Year Umar determined the first day of the month of muharram with which the Arabs began the countdown to the months (July 16, 622). The new chronology began to be applied since 658.

Some Moslem scholars, such as the historian Abu Jafar Muhammad al-Tabari (838 / 9-923) and the historian and translator Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Djabir al-Baladhuri (circa 820-893), often dated the events of Arabian history according to the account of the years adopted in Sassanid Iran. With such synchronization, noted O.G. Bolshakov, it turned out that the birth of Muhammad was most likely "in the 40th or 42nd year of the reign of Khosrow I Anushirvan i.e. in 570-573 years." (3, p. 236). This message is confirmed by the information provided by al-Biruni, collecting contradictory data from the stories about the life of Muhammad: "The Prophet is reported to have been born on the night of Monday of the second, but they also say on the eighth and thirteenth of the month of Rabbi the first. Then they say that it was in the fortieth year of the reign of Khosrau I Anushirvan, but they also say: "in the forty-second," and some say in the forty-third. In accordance with this disagreement, there is a discrepancy regarding the life expectancy of the [Prophet]" (2, p. 42)

According to the opinion the great Central Asian scientist of the 9th century - mathematician, astronomer, geographer and historian Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi expressed in the

“Book of History,” to which al-Biruni refers and stands in solidarity, Muhammad was born “on Monday night 17 Day-Maha in the forty-second year of the reign of Anushirvan or 20 Nisan of the year 882 of the era of Alexander ...” (2, p. 138). The famous medieval historian Ismail ibn Umar al-Busri better known as Ibn Kathir (1301-1373) believed that Muhammad, “most likely,” was born on Monday the ninth of the month of Rabbi I (April 571) (4, p. 393).

His equally well-known predecessor, Abu-l-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad, more commonly referred to as Ibn al-Athir (1160-1233), wrote in the work *Al-Kamil fi-t-tarikh* (The Complete book on the history) that Muhammad was born 7 years and 8 months before the death of Khosrov Anushirvan, i.e. in 571/72 (7, p. VI). However, all this data is most likely the result of simple countdowns from the date of the Prophet's death, and not a historical fact. For example, al-Khwarizmi believed that the Prophet died, having lived for 62 years, 9 months and 9 days (2, p. 141).

These data on the age of Muhammad were not the only ones. In particular, the famous collector and interpreter of hadiths (muhaddith) Abu Isa Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi (824-883, 888 or 892) in his book “Book of the noble features of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah,” gave other opinions expressed by the Companions of the Prophet. So the secretary (katib) of Muhammad, Muawiya\_ibn\_Abi\_Sufyan (between 594 and 605-680), who later became the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, believed that the Prophet was 63 years old at the time of his death. Muhammad's cousin, Abdallah ibn al-Abbas (619-686 / 87), said that the messenger of Allah died at the age of 63 or 65 years. The servant of Muhammad, Anas ibn Malik (circa 612-709 / 710 or 711 / 712), claimed that he passed away when he was 60, when “there were no more than twenty gray hairs on his head and beard” (15, p. 6, 240-242).

The inconsistency of Moslem historiography regarding the dates of the early history of Islam enabled Western Orientalists to

conclude that the entire history of Islam, including the biography of Muhammad, was composed (in detail) two to three centuries after the death of the Prophet. And at the same time, many of the Moslem authors arbitrarily interpreted the events of the late jahiliya and the first centuries of Islam and their chronology.

What all the experts agree on is that in the history of Arabia there was one event that turned out to be closely related to the time of the birth of Muhammad. We are talking about a failed attempt to capture Mecca, undertaken by an army equipped with war elephants led by the ruler of Khimyar (South Arabia) Abraha (Abraham) al-Ashram.

What caused the interest of historiographers, especially Moslem ones, in this event? Firstly, the ups and downs of the campaign of "people with an elephant" to Mecca made such a great impression on the Meccans that since this event - Am al-Fil - "the year of the elephant," they began to reckon time. Secondly, in Islamic literature, for a long time, starting from the eighth century, the provision according to which the birth of the Prophet Muhammad occurred during the campaign of Abraham to Mecca (which contradicts the method of counting down from the death of the Prophet in determining the date of his birth) has been canonized. And this significant event in many Moslem sources dates back to 570 according to the Gregorian calendar. Thirdly, the plot of the ill-starred Himyar ruler and his army was subsequently reflected in the Quran, in the chapter that is called "The Elephant" (105: 1-4).

Information about the campaign of Abraha is based on real events and has its own background. At the end of V century AD South Arabia was embroiled in a struggle for supremacy on trade routes from India and China, which unfolded between two great powers - Byzantium and Sassanid Iran. The pillar of Constantinople in the region was Christian Abyssinia (Ethiopia), on the territory of which there was a powerful Axumite state, and the ally of the Sasanian empire that from 115 BC The Himyar kingdom (Himyar) existed. It was located on the lands of

modern Yemen. One of the rulers of Himyara, Yusuf Ashar Dhu Nuwas (517-525), adopted Judaism under the name Joseph and launched the persecution of Christians, thereby causing the invasion of Yemeni Abyssinian troops. As a result, all of South Arabia for almost 50 years (525-572) came under the rule of immigrants from Ethiopia.

Around 533, the Ethiopian soldiers stationed in Yemen rebelled, overthrew the viceroy of the Aksumite king (negus), and enthroned one of their commanders, Abraha al-Ashram. Soon, the new ruler refused to pay tribute to the negus and, having defeated the large punitive army sent against him from Ethiopia, became the sovereign ruler of South Arabia. Unlike the inhabitants of Aksum, professing monophysite Christianity, Abraha is said to adhere to Orthodoxy (14, p. 427), which arose in 395 as a result of the division of the Roman Empire into Western and Eastern. This could not but lead to the establishment of strong ties of Himyara with Byzantium. During the years of his reign (535 - no later than 570), he at the head of the troops, reinforced by specially trained fighting elephants, repeatedly made military campaigns in Central Arabia.

What goals did Abraha pursue with his campaigns to the north? First of all, he sought to conquer the settled and nomadic tribes of the peninsula, as well as subjugate the trading rivals of the Himyarites - representatives of the Kuraish tribe who inhabited Mecca and its environs. According to the Byzantine writer and historian Procopius Caesarensis *is lat.* (circa 500 - after 565), the intentions of Abraha were different: revenge for the desecration of the Christian church (13, p. 281).

Based on data from South Arabian sources, Professor N.V. Pigulevskaya (1894-1970) dated one of these campaigns "circa 545" (11, p. 343). And in the Himyarite inscription Ry 506 it is said that "the king Abraha ... carved these lines when he made the fourth raid ..." and these lines are dated 547 (Quoted from: 12, p. 32). Abu-l-Nadr Muhammad ibn Saib al-Kalbi (? - 763), a historian and scholar of Islamic doctrine, believed that the



prophet Muhammad was born 23 years after this date of the "elephant campaign," i.e. in 570. An opinion was also expressed that this campaign was preceded by the "elephant campaign," which took place around 563 (9, p. 82-84; ex. cm: 3, p. 234). Even at-Tabari indicated 563 as one of the versions of the year of birth of the Prophet. In the work "The History of Messengers and Kings," he noted that there is an opinion that Muhammad was born in the ninth year of the reign of Amr ibn al-Mundhir III (554-569), head of the kingdom of Lakhmid (12, p. 33).

The reports of later Moslem sources preserved relatively detailed information about the last trip of Abraha to Mecca, and the reason that caused it seemed quite prosaic. This is how it is presented in the work *Kitab Al-Asnam* (The Book of Idols) by a great connoisseur of the genealogies and traditions of the Arab tribes Abu-l-Mundhir Hisham ibn Muhammad Al-Kalbi. (737-819 / 20 or 821 / 22)

In the city of Sana'a, Abraha al-Ashram built in the city of Sana'a, a church of marble and gilded wood and wrote to the Negus of Axum: "I built a church for you, no one has ever built anything like it. And I will not leave the Arabs [in piece] until I turn their pilgrimage away from the sanctuary (Ka'ba Temple. - A.A.) ... "Having learned about this, one of the leaders of the Arabian tribe Kinana Kinana sent two of his relatives to Sana'a on an assignment to defile the church by defecating. They did so. When Abracha found out about this, he became angry and asked: "Who dared to do this?" He was answered: "One of the worshipers of Ka'ba." And he got angry and marched out with an elephant and Ethiopians (6, p. 32).

The subsequent course of events is not clear in detail and overgrown with legends. According to a later Moslem interpretation, Abraha was supposedly riding ahead of the troops on an elephant named Mahmoud. But when the elephant entered Mecca, the population of which prudently took refuge in the mountains surrounding the city, he did not want to go any further and, moreover, knelt before Ka'ba.

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The prominent Meccans who remained in the city, led by Muhammad's grandfather Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, were on the point of entering into negotiations with the enemy, but the Almighty intervened. He sent to the invaders a flock of Ababil birds and each of them carried in its beak a brick of burnt clay (Quran, 105: 3-4). And on each of them there was written the name of the warrior on whose head it was to be thrown. As a result, most of the troops died, and the survivors fled, but along the way almost all were killed by the Meccans. Abraha himself, seriously ill, barely reached Sana'a, where he soon died. So the legend says, but, according to more rational assumptions, it was the epidemic of smallpox that became the real reason for stopping the last campaign of Abraha (8, p. 653).

Concluding the review of stories related to the campaigns of Abraha, it can be stated that dating of the "campaign of the elephant," still causing heated debate among oriental historians, remains problematic. There is objective information based on independent written sources that allows us to assert that this campaign was undertaken either before 570 or was carried out by the son of Abraha, Yaksum Yaksum (See, e.g., 3, p. 56-57; 9, p. 61-86; 12, p. 28-35). As a result, it becomes clear that the linkage of the last of Abraha's campaigns to the time of the birth of Muhammad does not hold water, since it is known that this Himyar ruler died before 570. The fact that Abraha most likely used elephants in all of his military campaigns also contributes to the existing conflicting opinions.

Nevertheless, the attachment the date of birth of Muhammad' to the campaign against Mecca of the troops with the elephant, whoever led them, Abraha al-Ashram or his successors, is not much contrary to the truth. Perhaps, the Meccans who heard about the numerous raids of Abraha to the north also connected with his name the last campaign of the Himyarites. Historians can only follow the traditional dating of the birth of the future Prophet of Islam 570-572, since otherwise not only the system of chronology adopted in Moslem primary

sources, but also the chronology of all Moslem history will be violated. In fact, it's not inconvenient for anyone to know that the baby Jesus could not have been born in the year of his own Christmas, because, according to the Gospel of Matthew, "he was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod" (Matthew 2: 1) (1, p. 1012). And we know that King Herod I the Great ruled in Judea from 37 BC right up to his death in 4 BC. The accuracy of the evangelist is confirmed by the fact that the general census of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, which forced the carpenter Joseph and his pregnant wife Maria to go "register" from the Galilean Nazareth to the Jewish Bethlehem, was initiated by the emperor of Rome Augustus (27 BC - 14 BC) in the same 4 BC.

To date, the entire Moslem historiography of the events that occurred during the Prophet's life is based on the four most frequently mentioned reference points: the "year of the elephant" ( $\approx$  570, the birth of Muhammad), the year of the restructuring of the Ka'ba (605), the beginning of the preaching of Islam (610) and hijrah (622).

In other words, taking into account the inevitable inaccuracies, all the data of Moslem authors are built in a single coordinate system: 570 - 605 - 610 - 622. O.G. Bolshakov noted that "...information about the early period of the life and work of Muhammad, is very unreliable. But not because it is falsified. The overwhelming majority of the data (excluding stories of miracles) are reliable to the extent that any eyewitness accounts are reliable" (3, p. 62). Therefore, the discrepancy in dates is actually a different view of the dating of an event.

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