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# The Life of Muhammad Before Prophetic Call in The Sirah of Ibn Ishaq

İbn İshak'ın Sîre'si Özelinde  
Hz. Muhammed'in Risalet Öncesi Hayatı

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### Abstract

The Prophet Muhammad, who is considered one of the most influential people in the history of humanity, is shown as an 'ideal example' for Muslims in the Qur'an. This notion has been created a historical consciousness about the importance of transferring the life of the Prophet to the next generations. Accordingly, Muslim historians had written books containing the biography of the Prophet which is called *Sirah* or *Maghazî*. In this context, it should be stated that the *Sirah* is the narrative biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Among the *Sirah* books, it is accepted that Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah* of the Prophet had no serious rival and outshone the fame of all his predecessors and contemporaries by his work. For this reason, it is an undeniable fact that it is important to understand the life of the Prophet Muhammad from Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah*. In the light of this thought, the main reference of our article will be this account. The aim of this article is to examine the basic paradigm that shaped the *Sirah* writing with reference to Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah* -which is the earliest biography of the Prophet that we have today- and to identify the earliest narrations about Muhammad's pre-prophetic life in his *Sirah*.

**Keywords:** Sirah, Prophet Muhammad (saw), Ibn Ishaq, Jahiliyyah, Makkah

### Öz

İnsanlık tarihinin en etkin insanlarından biri olarak kabul edilen Hz. Muhammed, Kur'an'da Müslümanlar için 'ideal örnek' olarak gösterilmiştir. Buna bağlı olarak Müslümanlar da Hz. Muhammed'in yaşamını gelecek kuşaklara aktarmanın önemine inanmış ve bu bağlamda siyer veya meğazi olarak adlandırılan Hz. Muhammed'in yaşam öyküsünü içeren eserler oluşturmuşlardır. Müslüman tarih yazıcılığının en eski formu olan haber/rivayet formunda oluşturulan siyer kitapları arasında en erken döneme ait olan ve günümüze ulaşan İbn İshak'ın eserinin ciddi bir rakibinin olmadığı, kendinden önce ve çağdaşları tarafından yazılmış bütün çalışmaların şöhretini gölgede bıraktığı düşüncesi genel kabul görmektedir. Bu nedenle Hz. Muhammed'in hayatını İbn İshak'ın *Sire*'sinden tespit etmenin önemi yadsınamaz bir gerçekliktir. Bu düşüncenin ışığında makalemizin temel referansını İbn İshak'ın *Sire*'si oluşturacaktır. Amacımız, erken dönem siyer yazımını şekillendiren temel paradigmayı bugün elimizde olan en eski biyografi olarak İbn İshak'ın *Siyer*'inden hareketle irdelemek ve Hz. Muhammed'in peygamberlik öncesi yaşamıyla ilgili en erken rivayetleri tespit etmek olacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyer, Hz. Muhammed (sav), İbn İshak, Câhiliye, Mekke

## Introduction

The classical *Sirah* was a kind of biography of the Prophet and concentrated on his life as a narrative form. Although the *Sirah* mainly used isnād (the chain of transmitters) and matn (the text like the Hadith) parts, the works of *Sirah* literature presents the individual narratives/reports in chronological order of the events to which they refer. In addition to this, the narrative form of *Sirah* was a story or a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, told by author with chronological order. The *Sirah* had a religious, moral and educational dimensions as well. For this reason, they prioritized the normative dimension rather than the historical reality of events and facts.<sup>[1]</sup>

The earliest surviving *Sirah* is dedicated to Ibn Ishaq and was written about 100 years later after the Prophet's death. Ibn Ishaq was born in al-Madinah about 704 C.E.. His grandfather Yasār, who had been held as a prisoner by the Persian emperor, was captured by the Muslims at the Battle of 'Ayn al-Tamr in Iraq in 633 and sent to al-Madinah as a slave. He accepted Islam. His son Ishaq and Mūsā became scholars with special expertise in the narratives about the Prophet and the early history of Islam. In 737, he went to Alexandria to study and then returned to al-Madinah but after a year or two left the city and thought for several years in a number of places, including al-Kufah, al-Basrah, an al-Rayy, before settling in Baghdad. Ibn Ishaq died there in 767 or 768. In spite of some biographies of the Prophet exist prior to Ibn Ishaq, his *Sirah* is accepted has no rival and outshone the fame of all his predecessors and contemporaries. He collected oral traditions that shaped the basis of an important biography of the Prophet.<sup>[2]</sup>

The original work of Ibn Ishaq, which is known in the literature *al-Mubtada' wa al-Ba'th wa al-Maghāzī* or shortly the *Sirah*, is the early biography has reached today as a whole, though with considerable absent parts.<sup>[3]</sup> An edited copy or recension of his work by his student Ziyād al-Bakka 'i (d.799), which was further edited by Ibn Hisham (d.833) is known today as *al-Sirah al-Nabawīyyah*. Although Ibn Hisham's edition wholly survived, he abbreviated, annotated, and sometimes altered the text of Ibn Ishaq. In his words; 'things are embarrassing to discuss; issues which would upset some people; and such reports as al-Bakkā'i told me he could not be regarded as reliable were not included.'<sup>[4]</sup>

[1] Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries*, New York: Doubleday, 2009, pp.58-64.

[2] Josef Horowitz, *The Earliest Biographies of The Prophet and Their Authors*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 2002, pp.74-79; W.Montgomery Watt, 'Translator's Foreword', In *The History of Tabarī*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988, vol.6, p.xii.

[3] Horowitz, p.75.

[4] Ibn Hisham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawīyyah*, ed. licenneti tahkiki'l-turās bimüesseti'l-huda li tahkiki'l-turās, Kahire, 1999, I, p.7.

In this context, we can be sure that Ibn Hisham seems to be very careful to distinguish what comes from Ibn Ishaq and what he has added himself.<sup>[5]</sup>

Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah* also preserved in the recension of his student Yunus b. Bukair (d.815). This incomplete original version was first published by M. Hamidullah in 1976. The work begins with the genealogy of the Prophet Muhammad and ends with the Prophet Muhammad's Ascension into Heaven.<sup>[6]</sup>

Although Ibn Hisham did not include the beginning part of Ibn Ishaq's work which is called *al-Mubtada* and skipped all the intervening information by starting with Abraham, the ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad, in this section Ibn Ishaq began with creation and gives information about the prophets from Adam and ended the Prophet Muhammad as a 'the seal of the Prophets'. Also in this part Ibn Ishaq gives traditions from the pre-Islamic era before the life of the Prophet.

The method of giving information about creation and the history of the prophets is an expression of seeing the process of revelation as the main paradigm that shapes the design of his *Sirah*. In this regard, it could be said that Ibn Ishaq's main idea and his historical settings in his book, shows his paradigm of *Sirah* which is based on God's revelation and to accept Muhammad as the last prophet in the direct of line of the Messengers of God.<sup>[7]</sup>

Although Ibn Ishaq does not limit himself in taking narrations, he arranges, abbreviates, and expands the narrations according to his own understanding. It is worthy to note that when Ibn Ishaq gives the narratives frequently precedes a statement is *za'ama* or *za'amu* (he/they alleged). This word carries a hint that the narration may not be true. Besides he uses a frequent note *Allâhu a'lam* which means only God knows/God knows best, whether a particular statement is true or not. Actually, when Ibn Ishaq records two conflicting narrations and is unable to say which is correct, he uses this phrase. Another indication of reserve if not scepticism underlies the expression *fî mâ dhukira lî* and an expression of similar import is *fî mâ balaghanî* which means it has reached me. Very rarely Ibn Ishaq gives his own comment on the narrations he records apart from the mental reservation implied in these terms.<sup>[8]</sup>

[5] James Robson, 'Ibn Ishaq's Use of the Isnad', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 38 (2):449-465 (1956), p.451.

[6] Ibn Ishaq, *Sîretu İbn İshak el-Musemma bi kitabi'l-mubtada ve'l-meb'as ve'l-meğazi*, ed. Muhammed Hamidullah.

[7] See, Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.65; Fred M. Donner, *Narrative of Islamic Origins The Beginings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1998, pp.147-151.

[8] A. Guillaume, 'Introduction', in Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad A Translation of Ishâq's Sirat Rasûl Allâh With Introduction and Notes*, by A. Guillaume, London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.xix-xxi.

Ibn Ishaq does not always use isnād. When he uses isnād, he gives it in different ways.

‘Sometimes being content to quote his immediate authority, sometimes going a little further back, and sometimes going right back to a Companion of the Prophet, or to the Prophet himself. He commonly begins his treatment of some incident by a general statement of what happened without any authority being quoted, but this is merely his method of introducing the subject, for he usually goes on to give isnāds of various kinds for details of the incident, or to present different statements of what happened.’<sup>[9]</sup>

#### A. The life of Muhammad Before Prophetic Call

We may now turn the life of Prophet Muhammad before his prophetic call according to Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirah*.

##### 1. Pure Descent and the Annunciation of the Coming Prophet

In his *Sirah*, Ibn Ishaq begins by saying that ‘this is the book of the biography of the apostle of God’ and then he gives the lineage of the Messenger of God as a ‘Muhammad’s pure descent from Adam. So he retained a genealogy of the Prophet Muhammad back to Adam in the chronological order. It runs as follows:

Muhammad was the son of Abdullah, b. Abdu’l-Muttalib (whose name was Shayba, b. Hashim (whose name was Amr), b. Abdu Manaf (whose name was al-Mughira), b. Qusayy (whose name was Zayd), b. Kilāb, b. Murra, b. Ka’b, b. Lu’ayy, b. Ghalib, b. Fihr, b. Malik, b. al-Nadr, b. Kinana, b. Khuzayma, b. Mudrika (whose name was ‘Amir), b. Ilyas, b. Mudar, b. Nizār, b. Ma’add, b. Adnan, b. Udd (or Udad), b. Muqawwam, b. Nahur, b. Tayrah, b. Ya’rub, b. Yashjub, b. Nābit, b. Isma’il, b. Ibrahim, the friend of the Compassionate, b. Tāriḥ (who is Azar), b. Nahur, b. Sarugh, b. Rāu, b. Falikh, b. Aybar, b. Shalikh, b. Arfakhshadh, b. Sām, b. Nūh, b. Lamk, b. Mattushalakh, b. Aknuhkh, who is the prophet Idris according to what the alleged, but God knows best (he was the first of the sons of Adam to whom prophecy and writing with a pen were given), b. Yard, b. Mahlī, b. Qaynan, b. Yānish, b. Shith, b. Adam.<sup>[10]</sup>

Then he passed to the Arab descendants of Ishmael through Adnan, with a reference to the line through Qahtan. In the related section dealing with Prophet Muhammad’s ancestry, Ibn Ishaq introduces some incidents from South Arabian history which have little relevance to the Prophet’s ancestors.<sup>[11]</sup>

[9] Look at for details, Robson, pp.451-465; see also, Şaban Öz, İlk Siyer Kaynakları ve Müellifleri, İstanbul: İsar Yayınları, 2008, pp.274-280.

[10] Ibn Ishâq, pp.1-2; Ibn Hisham, I, p.6; see also, Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad A Translation of Ishâq’s Sirat Rasûl Allâh With Introduction and Notes*, by A.Guillaume, London New York Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.3.

[11] Look at for details, Ibn Hishâm, I, pp.6-72, see also, Watt, vol.6, p.xiii, xxvi.

In the purified lineage of the *Sirah*, the close ancestor is Abd al-Muttalib, the grandfather of Muhammad. He is presented as the figure who defends the Ka'ba against Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of Yaman who planned to destroy the Ka'ba and reopens the Zamzam Well, which is attributed to holiness and has been closed for many years.

The narration, which deals with the event of Elephant, Ibn Ishaq states that when Abraha decided to destroy the Ka'ba and has been reached Mecca with the elephant named Mahmûd, Abd al-Muttalib was the leading shaykh of Quraysh. When Abraha sent to him the message that he had not come to fight them, but only to destroy the Ka'ba, Abd al-Muttalib's reply to him includes an interesting point of view. He said: 'God knows that we do not wish to fight him for we have not the power to do so. This place is the sanctuary of Allah and the temple of His friend Abraham. If Allah defends it against him, it already belongs to Him; if Allah lets him to go further, we cannot defend it!'

The story about the event, also provides an explanation for the end of Abraha's army. To wit, when the battle has been started, God sent upon them birds from the sea like swallows and starlings; each bird carried three stones, like peas and lentils, one in its beak and two between its claws. Everyone who was hit died but not all were hit. They withdraw from fighting and go back by the way they came.<sup>[12]</sup>

Ibn Ishaq further adds that when God sent Muhammad, He specially recounted to the Quraysh his goodness and favour in turning back the Abyssinians in order to preserve their state and permanence. Then Ibn Ishaq gives the Quranic verses:

*'Do you not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did he not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them (like) cropped stubble.'*<sup>[13]</sup>

Once again, Ibn Ishaq also emphasizes a second example from the Qur'an that the Quraysh are protected by Allah.

*'(He did this) to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.'*<sup>[14]</sup>

In this context Ibn Ishaq produces a significant paradigm that God saved the Quraysh from the danger and provided them with food even before the Prophetic call.

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[12] See details the Elephant event, Ibn Ishaq, pp.38-42; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.31-38; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.21-27.

[13] The Qur'an, 105:1-5. *The Qur'an*, A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

[14] The Qur'an, 106:1-4.

As regards the issue of the reopening the Zamzam Well, narrations reintroduce that Abd al-Muttalib was an important figure in that society. In the narrative, the Zamzam was the well of Ishmael the son of Abraham where God gave him water when he was thirsty, as a little child. When his mother went to seek water for him and could not find it, so she went up to al-Safa praying to God for this, then she went to al-Marwa and did the same. God sent Gabriel, who hollowed out a place in the earth with his heel where water appeared. When her mother heard the cries of wild which terrified her on his account, and she came hurrying towards him and found him drinking the water with his hand and she made him a small hole.<sup>[15]</sup>

The narrative pointed out that the task of reopening the Zamzam Well, which has been closed for many years since the rule of the Ishmailis and the Jurhums is given to Abd al-Muttalib. In the narration, the process of reopening the Zamzam is described that when Abd al-Muttalib was sleeping in the hijr, he was ordered in a vision to dig the Zamzam. Then he followed his dream and began to dig and found the well. It is therefore Abd al-Muttalib wants to make the well his own, but the rest tribes of Quraysh claim that the well belongs to the common ancestor Ishmael and they have their own rights in the well. Debate goes on and finally they agreed to have get a judicial decision in the matter. The chosen arbitrator was the soothsayer of one of the prominent families in Damascus. Abd al-Muttalib and a group of members of different branches of Quraysh set out to consult the arbitrator. The group is left alone with the danger of thirst on the way. On running out for water, Abd al-Muttalib went to his beast and mounted her and when she got up from her knees a flow of fresh water broke from beneath her feet. Then Abd al-Muttalib and his companies invited the Quraysh to come to the water which God had given them and to drink freely. The Quraysh tribes, who witnessed the extraordinary situation, gave up their claim of partnership on the well and returned without going to the soothsayer.<sup>[16]</sup>

The phenomenon of fresh water broke out from beneath of feet Abd al-Muttalib's beast during the journey to Damascus shows a significant similarity with the first narrative of about the Zamzam. In both narratives, Ishmael and Abd al-Muttalib appear to be supported by miracles which sent by Allah. It seems that the theme of Zamzam combined with Ishmael and Abd al-Muttalib in a similar narrative and comprise elements of extraordinariness.

Apart from the already mentioned narratives, there is another narrative in which Abd al-Muttalib vow to sacrifice his son. According to this narration; when

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[15] Ibn Hisham, I, p.74; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.45.

[16] Ibn Ishaq, pp.2-4; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.92-93; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.62-63.



Abd al-Muttalib was digging the Zamzam, he vowed that if he should have ten sons to grow up and protect him, he would sacrifice one of them to God at the Ka'ba. Afterwards when he had ten sons who could protect him he gathered them together and told them about his vow and called on them to keep faith with God. They agreed to obey him and asked what they were to do. He said that each one of them must get an arrow, write his name on it, and bring it to him: this they did, and he took them before Hubal in the middle of the Ka'ba. The youngest among the children of Abd al-Muttalib and his favourite child is Abdullah, the father of the Messenger of Allah. Abd al-Muttalib prays that the arrow won't go up to him, but the arrow hits Abdullah. Abd al-Muttalib brings him in front of two idols, Isaf and Naila, with whom Quraysh cut their sacrifices.

However, the Quraysh strongly oppose this. They base their opposition on the idea that the sacrifice of human could turn into a tradition and this could weaken the human race. As a result, Abdullah is saved from being sacrificed by the suggestion of a female sorcerer. The salvation of Abdullah, who was saved by the diet of camels, takes place with a hundred camels.<sup>[17]</sup>

It is noteworthy that when Ibn Ishaq prefaced above narration, he starts with the phrase that 'it is alleged, and God knows the truth'. This statement it carries with it more than a hint that the statement may not be true, though on the other hand it may be sound.<sup>[18]</sup> Although Ibn Ishaq expressed a reservation about the historical reality on the narration, it seems in the course of that time this kind of narrations arose among the people. Could it be considered that the story of Abraham's dream in sacrificing his son,<sup>[19]</sup> may have been implying that a sort of adaptation to this phenomena? What makes this narrative significance is; the circulation of such narrations among the people could serve us to understand the way of thinking in the course of their time.

However, on the one hand there is a holy image about Abd al-Muttalib in the narrations, on the other hand, his respect to the idols and organizing his life according to arrows which Qur'an vehemently rejects<sup>[20]</sup>, brings interesting connotations. These expressions, which seem contradictory to each other, are suitable to be understood as an impression of the existence of different forms of understanding and thought in the historical context of that period.

In the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq records some of narrations about his father Abdullah. In these traditions, Abdullah is elevated to a special position by who those witnessed a white blaze between his eyes.<sup>[21]</sup>

[17] Ibn Ishaq, pp.10-18; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.97-100; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.66-68.

[18] Guillaume, p.xix.

[19] al-Saffat,37:102.

[20] See al-Zumar,39:38;al-Zukhruf,43:87;al-Ma'ida, 5:3,90.

[21] Ibn Ishaq, pp.19-21; Ibn Hisham, I, p.101.

The Prophet Muhammad's mother Āmina, the daughter of Wahb b. 'Abdu Manāf b Zuhra who was the leading man of B. Zuhra in birth and honour, also described as being one of the most excellent women among the Quraysh in birth and position in that time. Under the idea of attributing a pure descent of the Prophet, Ibn Ishaq with the accompaniment of all these narratives, concludes that the Prophet Muhammad was the noblest of his people in birth and the greatest in honour both on his father and his mother's side.<sup>[22]</sup> Apart from the ancestors of the Prophet, the theme of the emergence of the Muhammad as a prophet also takes a large place in the narratives of Ibn Ishaq. The annunciation of the coming Prophet plays a special role in the pre-Islamic Arabian narratives.

One specific narration belongs to Rabī'a b. Nasr, king of the Yaman. According to narration the King had a vision which terrified him. So he summoned every soothsayer, sorcerer and astrologer in his kingdom. The soothsayer Satīh, who interprets the dream, says that Yaman will be occupied by the Abyssinians, that Iram, son of Dhu Yazan will end this occupation, but after that a pure prophet to whom revelation came from on high would bring it to an end. This person would be a man of the sons of Ghālib . Fihir b. Mālik, b. al-Nadr. The king also asked his dreams interpretation to another soothsayer who is called Shiqq. Shiqq's interpretation was very close with the other.<sup>[23]</sup>

Other narration about Yaman history presents the Jews as the source of the coming of Muhammad as a prophet. Ibn Ishaq relates that a Yamani ruler who called Tubān/Tibān As'ad Abū Karib raided the Hijaz but was prevented from attacking Medina by a pair of Medinan rabbis of Qurayza who were able to tell him about the future emigration of Muhammad to that town.<sup>[24]</sup> There is another narrative about the annunciation of the prophet which is attributed to sister of Waraqa b. Naufel. She had heard from his brother Waraqa b. Naufel, who had been a Christian and studied the scriptures, that a prophet would arise among this people.<sup>[25]</sup>

It seems that kind of narratives which deal with the annunciation or waiting a prophet could have the link with their knowledge which is comes from the holy scriptures of the Jews and the Christians. Therefore, it can be said that they are designed with in going back to scripture literature and adapted the idea for coming the Prophet. It may be concluded that most of these kind

[22] Ibn Hisham, I, p.101; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.68-69.

[23] Ibn Hisham, I, pp.12-15; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.4-6.

[24] Ibn Ishaq, pp.29-30; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.16-17; see also Uri Rubin, *The Eye of Beholder The Life of Muhammad As Viewed By The Early Muslims A Textual Analysis*, Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1995, p.45.

[25] Ibn Ishaq, p.20; Ibn Hisham, I, p.101; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.69.

of narratives have legendary character.<sup>[26]</sup> However, they have a legendary character were still imported to the *Sirah* as other many narrations. Because of the fact that *Sirah* writer's conception of history, mainly based on the principal of giving all the accounts/narrations that reached to them as they are, rather than building on historical realities what happened in the past. Despite the fact that *Sirah* authors could make sometimes critical interference on the narrations and say that this version of events was more reliable than the other one, they take all the versions which are available for them. In addition, history for them had a moral and educational purpose. If a narrative was doubtful, it would still be included for its moral and ethical value.<sup>[27]</sup>

## 2. The Birth of the Prophet and His Early Years

In the Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah*, the Prophet's early years, starting with Āmina's pregnancy of him, birth, infancy and childhood mainly is endowed with extraordinary and miraculous elements.

To begin with, Ibn Ishaq recorded a narrative which is related to the period of the prophet's mother Āmina's pregnancy of him. He starts to the narrative with the statement that 'It is alleged in popular stories (and only God knows the truth) that Āmina d.Wahb, the mother of God's apostle, used to say when she was pregnant with God's apostle that a voice said to her, 'You are pregnant with the Lord of this people and when he is born say, 'I put him in the care of the One from the evil of every envier; then call him Muhammad.'<sup>[28]</sup>

In a different context, there is another narration in his *Sirah* that when Āmina was pregnant with him, she had a dream that a light went out from her which illumined the castle of Damascus. She had borne him with the least difficulty imaginable. When she bore him, he put his hands on the ground lifting his head towards to heavens.<sup>[29]</sup>

It could be said that in above versions surveyed some legendary and miraculous characters as Ibn Ishaq pointed out when he introduces the narratives with the statement 'It is alleged...'.

Then, Ibn Ishaq sets some of other narratives that Prophet Muhammad was born on Monday, 12th Rabī'ul-awwal,<sup>[30]</sup> in the elephant year.<sup>[31]</sup> After his birth, his mother sent to tell his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib that she had given birth to a boy and asked him to come and look at him. When he came,

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[26] Rubin, p.47.

[27] Khalidi, pp.62-63.

[28] Ibn Hisham, I, p.102; cf. Ibn Ishaq, p.22; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.69.

[29] Ibn Ishaq, p.28; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.72.

[30] Ibn Hisham, p.102.

[31] Ibn Ishaq, p.25; Ibn Hisham, I, 102.

she told him what she had seen when she conceived him and what was said to her and what she was ordered. Then Abd al-Muttalib took him before Hubel<sup>[32]</sup> in the middle of the Ka'ba, where he stood and prayed to Allah thanking him for this gift.<sup>[33]</sup> Ibn Ishaq also gives a narration that on the night Muhammad was born, a Jew calling out from the roof, saying that 'The star of Ahmed, who was born tonight, has risen'.<sup>[34]</sup>

Alongside these narratives there are also some other narratives about his infancy and childhood days in the *Sirah*. Like, after his birth the family find foster-mother for him who was Halima d. Abū Dhu'ayb of B. Sa'd. Bakr. Reports on his time with his foster-mother also provides some extraordinary motifs. The following narrations are representative examples for these kinds of themes which are included the opening heart of the Prophet when he was child.

Foster-mother Halima tells it thus:

'...we ceased not to recognize this bounty as coming from God for a period of two years, when I weaned him. He was growing up as none of the other children grew and by the time he was two he has a well-made child. We brought him to his mother, though we were most anxious to keep him with us because of the blessing which he brought us. I said to her: 'I should like you to leave my little boy with me until he becomes a big boy, for I am afraid on his account of the pest in Mecca.' We persisted until she sent him back with us.

Some months after our return he and his brother were with our lambs behind the tents when his brother came running and said to us, 'Two man clothed in white have seized that Qurayshî brother of mine and thrown him down and opened his belly, and are string it up.' We run towards him and found him standing up with a livid face. We took hold of him and asked him what the matter was. He said, 'Two man in white raiment came and threw me down and opened up my belly and searched therein for I know not what.' So we took him back to our tent.

His father said to me, 'I am afraid that this child has had a stroke, so take him back to his family before the results appears.' So we picked him up and took him to his mother who asked why we had brought him when I had been anxious for his welfare and desirous of keeping him with me. I said to her, 'God let my son live so far and I have done my duty. I am afraid that ill will befall him, so I have brought him back to you as you wished' She asked me what happened and gave me no peace until I told her. When she asked if I feared a

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[32] Ibn Ishaq, p.22. Ibn Hisham does not mention about Hubel although he gives the narration from Ibn Ishaq.

[33] Ibn Ishaq, p.22; Ibn Hisham, I, 103; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.70.

[34] Ibn Hisham, I, pp.102-103.

demon possessed him, I replied that I did. She answered that no demon had any power over her son who had a great future before him...<sup>[35]</sup>

There is another similar and detailed version of the story of the opening heart which is transmitted directly from Prophet Muhammad, when his companions asked him 'tell us about you'. The Prophet's answer as follows:

*'I was suckled among the B. Sa'd b. Bakr, and while I was with a brother of mine behind our tents shepherding the lambs, two men in white raiment came to me with a gold basin full of snow. Then they seized me and opened up my belly, extracted my heart and split it; then they extracted a black drop from it and threw it away; then they washed my heart and my belly with that snow until they had thoroughly cleaned them. Then one said to the other, weighed him against ten of his people; they did so and I outweighed them...'*<sup>[36]</sup>

It is noteworthy to mention that Ibn Ishaq did not give any hint of historicity on the narration of opening heart. It could be said that these kinds of narrations show that early Muslims had the image of psychical purification ideas for the Prophet.

Ibn Ishaq continuous to give information about his childhood and says that when he was six years old, he lost his mother in al-Abwa on their return journey from visiting his uncles in Yathrib. Then his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib took him into his care. Having lost his grandfather at the age of eight, Muhammad had a protection by his uncle Abū Talib.

When Prophet Muhammad was still a young boy, staying with his uncle Abū Talib, Ibn Ishaq gives one particular account which is related the idea of coming prophet, attributed to Monk Bahīrā. According to narration, to make it briefly, the Prophet joins his uncle Abū Talib on a trade journey. When the caravan reached Busrā in Syria, there was a monk there in his cell by the name of Bahīrā, who was well versed in the knowledge of Christian. While he was in his cell, he saw the apostle of God in the caravan when they approached, with a cloud overshadowing him among people. Bahīrā invites them for food. Muhammad, being the youngest, stayed with the baggage under tree. Bahīrā encourages the people to bring the boy along, interrogates him, finds the seal of the prophet hood on his back. He urges Abū Talib to protect the boy from Jews, who will be his cruellest foes. Ibn Ishaq also adds that some of them even intended to assassinate the boy while he was still in Busrā, but Bahīrā prevented them from doing so.<sup>[37]</sup>

[35] Ibn Ishaq, pp.25-28; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.103-106; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.70-72.

[36] Ibn Ishaq, p.28; Ibn Hisham, I, p.106; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.72.

[37] Ibn Ishaq, pp.53-55; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.115-116; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.79-81; Rubin, p.50.

In the story of monk Bahīrā, Ibn Ishaq gives his hint with using the term ‘they alleged’. The statement points out that Ibn Ishaq has doubt authenticity of the narration. Even if the historical authenticity of the narration or similar narrations like this<sup>[38]</sup> are doubted, it shows that such thoughts has been appeared in a very early date.<sup>[39]</sup>

In addition, there are some other narratives which are related in his early ages. These are including information that Allah kept him away from all evil and sin.

In this regard, Ibn Ishaq says that:

‘The apostle of God grew up, God protecting him and keeping him from the vileness of heathenism because God to honour him wished to honour him with apostleship, until he grew up to be the finest of his people in manliness, the best in character, most noble in lineage, the best neighbour, the most kind, truthful, reliable, the furthest removed from filthiness and corrupt moral, through loftiness and nobility, so that he was known among his people as ‘The trustworthy’ because of the good qualities which God had implanted in him.’<sup>[40]</sup>

### 3. His Youth

The accounts of Prophet Muhammad’s youth are quite limited in Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirah*. Ibn Ishaq is silent from his journey to Syria with his uncle Abū Talib until Prophet Muhammed reached twenty years old. When Ibn Ishaq is mentioning the Fijar War he adds that ‘this war broke out when the Prophet of God was twenty years of age.’<sup>[41]</sup>

Other narrations about the youth of the Prophet are related to Khadija. The account is that Khadija who was a merchant woman of dignity and wealth, when she heard of the honesty, trustworthiness, and honourable character, she sent for him and proposed that he should take her goods to Syria and trade with them, while she would pay him more than she paid other. The Prophet Muhammad accepted the proposal and went to Syria with accompanied by Khadija’s slave Maysara.

During this journey what we have in the narrations of Ibn Ishaq are that also has some extraordinary motifs. In some ways, there are some similarities between the account of the monk Bahira and what happened during this journey with Maysara. According to narration when the Prophet and Maysara stopped in the shade of a tree near a monk’s cell, the monk came up

[38] See the attestation narrations in detail, Ibn Ishaq, pp.62-65; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.128-133.

[39] Khalidi, p.70; Rubin, pp.44-55.

[40] Ibn Ishaq, pp.58; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.81.

[41] Ibn Hisham, I, p.118.

to Maysara and asked who the man was resting beneath the tree. Maysara told him that he was of Quraysh, the people who held the sanctuary; and the monk exclaimed: 'None but a prophet ever sat beneath this tree.'

Also Ibn Ishaq adds another narration that their returning journey to Mecca. The story goes that Maysara saw two angels shading the Prophet from the sun's rays. Narration continues that when they returned to Mecca Maysara told Khadija about two angels who shaded him and of the monk's words. After Khadija heard these things, she proposed him marriage. At that time Khadija was the best born women in Quraysh, of the greatest dignity and, too, the richest and all of people were eager to get possession of her wealth if it were possible. The Prophet accepted her proposal and he married her. They had children namely al-Qasim, al-Tahir, al-Tayyib, Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthum, and Fatima. The boys died in paganism, and his daughters lived into Islam, embraced it, and migrated to Medina.<sup>[42]</sup> In this context, Ibn Ishaq relates that Khadija shared the information what Maysara told her, with her cousin Waraqa b. Naufel, who was a Christian who had studied the scriptures and was a scholar. Waraqa said to her 'if it is true, Khadija, verily Muhammad is the prophet of this people...'<sup>[43]</sup>

What is noteworthy in Muhammad's marriage to Khadija is that Ibn Ishaq does not mention either the age at which Muhammad married her or the age at which Khadija married him.<sup>[44]</sup>

When Ibn Ishaq mentions in another part about Khadija's death he says that Khadija was the first wife of the Prophet and Khadija had previously been married twice. Her first husband was the Atiq b. 'Ā'idh b. Abdullah al-Makhzumī and she had a daughter from him. When he died, she got married Ebu Hala an-Nabash b. Zurara b. at-Tamimī and had one son and one daughter, from him.<sup>[45]</sup>

Ibn Ishaq gives place to two narrations about Muhammad's religious belief before prophetic call. According to the narrative, when the Prophet Muhammad was a young boy, they visited Zayd b. 'Amr (d.606) who refused to believe idols with his slave Zayd b. Haritha out of Mecca. They sat next to him. They had some meat prepared from the sacrifices they had slaughtered on idols. The Messenger of Allah, offered him the food and said, "Eat this dish, uncle." Zayd expresses his doubts by saying, "O son of my brother, maybe it is one of those sacrifices you have made for your idols." When the Messenger of Allah says

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[42] Ibn Ishaq, pp.59-61, Ibn Hisham, I, pp.118-120; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.82-83.

[43] Ibn Hisham, I, p.120; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, p.83.

[44] Ibn Hisham adds that Prophet Muhammad was 25 years old when he got married with her (Ibn Hisham, I, p.118). Ibn Hisham is silent about Khadija's age when she got married with the Prophet.

[45] Ibn Ishaq, pp.228-229.

yes, he does not eat. Then he criticized those who worship them and sacrifice to them. After this incident, the Messenger of Allah did not touch any idols, nor did he sacrifice for them, until Allah honoured him with his prophet hood.<sup>[46]</sup>

From the point of view of the Prophet's religious belief before prophetic call had the dilemma in Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah*. On the one hand, Ibn Ishaq gives some narrations of that Muhammad was protected from sin and error, even when he was child by Allah, but on the other hand, he records narratives that includes his respecting the idols. In this regard, it will be significance to mention that Ibn Hisham omitted the story of Zayd from his recension of Ibn Ishaq.

In spite of mentioning no time and even out of chronological context, Ibn Ishaq recorded a narrative which is related with The Confederacy of the Fudul/Hilf al-Fudul. According to narration, the tribes of Quraysh decided to make a covenant and assembled for that purpose in the house of Abdullah b. Jud'ān. Those party to the agreement with him were B.Hashim, B.'l Muttalib, Asad b. Abdu'l-Uzza, Zuhra b. Kilāb, and Taym b. Murra. They bound themselves by a solemn agreement that if they found anyone, either a native of Mecca or an outsider, had been wronged they would take his part against the aggressor and see that the stolen property was restored to him.

We find in this narration of Ibn Ishaq in which the Prophet said: 'I witnessed in the house of Abdullah b. Jud'ān a covenant which I would not exchange for any number of fine camels: if I were invited to take part in it during Islam I should do so.'<sup>[47]</sup>

We could strongly have assumed that this event happened when the Prophet was young, although there is no fixed time for the event.

#### 4. His Life After Marriage to Khadīja and Pre-Revelation Visions

What did Prophet Muhammad do after his marriage Khadīja in these fifteen years before prophetic call? Ibn Ishaq interestingly remains silent to present details about his life during this period, except of his role in the rebuilding of the Ka'ba.<sup>[48]</sup>

According to the narrative of which Ibn Ishaq presents; the Quraysh decided to rebuild the Ka'ba when the Prophet was thirty- five years old, fifteen years after the sacrilegious war. The tribes of Quraysh gathered stones for the building, each tribe collecting them and building by itself until the building was finished up to the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad), where controversy

[46] Ibn Ishaq, p.98; in another version in the same page, Ibn Ishaq states that Zayd b. 'Amr visited them.

[47] Ibn Hisham, I, pp.87-88; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.57-58.

[48] Khalidi, p.78.



arose, each tribe wanting to lift it to its place. And almost got ready for battle. After some days Quraysh gathered in the mosque and took counsel. The oldest man of Quraysh urged them to make the first man to enter the gate of the mosque umpire in the matter in dispute. They did so and first to come in was the Prophet. When they saw him, they said ‘This is the trustworthy one, we are satisfied. When he came to them and they informed him of the matter he said, ‘Give me a cloak,’ and when it was brought to him he took the Black Stone and put it inside it and said that each tribe should take hold of an end of the cloak, and they should lift it together. They did this so that when they got it into position he placed it with his own hand, and then building went on above it. Ibn Ishaq also adds that Quraysh used to call the Prophet before revelation came to him, ‘the trustworthy one’.<sup>[49]</sup>

The reports of that Muhammad would be sent as a prophet before he was born, are similarly carried over to a time period just before Muhammad’s prophet hood in Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirah*. These reports include information about the time of coming and qualifications of him from the eye of some Jewish rabbis, Christian monks, and Arab soothsayers.<sup>[50]</sup>

In this context Ibn Ishaq records in his *Sirah* a verbatim quotation from the Gospel of John<sup>[51]</sup>, and translates the Paraclete as *al-Munhamanna*. He says that *al-Munhamanna* in Syriac is ‘Muhammad’, and that in Greek it is al-Baraqlitis.<sup>[52]</sup>

The narrations in Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirah* about the life of the Prophet before prophetic call ends with his Hira experiences, pre-revelation dreams and visions.

The narration with his Hirā experiences refers that the Prophet practises *tahannuth*/religious devotion every year for a month as was the custom of Quraysh in heathen days.

One of the reports with his pre-revelation dreams was transmitted from Ā’isha. She told that when Allah desired to honour Muhammad, the first sign of prophet hood was true visions, resembling the brightness of daybreak, which were shown to him in his sleep and Allah made him love loneliness so that he liked nothing better than to be alone.

The other report runs as follows:

‘The apostle at the time when Allah willed to bestow His grace upon him and endow him with prophet hood would go forth for his affair and journey far afield until he reached the glens of Mecca and the beds of its valleys where is no house was in sight; and not a stone or tree that he passed by but would

[49] Ibn Ishaq, pp.83-88; Ibn Hisham, I, pp.121-124; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life*, pp.84-86.

[50] Look at details, Ibn Ishaq, p.90; Ibn Hisham, I, p.128.

[51] Look at Gospel of John, 15:23-26, 16:1.

[52] Ibn Hisham, I, pp.145-146; see also Rubin, p.22-23.

say, 'Peace unto thee, O apostle of Allah.'. And the apostle would turn to his right and left and look behind him and he would see naught but trees and stones. Thus he stayed seeing and hearing so long as it pleased Allah that he should stay. Then Gabriel came to him and with the gift of God's grace whilst he was on Hirā in the month of Ramadan.'<sup>[53]</sup>

Ibn Ishaq says that when the Prophet has been experienced the first revelation, he was forty years old, but at the same time gives another narration that he was forty-three years old.<sup>[54]</sup>

## Conclusion

Throughout the forgoing article, first of the aims has been a determining of Ibn Ishaq's paradigm of the *Sirah*. Secondly, what kind of narratives has been reached to him about the early life of the Prophet has been reflected. The most crucial side of this article is to highlight the images of the Prophet's life before prophetic call in the eye of early Muslims.

It could be said that Ibn Ishaq's main paradigm was to accept the Prophet as 'the seal of the Prophets'. Nevertheless, Ibn Ishaq does not have a limit in giving narrations which has been reached him. That is why there are some legendary, miraculous, and contradictory narrations in his *Sirah*. In spite of giving hints that some narrations could not be true, Ibn Ishaq has no objection in including the narrations that reach him in his book. It is noteworthy to retain that to have any kind of materials even including contradictions, there still remain significances for us. In other words, we actually are lucky to have the ideas in that historical context via these narrations.

Finally, when we turn to the narrations which deal with the early life of the Prophet, it has been seen that some of the narrations are partly include legendary, miraculous, and contradictory motifs. There are some reasons for this. Firstly, the earliest surviving biography of the Prophet which belongs to Ibn Ishaq was written over 100 years later after the Prophet's death. The timing gap and oral narratives could suggest a lack of information and some variety of biases and perspectives. Secondly, one of the main goals of the author of *Sirah* also had a religious, moral, and educational dimensions. For this, they prioritized the normative dimensions rather than the historical reality of events or facts.

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[53] Ibn Hisham, I, pp.146-148; see also Ibn Ishaq, pp.100-101; *Ibn Ishaq, The Life*, pp.104-105.

[54] Ibn Ishaq, p.88, 109. Cf., p.114.

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