THE EVOLUTION OF THE CREATOR-PROPHET CONCEPT
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE
(Based on the creativity of W.Irving and G.Kh.Gibran)

Abstract. Washington Irving’s “prophet” is a presentation of a biographical portrait of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. According to Washington Irving, the Prophet Muhammad, as the last and greatest prophet of God the One, is to eradicate idolatry. The author’s monumental biography, “Mahomet and His Successors, 1949-50”, was indeed the first sympathetic biography of the Prophet of Islam to appear on the American continent.

Keywords: Washington Irving, prophet, Gibran Khalil Gibran, allusion, USA literature

Washington Irving (1783-1859), one of the pioneers of XIX century American literature, and Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), a Lebanese writer and philosopher (1883-1931), one of the most important figures in XX century American Arabic immigrant literature, formed new ideas, thoughts, and attitudes in literature. Although there is a concept of time and space that separates the two writers, the “Prophet” written by these artists has revealed a new form and content in the literary and artistic spheres, as well as the historical-philosophical way of thinking typical of the Romantic period.

Washington Irving’s “prophet” is a presentation of a biographical portrait of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Although the author’s book, “Mahomet and His Successors” (1949-50), is more reminiscent of an informative book in its genre, the American writer’s main purpose was to get acquainted the English-
speaking reader with the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the main directions of his struggle for Islam. For this reason, he used a synthesis of historical-biographical and artistic-publicist style in the narration of the work mentioned above.

Islam and the life of the Prophet Muhammad have attracted the attention not only of Muslim writers and scholars, but also of a number of Western writers and researchers, have been the subject of a number of books on both theology and history. According to Washington Irving, the Prophet Muhammad, as the last and greatest prophet of God the One, is to eradicate idolatry. Although this task was not easy, the number of followers of the Prophet Muhammad began to grow as the city of Medina allowed him to take refuge. It is a well-known fact that the great essayist, poet, philosopher and transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson praised the Prophet of Islam and Caliph Omar in his essay entitled “*Man the Reformer*, 1841” [1]. But before Emerson, Washington Irving had “discovered” the forgotten glory and ideals of Islam. What Thomas Carlyle, the British philosopher did in Europe with his famous lecture in Edinburgh entitled “Heroes, Hero-worship and Heroism in History - The Hero as Prophet” was already done in the United States a decade ago by Washington Irving.

In this sense, it should be noted that when Washington Irving praised the greatness and grandeur of Muslim Spain in full nudity, the United States had not yet got rid of the dogmas of Puritan Christian theology. Attempts to interpret Islam as a cultural factor in Spanish history were as bold as their madness. The author’s monumental biography, “*Mahomet and His Successors*”, was indeed the first sympathetic biography of the Prophet of Islam to appear on the American continent.

“*Mahomet and His Successors*” is a preface, thirty-nine chapters, and a comprehensive account of the nature of Islam. The work is based on a structure that meets its purpose. The historical identity of the Arabs, the ethnographic and exotic picture of their archaic-barbaric way of life from the earliest times to the early Middle Ages, the traditions of individual Arab tribes, the historical and political conditions of inter-tribal relations, and the Arab-Jewish conflict and other issues like this are in the focus of the first chapters of the work. Washington Irving’s writing quality shows itself with convex lines in descriptive plans of this kind.
During his stay in Spain, Washington Irving became acquainted with numerous Arabs and was able to pay close attention to their character and spiritual world. It was these attitudes and observations that helped him to speak about the historical identity of the Arabs. In the work, Washington Irving creates a vivid and unforgettable portrait of the mighty personality of the Prophet as a skilled artist: “His intellectual qualities were undoubtedly an extraordinary kind. He had quick apprehension, a retentive memory, a vivid imagination, and an inventive genius. Owing but little to education, he had quickened and informed his mind by close observation, and storied it with a great variety of knowledge concerning the systems of religion current in his day, or handed down by tradition from antiquity” [4, p.10].

This book, which reflects the life of Muhammad, is the last work written by Washington Irving on Spain and Muslims. He was the first American to discover Islam. If Columbus discovered America for Spain, Irving also re-introduced Spain to the Americans.

The image of the Prophet also occupies a central place in the work of the writer and philosopher Gibran Khalil Gibran’s “The Prophet” (1923). While Washington Irving presented the life of the Prophet mainly from a historical point of view, Gibran Khalil’s Prophet is a philosopher, and for him love is not limited to certain areas, but is reflected in all areas of beauty, nourished not by the desires of human love but by spiritual values. Gibran Khalil considers love as a means of self-knowledge and reaching the God. The feature of his work “The Prophet” is the essence of all his works. “The Prophet” is one of the author’s works written in English. There are three heroes in the work: Prophet Al Mustafa, Orphalese and Mitra.

The choice of the name Orphalese in the work is not accidental. Thus, “being an existing city with no place in history, but with its spirit and people, its geographical location and climate” or the wise “Orpheus” who came to Greece from Thrace, defended ancient Greek esotericism and taught the wisdom of the East to the West [2].

Who is the Prophet of Gibran Khalil? Unlike W. Irving, Gibran Khalil does not present Hazrat Muhammad as a prophet. It is also unclear whether his prophet was
Muhammad or Jesus Christ. There is no clear answer to this question. There are those who claim that Gibran Khalil Gibran referred to Muhammad by this name, which he gave to a person named Al Mustafa in the book. It should be noted that the name “Mustafa” is one of the names applied to the Prophet Muhammad. However, according to Matthew, most of the texts in the book are similar in content and style to Jesus’ sermon on the mountain in Chapter 5 of the Bible. But the author’s words “Jesus sits on one side of my chest and Muhammad sits on the other” are in fact a kind of answer to this question. Although the names have changed, the answer to this question loses its significance if we consider the identity of the source [2].

“The Prophet” (1923), the most famous work of Gibran Khalil Gibran, known as the “Nietzsche of the East”, contains of twenty-six talks about love, marriage, children, eating and drinking, working, joy and sorrow, crime and punishment, laws, freedom, pain, etc. between the people of Orphalese on the eve of a priest Al Mustafa’s departure from Orphalese, where he had stayed for twelve years. The work begins with an inner monologue of the Prophet, who is waiting for his ship on the seventh day of the month of harvest, after twelve years of this life. His soul begins to speak to the people gathered around him, and the determination here is very important, it carries the work from the material ground to the spiritual one.

The first person to believe in him is Almitra, a seeress who asks him to tell them everything that was really shown to the Prophet between birth and death. Thus, the question - answer begins and the concepts acquire new meanings one by one, and the work progresses to the end by the question - answer method [3].

Gibran Khalil Gibran’s “Prophet” is, in a sense, a farewell speech accompanied by poetic prose. For this reason, it is a book of remembrance that tries to explain to people as much as possible and tells them what to do and what not to do. “The Prophet” is a work with a unique artistic style, and it manifests itself especially in the interpretation of concepts, in many sentences full of analogies and metaphors. There is a strong lyricism in all the lines.

Western literary critics accuse Gibran Khalil of possessing similar to the subject, noting that Gibran’s “Prophet” was written under the influence of Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” and Andre Gide’s “The fruits of the Earth”.
However, it should be noted that the work of “The Prophet” is technically and stylistically eloquent and lyrical, against the background of certain similarities with the works of “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” and “The fruits of the Earth”, with an original artistic development on a completely different line in terms of meaning imposed on metaphors. Due to Nietzsche, instead of a God born in the human mind, there is a belief in God in the true sense of the word, and God is not just in the temple or in the holy books. It doesn't matter if you are a Muslim, a Christian or a member of another religion, this work unites you in one “essence” – the God. There is no church here that Gide believes in but opposes in form. In “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, the hero, as a world prophet, confronts us with new ideas, kills the God, rejects what is taught, and sets a superior human goal instead of heaven. In Andre Gide’s work, there is a hero who teaches his dervish what he has learned from a kind of murshid between the two heroes, and defends that he will reach the God by experiencing all kinds of pleasures in life. In “The Prophet”, there is a hero who memorizes the words presented to his soul without mastering them.

Although there is a poetic-philosophical meaning that brings both works to a common point, the foundations that separate them are very strong, and it would therefore be a great injustice to say that the work of “The Prophet” is an imitation of the works mentioned.

The main mission of the prophecy was to direct people’s actions over a period of time, to create a spiritual environment by regulating the way of life. In fact, in “The Prophet”, Gibran Khalil Gibran’s goal was to show that a perfect man could ascend to the level of divine holiness. From this point of view, the difference between Gibran Khalil Gibran’s image of the Prophet and the Prophet of Washington Irving is in its deep idea and content, in the fact that the thoughts about the Prophet are at the bottom of the work.

Washington Irving tried to summarize the essence of the Islamic worldview and its main provisions, citing the Quran, the main book of Islam. He shows that the religion created by the Prophet Muhammad promotes and instills sublime feelings and high human values, such as faith and obedience to the God, justice, humanism, mercy and truthfulness. The main theme of Gibran Khalil Gibran’s “The Prophet”
is divine love and is the healing power in the unity of being. The concept of love in Eastern philosophical traditions is different in the historical Prophet of Washington Irving, from the Prophet who embodied the divine light in the work of Gibran Khalil Gibran. If Washington Irving tries to convey the biography of the Prophet of the Islamic world in the language of historical facts, as it were, the Prophet of Gibran Khalil Gibran is an image that elevates human love to Divine love.

Washington Irving is trying to convey the essence of Islamic values to the Western world by telling the true-life story of the Prophet. In contrast, Gibran Khalil equates his Prophet with the prophets of both the Islamic and Christian worlds, and in fact expresses his philosophical worldview in the language of the prophet. In this work, the poet-philosopher Gibran Khalil both turns to the gibla of Muslims and walks outside with the prophet of Christians. The epic space of the work is the place of lonely people (Orphalese). Gibran Khalil Gibran considers love to be a means of knowing oneself and reaching the God.

Washington Irving wrote for a predominantly Christian American-British environment. In this context, the presentation of Islam and its ideological leader, the Prophet Muhammad, by a Christian writer in accordance with its objective-historical content, still, defending the Prophet of Islam against the accusations of Christian scholars should be evaluated as an extremely difficult, responsible and courageous step. By the way, it should be noted with gratitude and appreciation that no one among the foreign - Christian authors of the book about the life of the Prophet Muhammad has shown a more courageous and objective scientific position than Washington Irving to the baseless and unjustified accusations of his fellow believers.

There are a number of works in the world literature about the Prophet Muhammad. In the works written on this subject such as J.W.Goethe wrote “Mahomet, 1774”, A.S. Pushkin “Prophet, 1828” and “Imitation of the Quran, 1824”, Voltaire “Fanatism, or the Prophet Muhammad” (“LeFanatismeou Mahomet le Prophète, 1736), the writer’s imagination manifests itself more. The mentioned writers approached this issue both negatively and positively. However, the main thing that distinguishes Washington Irving’s work from them is that he wrote a purely autobiographical work based on existing historical facts [5].
Washington Irving’s “Mahomet and His Successors” is still the subject of research by American literary critics and theologians. Thus, when comparing the Bible and the Quran, theologian Ralph E. Johnson refers to Washington Irving’s “Mahomet and His Successors”. However, unlike R. Johnson, the work of Washington Irving is an attitude to Islam.

It should also be noted that according to the Arabic immigrant literature, the religion itself contains feelings of love and maturity. Once again, for them, true religion is the path to the God and, ultimately, the path to enlightenment, which leads to God those who deserve to be led. Such a concept of religion elevates man to heaven by introducing him to himself. A person, who seeks the truth, after difficult journeys and great efforts, attains Absolute Being and attains Unity. In the works of both authors, this concept is taken as a basis, and in their works, the most important logical concept of Islamic values and morality, Divine love, comes to the fore.

References: