



# THE EXPEDITIONS

AN EARLY BIOGRAPHY OF MUHAMMAD



MA'AMAR IBN RĀSHID

TRANSLATED BY SEAN W. ANTHONY

FOREWORD BY M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM

The life of the Prophet and the story of early Islam

## THE EXPEDITIONS

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This paperback edition differs in a few respects from its dual-language hardcover predecessor. Because of the compact trim size the pagination has changed, but paragraph numbering has been retained to facilitate cross-referencing with the hardcover. Material that referred to the Arabic edition has been updated to reflect the English-only format, and other material has been corrected and updated where appropriate. For information about the Arabic edition on which this English translation is based and about how the LAL Arabic text was established, readers are referred to the hardcover.

# THE EXPEDITIONS

*An Early Biography of Muḥammad*

BY

Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid

ACCORDING TO THE RECENSION OF

‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī



TRANSLATED BY

SEAN W. ANTHONY

FOREWORD BY

M. A. S. ABDEL HALEEM

VOLUME EDITOR

JOSEPH E. LOWRY



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*For Susu and Suraya,  
who love Muhammad*

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## FOREWORD

M. A. S. ABDEL HALEEM

Scholars of Arabic literature and readers with an interest in Arabic and Islamic civilization are now most fortunate to have available to them the works being published as the Library of Arabic Literature, the first series to attempt a systematic coverage of the Arabic literary heritage. The editors have already shown good judgment in selecting books for the series, and the present volume, *The Expeditions*, an early biography of the Prophet Muḥammad by Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, is no exception.

Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770) was a contemporary of Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768), author of the famous *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* (*The Prophetic Biography*), also known as *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* (*The Biography of the Messenger of God*), which has come to be widely circulated and is known simply as the *Sīrah*. Alfred Guillaume's English translation of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah* was published more than fifty years ago,<sup>1</sup> so the English translation of another important early text about the life of the Prophet Muḥammad is well overdue. Indeed, there is a real need for more such texts from the early Islamic period to see the light of day.

It should be pointed out that these two works are not the earliest writings on the subject of the Prophet's life. In his discussion of the genres of *maghāzī* and *sīrah*, the Ottoman literary historian Ḥajjī Khalifah (d. 1067/1657) reports that Ibn Ishāq compiled his work from preexisting materials, and goes on to identify 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 93/711–12) as the earliest to gather material on the topic.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, both Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid and Ibn Ishāq must have taken their information from written sources as well as authenticated oral reports collected by ‘Urwah and others.<sup>3</sup>

The major contribution of Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid and Ibn Ishāq was to bring the material from different sources together in one place. Other early Muslim scholars immediately recognized the value of this activity. This is why we have Ibn Ishāq’s work in a recension by the later Ibn Hishām (d. 212/828 or 218/833), and Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid’s work in a recension by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827). Similarly, written material about the pillars of Islam—including ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*), the giving of alms (*zakaḥ*), fasting in Ramadan (*ṣawm*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (ḥajj)—cannot be assumed to have appeared for the first time at the end of the first or at the beginning of the second Hijri century. Muslims had been continually engaging in ritual activities, and writing about them, since the time of the Prophet. Nor should it be assumed that hadiths (reports about the Prophet Muḥammad) were only written down when al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and the other famous collectors of hadiths of that era produced their great compilations. Nonetheless, the compilation by Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid of the present book was significant in its time for preserving the earlier scattered material.

The Arabic edition produced here, carefully edited from the extant manuscripts, as well as the translation into lucid English, have been undertaken by a gifted young scholar. What is more, his detailed introduction contains much useful guidance for the reader. Scholars of early Islam, Arabists, and interested readers will find this volume a welcome addition to the literature available and to their libraries.

Professor M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, OBE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this translation first came to me a decade ago while reading through the back matter of Michael Cook's excellent monograph *Muḥammad*, published in Oxford University Press's now-defunct "Past Masters" series in 1983. Cook opined that, given the daunting size of the English translation of Ibn Hishām's redaction of the biography of Muḥammad compiled by Ibn Ishāq, "an annotated translation of Ma'mar ibn Rāshid's account as transmitted by 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām would be a welcome addition to the literature."<sup>4</sup> Reading these words as a first-year graduate student some two decades after they had been written, I presumed that the feat had already been accomplished. In fact, it had not.

That same first year of graduate study at the University of Chicago, I would also face the formidable challenges of translating *maghāzī* literature for the first time. I was fortunate enough to do so in nearly ideal conditions: in a class supervised by Fred M. Donner. I recall with fondness convening in Prof. Donner's office in the Oriental Institute. Seated around a large wooden table, my classmates and I pored over every jot and tittle of the text under Donner's tutelage. It was a great place to begin a journey—a journey made all the more amazing by the instruction I would receive at the hands of two of the finest Arabists I have had the pleasure to know, Prof. Wadād al-Qāḍī and Prof. Tahera Qutbuddin. To all three of these mentors, I remain profoundly thankful.

In pursuing this project I have incurred many a debt that, for now, I can only repay with gratitude. I am deeply grateful to Phil

Kennedy, James Montgomery, Shawkat Toorawa, and the rest of editorial board of the Library of Arabic Literature (LAL), who were so open to taking my project under their wings and who continued to nurture the project and me as I gradually came to grasp the incredible vision of the series. Chip Rossetti, LAL's managing editor, was a constant guide and ever helpful throughout the project's realization. Rana Mikati lent me her keen eye and saved me from a number of errors in translation. Most of all, my project editor, Joseph Lowry, deserves my deepest gratitude. Continually challenging me and pushing me to better refine the translation, Prof. Lowry saved me from many errors and missteps along the way. If this project is any way successful and its fruits deemed praiseworthy, he surely deserves as much of the credit as I. "As iron sharpens iron does one person's wit sharpen the other's" (Prov. 20:17). Of course, any faults this work contains are mine alone.

I was fortunate to be able to work on this project unimpeded for the 2012–13 academic year thanks to the generous support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the willingness of the University of Oregon's History Department to grant me a yearlong leave. That this volume joins the ranks of the many illustrious projects funded by the endowment is an especially great honor. It is my hope that the NEH's support for the flourishing of the humanities, and thus enrichment of all humanity's heritage, will continue to thrive in the decades and centuries to come.

Many less directly involved in the project also made its current form possible. I must thank Feryal Selim for helping me acquire digital scans of the Murad Mulla manuscript from the Süleymaniye Library, as well as my many undergraduate students who allowed me to try out early drafts of this translation in class and who provided me with interesting and often unexpected feedback. An old friend, Craig Howell, provided me with great conversation and excellent insight into how a nonspecialist might read the text.

To my wife and children, I offer my deepest and most heartfelt thanks. You are beyond all else the inspiration behind my strivings and the center from which I draw my strength.

## INTRODUCTION

*The Expeditions* (Ar. *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*) by Ma'mar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770) is an early biography of the Prophet Muḥammad that dates to the second/eighth century and is preserved in the recension of his student 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām of Sanaa (d. 211/827). The text is exceptional because, alongside Ibn Hishām's (d. 218/834) redaction of the prophetic biography of Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767–68),<sup>5</sup> *The Expeditions* is one of the two earliest and most seminal examples of the genre of prophetic biography in Arabic literature to have survived.

Early biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad—and by “early” I mean written within two centuries of his death in 11/632—are an extremely rare commodity. In fact, no surviving biography dates earlier than the second/eighth century. The rarity of such early biographies is sure to pique the curiosity of even a casual observer. The absence of earlier biographical writings about Muḥammad is not due to Muslims' lack of interest in telling the stories of their prophet. At least in part, the dearth of such writings is rooted in the concerns of many of the earliest Muslims that any recording of a book of stories about Muḥammad's life would inevitably divert their energies from, and even risk eclipsing, the status of Islam's sacred scripture, the Qur'an, as the most worthy focus of devotion and scholarship. This paucity of early biographies is also partially the result of the fact that, before the codification of the Qur'an, the Arabic language had not fully emerged as a medium in which written literary works were produced.

For modern historians enthralled by such issues, the attempt to tease out the consequences of this chronological gap between Muḥammad's lifetime and our earliest narrative sources about him can be all-consuming. Debates thus continue in earnest over whether we may know anything at all about the "historical Muḥammad" given the challenges presented by the source material. But what is meant exactly by the "historical Muḥammad"? Modern historians speak of the historical Muḥammad as a type of shorthand for an historical understanding of Muḥammad's life and legacy that is humanistic, secular, and cosmopolitan. This is to say that any talk of a historical Muḥammad is merely an interpretation of his life that is distinct from, but not necessarily incompatible with, either how his faith community imagined him centuries after his death or how rival faith communities viewed him through the lens of their own hostile religious polemic. Yet all modern understandings of Muḥammad inevitably derive from a body of texts written by a faith community, for we have no contemporary witnesses to Muḥammad's prophetic mission, and the earliest testimonies that do survive are penned by outsiders whose depictions and understanding of Islam in its earliest years are sketchy at best and stridently hostile at worst.<sup>6</sup> Hence, to speak of a *historical* Muḥammad is not to speak of the *real* Muḥammad. We recognize that we seek to understand, explain, and reconstruct the life of a man using the tools and methods of modern historical criticism. Whatever form such a project takes, and regardless of the methodology adopted, there is no escaping the basic conundrum facing all historians of early Islam: they must fashion their reconstruction of Muḥammad's biography from the memories and interpretations of the community that revered him as Prophet. In other words, historians concerned with such topics must dare wrestle with angels.<sup>7</sup>

Today, many scholars remain steadfastly optimistic that writing a biography of the historical Muḥammad is feasible and worthwhile,<sup>8</sup> though just as many take a decidedly more pessimistic view. More than a few have dismissed the idea of writing Muḥammad's

historical biography as fundamentally impossible.<sup>9</sup> This debate remains intractable and scholarly consensus elusive. It is my pleasure then, and in some ways my great relief, to table this contentious debate and instead present the reader with one of the earliest biographies of Muḥammad ever composed. This relatively straightforward task, although not without formidable challenges, allows one to sidestep the fraught questions surrounding the man behind the tradition and permit a broader audience to encounter the early tradition on its own terms.

Much of this book's contents relate the story one might expect of any telling of Muḥammad's life. A boy born among the denizens of the Hejaz region of Western Arabia is orphaned by the unexpected deaths of first his parents and then his grandfather. As the child grows into a man, omens portend his future greatness, but his adult life initially unfolds as an otherwise prosaic and humble one, not too atypical for an Arabian merchant whose life spanned the late sixth and the early seventh centuries AD. Working for a widowed merchant woman of modest means, he ekes out an existence in her employ, until he eventually weds her and strives to live a modest, honorable life in a manner that earns him the esteem and admiration of his tribe, the Quraysh. The man's life forever changes when one night he encounters an angel atop a mountain on the outskirts of his hometown, Mecca. The angel charges him to live the rest of his days as God's last prophet and the steward and messenger of His final revelation to humankind.

This man proclaims his message to be one with the monotheism first taught by Abraham, the venerable patriarch of the Hebrew Bible and the common ancestor of the Arabs and Jews. Denouncing the cultic practices surrounding Mecca's shrine, the Kaaba, and the dissolute lives of its patron tribe, the Quraysh, as pagan, idolatrous, and morally corrupt, the man soon finds himself at odds with those who profit both economically and politically from the status quo. The Quraysh reckon the man's prophetic message a serious threat to their livelihood and power, and soon the prophet and his earliest

followers suffer persecutions and tribulations that take them to the precipice of despair. Yet God at last provides succor to His servants: Two warring tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, living in a city north of Mecca called Yathrib, invite the man and his people to live in their midst, agreeing to submit to whatever peace the Meccan prophet might bring.

Fleeing persecution, the prophet undertakes his emigration to Yathrib, his Hijrah, where he establishes a new community (*ummah*), united not by tribal affiliation and genealogy but by faith and loyalty to the prophet's message. Yathrib becomes Medina, "the Prophet's city" (*madīnat al-nabī*). The days of persecution now ending, the prophet leads his followers in battle to conquer Arabia and forge a new polity guided by God's hand. These early conquests augur a greater destiny: the spread of his religion far beyond the deserts of Arabia. Within a hundred years of the prophet's death, his community stretches from Spain to the steppes of Central Asia, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Though the above biographical details are widely known, few laypersons recognize that none come to us from the Qur'an. Even if the scripture at times references such events implicitly, it never narrates them. Notwithstanding its inestimable value, the Qur'an offers little material that might allow the modern historian to reconstruct the life of its Messenger, even in its most basic outlines. Moreover, though Muḥammad, as God's Messenger, delivered the Qur'an to his early followers and thence humanity, Muslims did not regard the Qur'an as a record of the Prophet's own words or actions—rather, the Qur'an was solely God's Word, and with the death of His Messenger, the canon of the scripture closed. For detailed narratives of the lives of Muḥammad and his Companions we are wholly dependent on a later tradition external to the Qur'an.

Despite its limited utility in reconstructing the biography of Muḥammad, the sacred corpus known as the Qur'an (Ar. *al-qur'ān*; lit., the "recitation" or "reading") is still very likely to be our earliest and most authentic testimony to Muḥammad's teachings and

the beliefs of his earliest followers. The scripture was organized and arranged into a codex (Ar. *muṣḥaf*), not within the lifetime of Muḥammad but under his third successor, or caliph (Ar. *khalīfa*), ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 23–35/644–56). ‘Uthmān’s codex was subsequently refined and reworked under the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān between 84/703 and 85/704.<sup>10</sup> A parallel, albeit much slower and more fraught, process was undertaken by early Muslims to preserve the prophet’s words and deeds, which led to the formation of the second sacred corpus of Islam, known collectively as hadith (Ar. *al-ḥadīth*; lit., “sayings”), which is distinct from the Qur’an and is often referred to as “traditions.” Unlike the Qur’an, which Muslims codified in a matter of decades, the hadith canon took centuries to form.<sup>11</sup>

*The Expeditions* belongs to a subgenre of the hadith known as the *maghāzī* traditions, which narrates specific events from the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions and whose collection and compilation into a discrete genre of prophetic biography preceded the canonization of hadith considerably.<sup>12</sup> The Arabic word *maghāzī* does not connote “biography” in the modern sense. It is the plural of *maghzāh*, which literally means “a place where a raid/expedition (*ghazwah*) was made.” The English title I have adopted, *The Expeditions*, is serviceable as translations go, but may lead an English-speaking audience to ask why these traditions are ostensibly gathered under the rubric of Muḥammad’s military campaigns rather than, say, “biography” as such.

As is often the case with translations, the English “expeditions” does not quite do justice to the fullest sense of the Arabic *maghāzī*, for much of what this book contains has little to do with accounts of military expeditions or the glories of martial feats, although there are plenty of those.<sup>13</sup> The word *maghāzī* invokes the discrete locations of key battles and raids conducted by the Prophet and his followers, yet it also invokes a more metaphorical meaning that is not restricted to targets of rapine or scenes of battle and skirmishes. *Maghāzī* are also sites of sacred memory; the sum of all events

worthy of recounting. A *maghzāh*, therefore, is also a place where any memorable event transpired and, by extension, the *maghāzī* genre distills all the events and stories of sacred history that left their mark on the collective memory of Muḥammad’s community of believers.

The origins of this particular collection of *maghāzī* traditions (for there were many books with the title *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*)<sup>14</sup> begins with a tale of serendipity. As the story goes, Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid was a Persian slave from Basra who traveled the lands of Islam trading wares for his Arab masters from the Azd tribe. While traveling through Syria trading and selling, Ma‘mar sought out the rich and powerful court of the Marwānids. Seeking this court out required boldness: the Marwānids were the caliphal dynasty that reigned supreme over the Umayyad empire throughout the first half of the second/eighth century. When Ma‘mar arrived at the court, it was his good fortune to find the royal family busy making preparations for a grand wedding banquet, and thus eager to buy his wares for the festivities. Though Ma‘mar was a mere slave, the noble family treated him generously and spent lavishly on his goods. Somewhat boldly, Ma‘mar interjected to pursue a more uncommon sort of remuneration: “I am but a slave,” he protested. “Whatever you grant me will merely become my masters’ possession. Rather, please speak to this man on my behalf that he might teach me the Prophet’s traditions.”<sup>15</sup> That “man” of whom Ma‘mar spoke was, by most accounts, the greatest Muslim scholar of his generation: Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). Indeed, al-Zuhrī’s stories about Muḥammad and his earliest followers comprise the bulk of the material Ma‘mar preserves in this volume.

It is somewhat fitting that this book should have had its inception at a banquet, for the book itself is a banquet of sorts—a feast of sacred memory. This book takes one not only into halls of history but also through the passages of memory. Nostalgia permeates its stories. Sifting through its pages, the flavors of memory wash over the palate: the piquant spice of destiny, the bittersweet flavor of

saturnine wisdom, the sweetness of redemption, dashes of humor and adventure, and the all-pervasive aroma of the holy.

The *maghāzī* tradition in general and Maʿmar's *Maghāzī* in particular are therefore not merely rote recitations of events and episodes from Muḥammad's life. They are more potent than that. The *maghāzī* tradition is a cauldron in which the early Muslims, culturally ascendant and masters over a new imperial civilization, mixed their ideals and visions of their model man, Muḥammad, and brewed them with the triumphalism of a victory recently savored. Muslims recorded and compiled these traditions as their newborn community surveyed the wonders of a journey traveled to a destination hardly imagined at its outset.

#### THE ORIGINS AND COMPOSITION OF *THE EXPEDITIONS*

*The Expeditions* is best understood not as a conventionally authored book produced by the efforts of a single person but as an artifact of a series of teacher–pupil relationships between three renowned scholars of the early Islamic period. These scholars are Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) of Medina, Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770) of Basra, and ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām of Sanaa (d. 211/827). The relationship between the latter two scholars in particular produced a number of books that have survived until our day, this volume being merely one.<sup>16</sup> This serial teacher–pupil nexus is of the utmost importance for understanding not only how this book came into being, but also for reading the book and understanding why its structure unfolds the way it does. Simply put, the traditions contained in *The Expeditions* represent, for the most part, the lectures of al-Zuhrī recorded by Maʿmar, which Maʿmar in turn supplemented with materials from his other, more minor teachers when lecturing to his own students. Among these students was ʿAbd al-Razzāq, who committed Maʿmar's lectures to writing and thus preserved the book in the form in which it has survived until today.<sup>17</sup> These methods were, in effect, how most books on topics such as history, law,

and religious learning were made in second and third/eighth and ninth centuries, but more on this below.

What this means, of course, is that Ma‘mar is not the “author” of this text in the conventional sense, which is not, however, to say that he is not directly responsible for this text. My assignation of authorship to him is not arbitrary; in my estimation he remains the pivotal personality responsible for its content and form, even if speaking of his “authorship” necessarily requires some qualifications. *The Expeditions* actually contains many authorial voices that are not Ma‘mar’s, including those of his teachers and, more rarely, that of his student ‘Abd al-Razzāq. How does one explain this?

The simplest place to begin is to point out a formal characteristic of early Arabic literary texts that dominates most narrative writing from the time of its emergence in the first half of the second/eighth century. This formal characteristic is the *isnād-khabar* (“chain-report”) form, a crucial couplet that forms the building blocks of sacred, historical, and even literary narratives and that gives rise to the distinctively anecdotal character of Islamic historical writing and much of Arabic literature.<sup>18</sup> The word *khabar* and its more sacred counterpart *ḥadīth* convey the sense of “report,” “account,” or even “saying.” (This last meaning is especially true for the word *ḥadīth*, most frequently used to refer to the sayings of the Prophet.) The word *isnād*, on the other hand, refers to a chain of supporting authorities that ostensibly certifies the veracity of the account. Every text utilizing this form begins by citing a chain of successive authorities who passed on the story one to another, and only then proceeds to relate the actual narrative.

In practice, the process works like this: Ma‘mar’s student ‘Abd al-Razzāq commits to memory and records his teacher’s tradition (i.e., a *khabar* as related by him) but ‘Abd al-Razzāq also memorizes the chain of authorities (*isnād*) that Ma‘mar cites before he begins relating his tradition. This chain of authorities presumably goes back to eyewitnesses of the events, although in practice this is not always the case. Such chains are also cumulative. On any

subsequent occasion in which ‘Abd al-Razzāq relates the tradition, he will begin by citing Ma‘mar as his authority for the account and then continue to list all of Ma‘mar’s authorities before he relates the text of the account itself. Although citing *isnāds* is an archaic tradition, it is also a living one: Muslims today still relate such traditions with chains of transmission that reach back to the first generation of Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

These narratives are usually fairly short, although a *khbar* can be rather long in the *maghāzī* genre. *Khabars* tend to remain relatively short, for example, in works concerned with Islamic ritual and law. The important point to keep in mind is that they are self-contained textual units that proliferated among early Muslims before the existence of any book or any similar type of systematic compilation gathered them together—that is, their transmission was initially oral and their reception initially aural. Such narratives were gathered and preserved by the earliest compilers like precious pearls, worthy of appreciation on the merits of their individual beauty and value alone. Yet, like any collector of pearls is wont to do, these precious pearls of narrative were also arranged to make literary necklaces of sorts, which became the first books. These books could be arranged according to diverse interests: legal and ritual topics (*fiqh*), the exegesis of the Qur’an (*tafsīr*), or, as in the present case, stories of the Prophet’s life and the experiences of his earliest followers. With this systematic presentation of narrative material, the literary phase of early Islamic historiography begins.<sup>20</sup>

It is difficult to date the beginnings of *maghāzī* literature with precision because the earliest exempla of the genre are lost or are only partially preserved, sometimes in highly redacted forms, in later works. Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid’s most influential teacher, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī of Medina, is a crucial trailblazer in the composition of *maghāzī* traditions, but the Islamic tradition names other scholars who predate al-Zuhrī. Two of these merit particular mention.

Abān ibn ‘Uthmān (d. 101–5/719–23), a son of the third caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 23–35/644–55), is reported as being among

the first, if not *the* first, to write a book containing “the conduct (*siyar*) of the Prophet and his expeditions (*maghāzī*).”<sup>21</sup> The sole person to relate a detailed story of Abān’s writing activities is the Abbasid-era historian al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870). According to him, Abān’s project to compile the story of Muḥammad’s life was first undertaken in 82/702 at the behest of the Umayyad prince, and later caliph, Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, who even furnished Abān with ten scribes (*kuttāb*) and all the parchment he required for the project. Sulaymān, however, was incensed when he actually read the fruit of Abān’s labors: the text was bereft of tales of Sulaymān and Abān’s Umayyad ancestors from Mecca and was instead chock-full of the virtues of Muḥammad’s Medinese Companions, the Allies (Ar. *al-anṣār*). How could this be, the prince demanded, when the Allies had betrayed the caliph ‘Uthmān, of blessed memory, and Abān’s father no less! In al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār’s account, Abān retorted that all he had written was true, in spite of whatever culpability they shared in ‘Uthmān’s assassination in 35/656. Hearing none of it, Sulaymān consulted his father, the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, who ordered the book burned to ashes.<sup>22</sup> This is all one ever hears of Abān’s book of *maghāzī*, and scant trace of his writings otherwise remain, if indeed they ever existed.<sup>23</sup>

The situation is more promising for the writings of Abān’s contemporary, the prominent scholar of Medina ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. ca. 94/712–13). Like Abān, ‘Urwah was the son of a prominent early Companion of Muḥammad, al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām (d. 35/656). Furthermore, his mother was the daughter of the first caliph of Islam, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, and sister to Muḥammad’s favorite wife ‘Ā’ishah. Indeed, ‘Urwah’s maternal aunt ‘Ā’ishah often serves as a key authority for ‘Urwah’s accounts, if one considers his chain of authorities (*isnād*) genuine. The man was extraordinarily well connected and deeply imbedded in the circles of the elite of the early Islamic polity.

Although no work of ‘Urwah’s has survived per se, his impact on the works surviving from subsequent generations can be better

scrutinized and gauged than can Abān ibn ‘Uthmān’s. Modern scholars who have dedicated themselves to excavating later collections for survivals of ‘Urwah’s traditions have concluded that the broad outlines of at least seven events from Muḥammad’s life, ranging from his first revelation and his Hijrah to Medina to his many battles thereafter, can be detected even if the original wording of ‘Urwah’s accounts may be lost.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, judging by the citations thereof contained in *The Expeditions*, this corpus of traditions from ‘Urwah proved to be seminal for Ma‘mar’s teacher al-Zuhrī. Several redacted letters attributed to ‘Urwah discussing events from Muḥammad’s life ostensibly also survive in the work of a later historian, Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Curiously though, all the letters are addressed to the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, who is otherwise known for his opposition to such books, preferring instead to promote the study of the Qur’an and Sunnah (i.e., scripture and religious law), as witnessed in the above story of Abān ibn ‘Uthmān’s efforts to compile such traditions.<sup>25</sup> Despite considerable advances in our knowledge of ‘Urwah and his corpus in recent decades, the fact remains that his corpus is now lost and its exact contours are the object of speculation (albeit well informed). The authenticity of the ‘Urwah corpus is still being vigorously debated.<sup>26</sup>

The author of *The Expeditions*, Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, was born in 96/714 and was active two generations after Abān and ‘Urwah. Ma‘mar was a slave-client (Ar. *mawlā*; pl. *mawālī*) of the Ḥuddān clan of the Azd, a powerful Arab tribe that had its base of power in Ma‘mar’s native Basra as well as Oman. Like many scholars of his generation, Ma‘mar was of Persian extraction. However, having lived in the midst of the Islamic-conquest elite all his life, he was deeply entrenched in their culture and had thoroughly assimilated their language and religion, Arabic and Islam, which he claimed as his own. Indeed, his native city of Basra originated not as a Persian city but rather as an Arab military garrison built upon the ruins of an old Persian settlement known as Vaheshtābādh Ardashīr near the

Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab river. The early participants in the Islamic conquests constructed their settlement on this site in southern Iraq out of the reed beds of the surrounding marshes in 14/635, soon after they had vanquished the Persian armies of the moribund Sasanid dynasty. Basra continued to function as one of the main hubs of culture for the Islamic-conquest elite throughout Maʿmar’s lifetime. Maʿmar served his Azdī masters not as a domestic slave or fieldworker, but as a trader, probably mostly of cloth and similar fineries. Such was the lot of many slaves in the early Islamic period: they were often skilled as traders, artisans, or merchants of some type, and in bondage would continue to practice their livelihood, only with the added necessity of paying levies on their profits to their masters, who in turn granted them access to the wealth, power, and prestige of the new Islamic-conquest elite.

Maʿmar’s duties to his Arab masters required such remuneration, but the burden does not seem to have hampered his freedom of movement and association. He began to study and learn the Qurʾan and hadith at a tender age as he sought knowledge from the famed scholars of his native Basra, such as Qatādah ibn Dīʾamah (d. 117/735) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728–29), whose funeral he attended as an adolescent. Indeed, it was his trading that enabled him to journey afar and pursue knowledge and learning beyond the environs of Basra. In time, his trading took him to the Hejaz, the cultural and religious heart of Islamic society in his era, as well as to Syria, the political center of the Umayyad empire, which stretched from Iberia to Central Asia when he first embarked on his studies of *maghāzī* traditions. He spent the final years of his life, likely from 132/750 onward, as a resident of Sanaa in Yemen, where he married and where he would pass away in 153/770.

The preponderance of materials transmitted by Maʿmar in *The Expeditions* derives from his teacher, the Medinese scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī. Al-Zuhrī was a master narrator of the *maghāzī* genre and, after his most accomplished student Muḥammad ibn Iṣḥāq (d. 150/767–68), is the most seminal practitioner of the

genre in early Islamic history. Ma‘mar first encountered al-Zuhrī in Medina, while trading cloth on behalf of his Azdī masters. There, Ma‘mar claims, he stumbled upon an aged man surrounded by a throng of students to whom he was lecturing. Already having cut his scholarly teeth when studying with the scholars of his native Basra, the young and inquisitive Ma‘mar decided to sit down and join their ranks.<sup>27</sup> Ma‘mar’s encounter with al-Zuhrī in Medina impressed him profoundly, although it was likely somewhat brief. In Medina, it seems, his encounters with al-Zuhrī were mostly those of a curious young onlooker. It was not until al-Zuhrī had relocated his scholarly activities to the Umayyad court in Ruṣāfah and begun to serve as a tutor to the sons of the caliph Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105–25/723–43) that Ma‘mar would once again encounter the aged scholar.

Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī was a formidable figure. His origins were at the farthest end of the social spectrum from Ma‘mar’s servile class: al-Zuhrī was of the innermost circles of the conquest elite. He was not merely an Arab and a Muslim; he was also a descendant of the Zuhrah clan of Mecca’s Quraysh, from whose loins the religion of Islam and caliphal polity had sprung. The Quraysh dominated the articulation of Islam and the affairs of its polity from an early date. Although many of al-Zuhrī’s students, like Ma‘mar, were non-Arab clients of servile origin, al-Zuhrī reputedly preferred, if feasible, to take his knowledge only from the descendants of Muḥammad’s early followers from the Quraysh and from those Arabs who gave Muḥammad’s early followers shelter in Medina.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, al-Zuhrī attributed his own vast learning to four “oceans” of knowledge (Ar. *buhūr*) he encountered among the scholars of Quraysh who preceded him: Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712–13), Abū Salamah ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (d. ca. 94/712–13), and ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Utbah (d. 98/716).<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, al-Zuhrī was deeply entrenched within the Umayyad state apparatus and its elite, and this at a time when many of his fellow scholars looked askance at any association with the state. A

contemporary Syrian scholar, Makhūl (d. ca. 113/731), reportedly once exclaimed, “What a great man al-Zuhrī would have been if only he had not allowed himself to be corrupted by associating with kings!”<sup>30</sup>

The caliph Hishām brought al-Zuhrī from Medina to his court in Ruṣāfah, where the scholar remained for approximately two decades (i.e., nearly the entirety of Hishām’s caliphate), only leaving the caliph’s court intermittently.<sup>31</sup> Ruṣāfah, located south of the Euphrates, was once a Syrian Byzantine city named Sergiopolis and was renowned as a destination of pilgrimage for Christian Arabic-speaking tribes visiting the shrine of the martyr St. Sergius as well as for its many churches. Hishām renovated the city and revived the settlement as the site of his court, building a mosque and palaces famous for their cisterns.<sup>32</sup> In Ruṣāfah, Hishām compelled al-Zuhrī to begin writing down traditions about the Prophet Muḥammad’s life, as well as about other matters. This was likely against the scholar’s will, as the recording of hadith in writing remained a controversial issue at the time. Part of Hishām’s commission included the employment of state secretaries (*kuttāb*) to record al-Zuhrī’s lectures as he related them to the Umayyad princes, producing by some accounts a considerable body of written work.<sup>33</sup>

It was during al-Zuhrī’s residence at the caliph’s court in Ruṣāfah that Ma‘mar journeyed there as a trader hoping to sell his wares. He humbly requested the attendees at a marriage banquet to grant him access to al-Zuhrī and, thus, to the scholar’s famed learning. According to his own testimony, Ma‘mar took the majority of his learning from al-Zuhrī while he resided in Ruṣāfah, where Ma‘mar claims he had al-Zuhrī nearly all to himself.<sup>34</sup> Ma‘mar learned al-Zuhrī’s traditions via two means: audition (*samā’*) and collation via public recitation (*‘ard*)—meaning that once Ma‘mar had memorized the traditions he would recite them back to al-Zuhrī for review and correction. The combination of these two features of Ma‘mar’s studies with al-Zuhrī rendered his transmission of al-Zuhrī’s materials highly desirable in the eyes of other scholars.<sup>35</sup>

It is likely that Ma'mar remained in Ruṣāfah, or at least Syria, even beyond al-Zuhrī's death in 124/742. He testifies to having witnessed al-Zuhrī's personal stores of notebooks (*dafātir*) being hauled out on beasts of burden for transfer to some unspecified location after the caliph al-Walīd II ibn Yazīd was assassinated in a coup d'état by Yazīd III in Jumada II 126/April 744.<sup>36</sup>

After the coup had toppled Walīd II, Syria descended into a vortex of violence that made life there precarious; even the Umayyad dynasty did not survive the ensuing conflicts that collectively came to be called the Third Civil War (*fitnah*). The denouement of this conflict in 132/750 also saw the ascendance of a new caliphal dynasty, the Abbasids.<sup>37</sup> It was likely this tumultuous series of events that caused Ma'mar to journey far to the south, to Sanaa in Yemen. Scholars of any sort, let alone one of Ma'mar's stature, seem to have been rare in the region at the time, so the locals quickly made arrangements to marry him to a local woman with the hope of tethering him to the city for the long haul.<sup>38</sup>

In Yemen, Ma'mar's most promising and, in due time, most famous pupil was 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī. Of the twenty-odd years Ma'mar reputedly spent in Yemen until his death in 153/770, his relationship with 'Abd al-Razzāq spanned the final seven to eight years.<sup>39</sup> The importance of 'Abd al-Razzāq's role in the preservation of Ma'mar's learning is beyond doubt. This is in part due to the considerable scholarly output of 'Abd al-Razzāq himself, which included the ten surviving volumes of his own hadith compilation, the monumental *al-Muṣannaf*. However, 'Abd al-Razzāq was also the first scholar to transmit and present Ma'mar's scholarship in a recognizably "book-like" form.<sup>40</sup>

Early Muslim scholars did not usually compose books in order to display their scholarly prowess. Indeed, to possess such books for any purpose except private use could considerably harm one's scholarly reputation, as it suggested that one's knowledge (Ar. *ilm*) was not known by heart, and therefore not truly learned.<sup>41</sup> Knowledge was, in this sense, expected to be embodied by a scholar and

only accessible by personally meeting and studying under said scholar. As a general rule, books were for private use, not public dissemination. This attitude toward writing and knowledge, indeed, was the root of al-Zuhri's alarm when the Umayyad caliph Hishām compelled him to have his knowledge copied into books. Ma'mar, one of al-Zuhri's closest students at Ruṣāfah, seems to have first seen al-Zuhri's private collection of notebooks only after they were removed from his teacher's private storage (Ar. *khazā'in*) after his death, for al-Zuhri's books were largely irrelevant to the interpersonal process of the transmission of knowledge that Ma'mar enjoyed under his tutelage. Books were no substitute for the authenticating relationship between a scholar and his pupil. Those who had derived their knowledge only from books were scorned. Indeed, when a Damascene scholar who had purchased a book by al-Zuhri in Damascus began to transmit the material he had found therein, he was denounced as a fraud.<sup>42</sup>

Hence, it was as a compliment to his revered teacher's learning and to his awe-inspiring ability to recall vast stores of hadith from memory at will that 'Abd al-Razzāq would remark that he never once saw Ma'mar with a book, except for a collection of long narratives (as one finds in *The Expeditions*, for instance), which he would occasionally take out to consult.<sup>43</sup> However, it would be inaccurate to say that written materials had no role to play whatsoever. Teachers could and did bestow private writings on students or close confidants. Such writings, it seems, would fall somewhere between the "lecture notes" used by scholars as an aide-mémoire and the published books produced by later generations. Ma'mar reputedly composed such a tome (Ar. *sifr*) for his fellow Basran scholar Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī on one occasion,<sup>44</sup> and for 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī on another.<sup>45</sup> *The Expeditions* may have been one such work preserved in the course of 'Abd al-Razzāq's indefatigable pursuit of knowledge: what Sebastian Günther has designated as a "literary composition."<sup>46</sup> Simply put, although *The Expeditions* was the product of Ma'mar's lectures to 'Abd al-Razzāq, the end product was a

composition polished enough to be disseminated to others and not restricted to Ma‘mar’s private use. Hence, although the work was the product of a teacher’s lessons and granted to a student to transmit as such, *The Expeditions*, as well as other compositions like it, functioned as a work that conformed to a literary form and was organized according to a topical and well-thought-out presentation of material.

However, such books were not intended to replace the memorization of received knowledge. The practice of memorization was still cultivated with the utmost care. ‘Abd al-Razzāq would fondly recall Ma‘mar feeding him the fruit of the myrobalanus plant (Ar. *halīlaj*), presumably to sharpen his memory.<sup>47</sup> Memorization would remain the sine qua non of scholarly mastery for some time to come. Yet even ‘Abd al-Razzāq had considerable resources at his disposal to aid his preservation of vast amounts of hadith, exceeding the capacity of even the most prodigious memory. When he attended lectures of learned men alongside his father and brother, ‘Abd al-Razzāq reputedly brought with him an entourage of stationers (Ar. *warrāqūn*) to record what they had heard via audition.<sup>48</sup>

The preservation of texts such as Ma‘mar’s *The Expeditions* is admittedly not entirely straightforward, but this is in large part due to the fact that the genres of Arabic prose were still inchoate and evolving. With the exception of scattered papyrus fragments that testify to their material existence,<sup>49</sup> none of the second/eighth-century works of Arabic historical writing survives into modern times, save in later recensions. These recensions themselves are often at least two generations removed from the work’s putative author. Hence, the works of the master architect of the *maghāzī* genre, the Medinese scholar Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767–68), survive, but only in abridged, and perhaps even expurgated, versions of later scholars such as Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām (d. 218/834), and al-‘Uṭṭarīdī (d. 272/886).<sup>50</sup> That Ma‘mar’s *Expeditions* itself only survives in the larger, multivolume compilation of his student ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī called the *Muṣannaf* is therefore not in the least atypical.

The two works of Ma‘mar and Ibn Ishāq can be fruitfully compared. Compiled at the behest of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75),<sup>51</sup> Ibn Ishāq’s *Book of Expeditions* (*Kitāb al-Maghāzī*) is a massive enterprise, a masterpiece of narrative engineering that recounts God’s plan for humanity’s universal salvation, at the apex of which appears the life of Muḥammad, Islam’s prophet.<sup>52</sup> Ibn Ishāq’s work dwarfs Ma‘mar’s. The Cairo edition of the Arabic text of Ibn Hishām’s *redaction* of Ibn Ishāq’s work, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah* (*The Prophetic Life-Story*), runs to over 1,380 pages of printed text. The full version as conceived by Ibn Ishāq, had it survived, would have been far longer. Originally, the structure of Ibn Ishāq’s *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* appears to have been tripartite: *al-Mubtada’* (“the Genesis,” relating pre-Islamic history and that of the Abrahamic prophets from Adam to Jesus), *al-Mab’ath* (“the Call,” relating Muḥammad’s early life and his prophetic career in Mecca), and *al-Maghāzī* (“the Expeditions,” relating the events of his prophetic career in Medina until his death). In addition to these three sections, there might have existed a fourth: a *Tārīkh al-khulafā’*, or “History of the Caliphs.”<sup>53</sup>

Ma‘mar’s *Expeditions*, by contrast, is a far more slender, economical volume, even though it covers similar ground. *The Expeditions* is a substantial, though probably not exhaustive, collection of al-Zuhri’s *maghāzī* materials. Most of the major set pieces are present, though there appear to be some glaring omissions, such as the ‘Aqabah meetings between Muḥammad and the Medinese tribes prior to the Hijrah.<sup>54</sup> Though some scholars have raised questions about these missing pieces from Ma‘mar’s *Expeditions*, which for whatever reason ‘Abd al-Razzāq did not transmit, such traditions are likely to be few and far between, if indeed they ever existed.<sup>55</sup> Hence, the extensive “editing” of Ibn Ishāq’s materials that one finds in Ibn Hishām’s version of Ibn Ishāq’s text, for instance, is sparsely present, if not entirely absent, from ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s recension of Ma‘mar’s work.