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# Dating the Emergence of the Warrior-Prophet in *Maghāzī* Literature

*Second/Eighth to the Fourth/Tenth Century*

*Adrien de Jarmy*

## 1 Contextualising Early *Maghāzī* Literature

### 1.1 “Prepare to Fight with All Your Might!”

These words, spoken in the first person, and emphasising the narrative tension before battle, were used by Muḥammad to galvanise the Muslims as they prepared to face the Quraysh in Badr (2/624), according to the account in the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* by al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823).<sup>1</sup> In *maghāzī* texts, the famous battles, such as Badr, Uḥud (3/625), al-Khandaq (5/627),<sup>2</sup> and al-Fāṭḥ (8/629–30)<sup>3</sup> are the highlights of the Prophet’s mission. He is represented as a valiant warrior, whose role as intercessor between earth and heaven is decisive in bringing the Believers (*mu’minīn*) to victory. The earliest sources we have on the life of Muḥammad are the *maghāzī*, but they are far from being a consistent literary genre because they encompass a mix of different types of texts: lists of martyrs, poetry, Qur’ānic explanations, anecdotes resembling those found in the Bible, and of course accounts of military expeditions. The principal characteristic of this literature is the omnipresence of subjects related to war: its rules, the eagerness in combat against the infidels, the distribution of spoils, stereotypes about the peoples who were conquered (mainly the People of the Book). *Maghāzī* literature began to take shape at the end of the Umayyad era, in the first decades of the second/eighth century: the conquests were receding into memory and the need to write down the key features of historic Islamic military successes arose. The end of the conquests had opened up space for a reflexive discourse on the past and origins of Islam, within the close relationship between Umayyad power and the first scholars to shape its memory.<sup>4</sup>

1 Wāqidi, *The Kitāb al-maghāzī*, 100.

2 The Battle of the Trench.

3 The conquest of Mecca.

4 Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir. L’espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides*.

During the same period, the end of the Umayyad state was brought about by a succession of military crises on the borders of the Empire.<sup>5</sup> Since the Prophet emerged as a literary character in this historiographical context, it's no surprise that some of the earliest representations of the Prophet Muḥammad depict him as a warrior.<sup>6</sup>

It is now clear that this historiography was born during the reign of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65/685–86/705), through knowledge gathered by 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/712–13).<sup>7</sup> However, for this era it is difficult to evaluate which form of transmission is more important, oral or written. Throughout the second/eighth century, scholars debated the value of writing, either because – for them – the authority of oral transmission was paramount, or because the Qur'ān was considered to be the only valid corpus recorded in writing. This could explain their reluctance, until the end of the Umayyad era, to write down Prophetic traditions.<sup>8</sup> So how can we date the emergence of the character of the Warrior-Prophet in *maghāzī* literature, if the historiography seems so hazy? Gregor Schoeler submitted an interesting model to overcome this problem: in denying 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr's authorship of a *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, he stated that scholars of the time still favoured oral transmission. The texts they did write were far from being structured works (*syngammata*) intended to be publicly read, as we expect later productions to be; instead, they wrote down notes, which served as reminders (*hypomnēmata*). During Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's (d. 124/742) lifetime, and through the course of his work, an important transition occurred.<sup>9</sup> According to one of his students, Mālik b. Anas, he had disliked the idea of writing traditions down.<sup>10</sup> But another of his students, Ma'mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), reported that one of al-Zuhrī's companions, Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān (d. after 140/757–8), had stated that al-Zuhrī encouraged followers to put Prophetic traditions in writing, leading Gregor Schoeler to deduce that the scholar had changed his mind towards the end of his life,

5 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State*.

6 We insist on the relationship between representations of Muḥammad as a warrior and the birth of a military historiography, because representations of Muḥammad might have emerged differently had they been based on other material. See, for instance, the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, Tillier, "Abd al-Malik, Muḥammad et le Jugement dernier".

7 Horowitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, is the first study in which this theory was clearly expressed; it was confirmed more recently by Gregor Schoeler and Andreas Görke, see Schoeler *et al.*, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads*.

8 Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam".

9 Schoeler, "al-Zuhrī et la consignation par écrit des traditions", 52–56.

10 Schoeler, "al-Zuhrī et la consignation par écrit des traditions", 43–45.

under the impetus of a general change in attitudes to the written word and the benefits it could provide.

The two decades around the transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty were crucial, marking a step change in Islamic tradition, and in perceptions of the character of Muḥammad. Two of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri's students, Ma'mar b. Rāshid and his famous contemporary, the scholar Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), are well-known: the first for having composed a *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, and the second for the *sīra*.<sup>11</sup> The fact that these works encouraged their own (sometimes altered) re-transmission in later recensions (*rivāyāt*), through which they have come down to us,<sup>12</sup> proves both that they existed as written productions and that they were successful as authoritative works. Ma'mar b. Rāshid's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* was the basis of the *Muṣannaḥ* by his student 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣān'ānī (d. 211/826),<sup>13</sup> and the *sīra* was presented in the work of Ibn Hishām, (d. 213/828 or 218/833), who was born in Baṣra but appears to have lived most of his life in Egypt.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of the *terminus post quem* of their dates of death, and putting aside very complex and sometimes fragile methods such as the *isnād-cum-matn*,<sup>15</sup> logically we can conclude that both works give us a representation of the Prophet that dates from the earliest days of the *miḥna*, which started in 217/833. However, each of these two works has been transmitted to us by very different means: Ibn Hishām's *sīra* is taken from a recension by al-Bakkā'ī of Kūfa (d. 183/799), whereas 'Abd al-Razzāq's work was composed directly from the teachings of his master Ma'mar, who established himself in Ṣān'ā' after the fall of the Umayyad state. Although we know very little of Ibn Hishām's life,<sup>16</sup> the time elapsed between the date of Ibn Ishāq's death (150/767) and his own (c. 213/828) makes it very unlikely that the two

11 It is not clear whether Ibn Ishāq called his own work the *Sīra* or if this was the title given it by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), who composed the summary. For two different points of view on the subject, see Hinds, "Maghāzī and *Sīra* in early Islamic scholarship" 57–66, and Jarrar, *Die Prophetenbiographie im islamischen Spanien*.

12 The work is known to us from the summary by Ibn Hishām. There are other well-known recensions, such as the work by Salama b. al-Fāḍl al-Abrash of Ray (d. after 190/805–6), which survived in the *Ta'rikh* by al-Ṭābarī (d. 310/923), and Yūnus b. Bukayr of Kūfa (d. 199/815). For a list of recensions of the *Sīra*, see the introduction of Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*.

13 Rāshid, *The Expeditions*. See also 'Abd al-Razzāq b. al-Ṣān'ānī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, and index.

14 Our work rests on three editions of the text: *al-Sīra*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld; *Das Leben Muhammads*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā *et al*; and *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salam Tadmurī.

15 Motzki, "Dating Muslim traditions", and "The *Muṣannaḥ* of 'Abd al-Razzāq b. al-Ṣān'ānī as a source of authentic *ahādīth* of the first century A.H."

16 See Hinds, "al-Maghāzī" and Ravens, "Sīra".

ever met, or, in any case, that they could have had a close relationship such as existed between Ma‘mar and ‘Abd al-Razzāq.

The purposes of these different recensions are also quite distinct: Ibn Hishām’s text is the result of a rearranged summary, and he specifies that he left a great deal of his source to one side. The whole work is built on a chronological account of Muḥammad’s life, in an approach similar to that adopted in al-Wāqidi’s *Kitāb al-maghāzī*. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, on the other hand, chose to include his teacher’s *Kitāb al-maghāzī* in his own collection of *ḥādīth*: this project took him in another direction. Ignoring much of the chronology, and depriving the text of dating, he was content to transmit the raw bulk of traditions according to his teacher. Certain features of his work, such as his direct relationship with his master, the fact that Ma‘mar lived at the Umayyad court before leaving for Ṣan‘ā, and the archaic framework of the text, make it more plausible that ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Kitāb al-maghāzī* reflects Ma‘mar’s vision, and thus presents something of the state of historiography in the last decade of the Umayyad dynasty.

Untangling the facts behind the composition of Ibn Hishām’s *Sīra* is a much more difficult process. The text is comprised of many different segments, and Ibn Ishāq was known to have found caliphal patrons in the new Abbasid capital of Baghdād, while Ma‘mar left for Yemen. Historiography was an activity that had been sponsored by the court since the early Umayyad era,<sup>17</sup> meaning that while these stories may have been circulated orally between scholars, some of them also spread in the form of written texts and, thanks to state patronage, were recognised as part of the canonical account. All of this makes it more likely that literary representations of the *sīra* gained authority between the first decade of the Abbasid dynasty and the composition of Ibn Hishām’s *Sīra*. This offers a context, and solid ground on which to base an argument that the emergence of a Warrior-Prophet character in the *maghāzī* literature was a dynamic and non-linear process.

The first half of the third/ninth century saw the appearance of many well-known texts, such as the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* by al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823), transmitted through the recension by Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/845), who also wrote the *Ṭabaqāt*.<sup>18</sup> During the same period, Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) included a *Kitāb al-maghāzī* in his *Muṣannaf*,<sup>19</sup> a practice that was also followed, among people compiling collections of *ḥādīth*, by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) in his

17 Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds*, 46; Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, “Umayyad Court” 659–663.

18 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt al-kubra*.

19 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*.

famous *Ṣaḥīḥ*. In these texts Prophetic traditions became much more complex, and accounts of supranatural events such as the miracles of the Prophet became frequent. This form of devotion towards Muḥammad is best reflected in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt*, and in certain chapters of a much later work: al-Ṭabarī's (310/923) *Taʾrīkh*,<sup>20</sup> which offers lists and descriptions of Prophetic relics, war-related or not. We also argue that unlike Maʿmar's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, the *kutub al-jihād* and *siyar* that emerged in the first half of the third/ninth century, and were included in re-collections of *ḥādīth* – made up for the most part of Prophetic traditions – were inspired by the revival of *jihād* at that time, and by its formalisation in famous treatises on the subject.

The representation of a Warrior-Prophet – and of Muḥammad in general – only gradually begins to stand out in the historiography. In this study we will demonstrate general tendencies, highlighting the historical background that supported the development of this character of the Warrior-Prophet in *maghāzī* literature. To do this, we have avoided *asānīd*-centred methodologies and favoured a more comparative approach, examining similarities and differences between the texts recounting traditions, that is to say the *mutūn*. To evaluate the presence of the Prophet in the sources, we applied both quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, we will build our argument on statistics relating to traditions mentioning Muḥammad, in samples taken from re-collections of *ḥādīth*. In this way we will confirm various important stages in the evolution of this character between the last decades of the Umayyad era and the first century of the Abbasid. We will then address the issue of the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions, showing that the way chroniclers chose to order these shaped the military memories of the origins of Islam that were current in the first half of the third/ninth century. Finally, we will examine the subject of the Prophet's relics of war as they appear in later texts: their presence in these indicates a growing devotion to the character of the Warrior-Prophet during the second half of the third/ninth century and up until the work of al-Ṭabarī.

## 2 The Warrior-Prophet: A Subject That Gradually Gained Importance in Historiography

As we suggested above, Maʿmar b. Rāshid's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, collected in the *Muṣannaʿ* of his direct student ʿAbd al-Razzāq, may reflect the state of historiography before the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty. Compared to later sources, this *Kitāb al-maghāzī* is a very brief text, comprising only 147

20 Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 119.

traditions in total.<sup>21</sup> At that time, historiography was far from encompassing the huge number of traditions that Abbasid scholars would later collect. The number of the traditions in this *Kitāb al-maghāzī* that mention Muḥammad is, however, comparatively high. The Prophet is present in 91 traditions, and in 27 of the 31 chapters (*bāb*) of the text. He is thus mentioned in 61.9% of the traditions, and in 73% of the chapters.<sup>22</sup> Muḥammad occupies almost two-thirds of this entire text dedicated to the military history of the origins of Islam, making it possible that Maʿmar's work reflects a historiographical stage that had already made progress in this direction, through a process that was initiated by his master, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (and perhaps others).<sup>23</sup> Thus the earliest literary representations of Muḥammad emerged in a war literature, expressing nostalgia for the great victories of the past, such as Badr or the conquest of Mecca, which is already called *al-Fatḥ* in Maʿmar's *Kitāb*.<sup>24</sup> In *The End of the Jihād State*,<sup>25</sup> Khalid Yahya Blankinship proposed that the Umayyad Caliphate based its expansion on the doctrine of *jihād*; this brought about the Empire's fall because imperial power lived beyond its means during the reign of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105/724–125/743) and ended up consuming itself. In cases where the theory of a centralised *jihād* as early as this has been debated,<sup>26</sup> historians such as Michael Bonner have agreed on the momentum of this collapse during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik's son, during which al-Zuhrī and Maʿmar b. Rāshid had a teacher-student relationship, and caliphal armies suffered a number of setbacks. In fact, the second siege of Constantinople preceded this period, occurring in 98/717–99/718, after which the Byzantines retaliated by attacking Syria. In the west, the Battle of Tours held back Umayyad armies in 113/732. At the same time, a number of revolts arose in the border regions of the newly conquered Empire: the Khazars killed the Arab governor of Armenia in 107/726, Transoxiana rose violently between 109/728 and 111/730, and the Berbers revolted in North Africa in 122/740–124/742. The Umayyad Empire,

21 In "The *Kitāb al-maghāzī* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī", Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort estimated a higher number of traditions in the book. However, as Sean W. Anthony noted in the introduction to Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, a number of these are actually commentaries by ʿAbd al-Razzāq on the traditions collected by his master.

22 See the chart in the appendix at the end of this chapter.

23 On this matter, we would have liked to read Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort's dissertation *Between History and Legend*. But, according to worldcat.org, only four universities in Europe have copies of the dissertation, mainly in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, so it was unavailable for our purposes.

24 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 94.

25 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihād State*.

26 Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*.

hitherto victorious, faced its first major defeats and the tremendous momentum of their expeditions, which had begun in the previous century, slowed to a halt.<sup>27</sup> At this time, Muslim scholars living in the entourage of caliphal power, such as al-Zuhri, and Ma'mar after him, were collecting military traditions dating from the beginnings of Islam. The correlation between the emergence of a widespread Islamic military historiography in the form of written works (*syngammata*) and the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty underlines the role a Warrior-Prophet could play for them as a historiographical hero.

Anyone looking for epic narratives and battles in the likes of Ibn Hisham's *Sira* and al-Waqidi's *Kitab al-maghazi* would, however, be truly disappointed. There is nothing of the sort in Ma'mar's text, in which we find only the raw skeleton of military traditions; this demonstrates that *maghazi* literature was, at this point, still in its early stages. Furthermore, the story doesn't end with the death of Muhammad, since more than a third of the work is dedicated to subjects such as the reign of Abu Bakr and his expeditions,<sup>28</sup> Umar's expeditions,<sup>29</sup> anecdotes concerning expeditions carried out by 'Ali and Mu'awiya,<sup>30</sup> and to an account of the battle of al-Qadisiyya (14/636).<sup>31</sup> Building on these facts, we would like to suggest two closely related hypotheses: although Muhammad was already the main character of Ma'mar's *Kitab*, statistics confirm that *maghazi* literature wasn't entirely associated with Muhammad's own biography until a much later date, maybe not until al-Waqidi's *Kitab al-maghazi*. In addition, Muhammad could have existed as merely one character among many others until the point at which he acquired complete authority in this literature, during the first half of the third/ninth century. Coming back to the chart, only 55.1% of the traditions in the *Kitab al-maghazi* that makes up part of Ibn Abi Shayba's *Muṣannaḥ* mention Muhammad. In the case of this text, determining a chronology is much more difficult than in that of Ma'mar's *Kitab al-maghazi*, because the origins of Abi Shayba's sources are more numerous and wide-ranging, and the text covers more ground. In Ibn Abi Shayba's work, the absolute number of traditions quoting Muhammad is much larger: over 319 from a total of 579, and such quotations occur in all 47 chapters, highlighting the evolution in historiography after Ma'mar's smaller *Kitab*. In the *Kitab al-maghazi* within Ibn Abi Shayba's *Muṣannaḥ*, Prophetic traditions occur throughout the text. Nevertheless, a significant part of the work is dedicated to various other

27 Hoyland, "Retrenchment and revolt", 170–206.

28 Ma'mar b. Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 192–215.

29 Ma'mar b. Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 252–261.

30 Ma'mar b. Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 216–237. See also the dispute between 'Ali and al-'Abbās, 241–251.

31 Ma'mar b. Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 266–271.



topics: the conversion of many Companions,<sup>32</sup> the reign of Abū Bakr and the *Ridda*,<sup>33</sup> the reigns of ‘Umar,<sup>34</sup> ‘Uthmān<sup>35</sup> and ‘Alī.<sup>36</sup> It seems that, at a time when Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī structured their texts entirely around the figure of the Prophet in a process that would lead to the canonisation of these texts in the Islamic tradition, Ibn Abī Shayba was still continuing to transmit a different version of Islamic historiography, closer to the trend that was in fashion in the final decades of the Umayyad era. It’s possible that Ibn Ishāq also continued to follow this trend, as, according to Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 384/995 or 387/998), he may also have transmitted traditions concerning the expeditions of the Successors and Umayyad conquests.<sup>37</sup> Ibn Hishām may have decided to put these to one side, in order to restrict himself to writing mostly about Prophetic traditions.

Besides the well-known sources that we have quoted here, during the first Abbasid century many other scholars were attracted to Islamic military historiography, such as Abū Ma‘shar Najīb b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sindī (d. 170/786), ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (d. 176/792), ‘Alī b. Mujāhid (d. 182/798), Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Umawī (d. 194/809), al-Walīd b. Muslim al-Umawī (d. 195/810), and ‘Abd Allah b. Wahb (d. 197/812). If scholarly works of Islamic military historiography were scarce and underdeveloped during the first half of the second/eighth century, the Abbasid era was blessed with the opposite phenomenon, seeing a huge development in *maghāzī* literature. This era was also marked by the formative period of the doctrine of *jihād* and its rules,<sup>38</sup> as danger arose on the borders of the Empire, putting pressure on the community of Muslims and *Dār al-Islam*. The Umayyad conquest offensive ended with their dynasty, and war under the Abbasids evolved; they adopted a more defensive approach, concentrated on the border ‘hot spots’ located on the margins of the territory. Michael Bonner has shown that this period was marked by a revival in the Empire of the ideology of *jihād*, in connection with the emergence of the notion of borders (*thugūr*) in Islam during the first century of the Abbasid caliphate, motivated by pro-Umayyad revolts and conflict with the Byzantine Empire.<sup>39</sup> As soon as the Abbasid dynasty came to power in 132/750, Syria, the Jazīra, and the region of Wāsiṭ in Iraq rose up under the influence

32 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 37580–37604....

33 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38039–38052.

34 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38053–38071.

35 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38072–38089.

36 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38090–38097.

37 Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm*, 200.

38 Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*.

39 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*, 43–135.

of pro-Umayyad governors who rejected the new rulers.<sup>40</sup> Between 133/750 and 137/755, the Byzantine emperor Constantine V took advantage of this moment of weakness to attack the border in northern Syria and the fortresses of Malatya, Shimshāt, and al-Maṣṣīṣa, which were deep in Anatolian territory.<sup>41</sup> Byzantine attacks on the border resumed in 168–70/785–86 and the Muslim defensive system was jeopardised and threatened to collapse. The border was then extensively reorganised under the reign of Ḥārūn al-Rashīd (763–809), who established a line of fortresses from al-Maṣṣīṣa<sup>42</sup> to Malatya, as well as an army (*jund*) specially assigned to this region. The Arab-Byzantine border then became known as *al-Āwāṣim*,<sup>43</sup> a province in its own right and a buffer zone against the enemy. Between 130/750 and the first decades of the third/ninth century, the Byzantine threat therefore weighed heavily on the *Dār al-Islam*.

Surely, the evolution of Islamic military historiography and the concomitant increase in the production of *maghāzī* texts can be related to the revival of *jihād* ideology during the period leading up to the third/ninth century. This revival must also have played a role in the increase in the number and importance of Prophetic traditions in such texts. Statistics drawn from Ibn Abī Shayba's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* indicate that at the time of its composition this process was on-going. However, the absolute number of traditions mentioning Muḥammad grew significantly, as witnessed by his presence in every chapter of Ibn Abī Shayba's text. What's more, during the same period al-Wāqidi chose to include only the Medina years of Muḥammad's life in his *Kitāb al-maghāzī*. Al-Bukhārī, who died in 256/870, travelled from a very young age in order to collect the Prophetic traditions that he included in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. He chose to write a *Kitāb al-maghāzī* centred almost exclusively on the Prophet's life and traditions relating to it, including over 402 prophetic traditions (out of a total of 488), 88.3% of the traditions cited. In the case of this text, 87 of the 90 chapters (96.6%) mention Muḥammad. In their works, these scholars completed the association between *maghāzī* literature and the biography of Muḥammad, represented as a Warrior-Prophet.

Thus, the representation of Muḥammad as a Warrior-Prophet very gradually and progressively became important in the historiography presented in the *maghāzī*. This phenomenon had its roots deep in the evolution of the military context that existed between the end of the Umayyad era and the

40 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*, 45.

41 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*, 50–51, quoted the following sources: "al-Ṭabarī, 111, 121; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 186, 199; Azdīn, 142; Ya'qūbī, 11, 435; Khalīfa, 626. For Christian sources: Pseudo-Dionysos, 55–65; Michel the Syrian, 11, 518, and Theophanes, 427, 429".

42 Mopsuestia.

43 Meaning the defence or the protection.

first Abbasid century, and it influenced a rearrangement of the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions.

### 3 The Chronology of the Prophet's Expeditions: A Teleological Construction in Sources from the Third/Ninth Century

Several researchers have dedicated important studies to the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions. As early as 1957, J. M. B. Jones published an extensive survey, comparing the dates given by al-Wāqidi in his *Kitāb al-maghāzī* with data from other sources, particularly the *Sīra*.<sup>44</sup> Uri Rubin, from the other side of the historiographical spectrum, tackled the subject differently in an epilogue to *The Eye of the Beholder*, assessing numerical patterns that emerged from the chronology, a similar process to that found in the Jewish biblical tradition.<sup>45</sup> Assuming that the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions could only be understood as it echoed past Jewish theology, he left behind the historical context in which these texts were produced and based his study solely on literary representations. Letting go of all historical positivism, the influence of John Wansbrough was here very clear, and as he stated that Muslim chronology could only be grasped through its relationship with a past referent, his work led to epistemological relativism.<sup>46</sup> Without denying the theological project that supported the construction of the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions, we shall insist here on a related but distinct purpose: teleology.

Looking at the chronology in the *kutub al-maghāzī* of Ma'mar b. Rāshid and Ibn Abī Shayba, one can't help but notice how incomplete it is, and how little it corresponds to the order established by Ibn Hishām – or possibly by Ibn Ishāq before him – and by al-Wāqidi. Thus, Ma'mar b. Rāshid's text begins with the

44 Jones, "The Chronology of the *Maghāzī*". For a more complete survey of other studies on the chronology of Muḥammad's life, see Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition" 16–20. We owe this reference to Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 189.

45 Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 189–214.

46 Epistemological relativism is a scientific position that prioritises the relationships between different known facts and stipulates that an experience has meaning only in its relationship with a preceding experience that echoes it. The value of something known is understandable only through these relationships, which also determine its function, regardless of whether what is known is considered to be true or false. Grammar seems to us to be a good analogy: we separate a word's function from its meaning, with its function being much more volatile. The accusation of epistemological relativism was first laid against the historian of the sciences, Thomas Samuel Kuhn. See Lakhoff G. et al., *Metaphors we Live By*.

excavation of the well of Zamzam by ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib,<sup>47</sup> then makes a jump through time to the expedition of Ḥudaybiyya (6/628).<sup>48</sup> Then the story flashes back to the battle of Badr (2/624) and continues in chronological order until the expedition of Ḥunayn (8/630),<sup>49</sup> before opening an ellipsis concerning the Believers who emigrated to Abyssinia, an episode dating from the Prophet’s life in Mecca.<sup>50</sup> The story then resumes, and there is another parenthetical return to the past with an account of the battle of al-Khandaq (5/627).<sup>51</sup>

The framework of Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Kitāb al-maghāzī* is more consistent. Nevertheless, in the last chapter of this book (*bāb*), after having narrated the reigns of the Prophet’s Successors, the compiler flashes back to the first oath of ‘Aqaba.<sup>52</sup> However, on the contrary, in the texts of Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī temporality and chronology are structural elements. The order of the main expeditions is strictly the same, with differences existing only among accounts of minor expeditions. The chronological organisation of the narrative served a teleological purpose: to underline the stages in which Islam, and its protagonist Muḥammad, achieved victory. Perhaps this history of origins, focused on the Prophet, met the new Abbasid dynasty’s need for legitimisation, as did their kinship with Muḥammad through his uncle al-‘Abbās, a claim that was widely circulated at the beginning of their reign.<sup>53</sup> Even in the early fourth/tenth century, the affiliation between Abbasid power and the Prophet’s history made sense in al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīkh*, a narrative that starts from the Creation and early days of biblical history and extends to the year 293/905–6. It is possible that a universal history was already in the making with Ibn Ishāq’s text. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn Ishāq also wrote a *Kitāb al-mubtada’*.<sup>54</sup> It is difficult to know if this was part of the *Sīra* or constituted a separate manuscript. However, during the Abbasid era, universal history became the subject of greater attention as more scholars thought about the implications of including Muḥammad’s life in a broader, biblical scheme.

A number of elements related to dating confirm that chronology had a teleological purpose. In the most well-known sources written during the Abbasid

47 Ma’mar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 2–25.

48 Ma’mar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 26–49.

49 Ma’mar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 50–111.

50 Ma’mar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 112–129.

51 Ma’mar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 160–165.

52 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38098–38105.

53 Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*. Although their theory was understandably received with much controversy, their repeated references to *Rasūl Allāh* in the Abbasid caliphal title in letters and poetry at least underlined their desire to link their ideology more closely with Muḥammad’s authority.

54 *Ibid.*

period, the dates of the expeditions are always given. John Wansbrough has pointed out this feature in the texts of Ibn Ishāq-Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī in *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. Wansbrough saw this as proof of a gradual transition to a normative and legal literature that is based on the dating of the first events, and follows a logic that is useful for jurisprudence.<sup>55</sup>

However, the dates of the expeditions are much rarer, or absent, in the *kutub al-maghāzī* which are integrated into the *muṣannafāt* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba. One could argue that these two men were traditionalists above all, and that their goal was to compile normative traditions and integrate them into the great compilations of *ḥādīth*, thus shaping the *sunna*. One could also say that at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century the work of Ibn Hishām, al-Wāqidī and al-Ṭabarī, although it diverged in other ways, was like that of historians, whose role is crucial for the dating of events, but – at first sight – had a very minor influence on the formalisation of the *sunna*. Without fully rejecting this argument, it can be noted that the work of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid, whose work was transmitted in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*, did resemble that of Ibn Ishāq, who (unlike him, and working barely a decade later, at the start of Abbasid reign) did transmit the dates of the expeditions. In addition, al-Bukhārī, a famous traditionist, adopted the classic chronology for the expeditions in his *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, integrated within the *Saḥīḥ*, whose writing dates at the latest from the years preceding his death in 256/870. This great traditionist places at the beginning of his book the expedition of al-‘Ushayra (2/623),<sup>56</sup> one of the first expeditions of the Prophet in the main texts of *maghāzī*, before continuing the story with the battle of Badr<sup>57</sup> and subsequent major military events, until the Prophet’s death.<sup>58</sup> It is difficult to know whether al-Bukhārī adopted the chronological model established in the first decades of the Abbasid era. However, the fact that this model is included in the largest compilation of Sunnī *ḥādīth* shows that it acquired authority in the Muslim world in his time.

55 “[...] in the *maghāzī* literature proper an explicit and meticulous chronology is not merely attested but becomes its organising principle. It is thus that each episode is introduced: ‘and that was [so many] months after the *Hijra* (*‘alā ra’s ... ashur min muhājarat rasūl allāh*).’”; “A further, and equally significant, impulse is evident: a concern to fix the dates of first occurrences (*awā’il*), e.g. the first battle standard (*liwā*) bestowed by Muḥammad (Wāqidī, 9: to Ḥamza), the first shot fired in the cause of Islam (Wāqidī, 10: to Sa’d). Solicitude for ‘origins’ eventually produced a genre of Arabic literature whose *raison d’être* was not so much historical as juridical.”, in Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 30, 31.

56 *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 59, 285.

57 *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 59, 286–362.

58 *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 59, 741–745.

In the writings of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, and Ibn Abī Shayba, the presence of numerous temporal ellipses and the frequent absence of dates for the events recounted indicate that chronology was not yet a major concern. Unlike the *Sīra*, whose title<sup>59</sup> reflects an insistence on the chronological sequence, and therefore on the biography of the character, there is no ‘life path’ in these texts, but rather an accumulation of traditions relating to expeditions that took place during the beginnings of Islam, and within which the Prophet plays an increasingly important role. It is only in later texts that the Prophet becomes the sole subject of the *maghāzī* and that his life story is structured chronologically. Contrary to what Wansbrough argued, here chronology has a true narrative purpose and does not serve only as a transition from narrative to normative texts.

#### 4 Prophetic Relics of War

This complete focus on the character of Muḥammad in *maghāzī* literature during the first half of the third/ninth century led to the development of devotional traditions, and a focus on a series of relics that personified the qualities of the Warrior-Prophet. Let us consider some traditions that appear late in the formalisation of Muḥammad’s biography: short chapters dedicated to the description of his possessions, organised in the form of lists and generally accompanied by comments from the writers of traditions. We shall focus more specifically on weapons and mounts, traditions that shaped the image of Muḥammad in the sources. The descriptions of the Prophet’s weapons confirm not only his image as a warrior – despite there being very little actual single combat in the narration of traditions – but also the royal features of this character, similar in appearance to the caliphs. If parts of the Prophet’s armoury were already mentioned occasionally in older sources, the first appearance (to our knowledge) of this type of chapter occurs in Ibn Sa‘d’s *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, and this was followed in the next century by al-Ṭabarī, who explicitly quotes his predecessor in the *asānīd*. The appearance of these chapters in the biography of the Prophet can therefore be situated at the time of the writing of the *Ṭabaqāt*: the first decades of the third/ninth century. Indeed, Ibn Sa‘d dedicates one chapter to Muḥammad’s swords,<sup>60</sup> another to his coats of mail,<sup>61</sup> one to

59 Literally, “the way”, also meaning “the [written] life” of a character, the protagonist’s life becoming a model for the Muslim community.

60 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 417–419.

61 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 419–420.

his shields,<sup>62</sup> and one to his bows and spears.<sup>63</sup> Al-Ṭabarī copied this structure exactly, but nevertheless tended to group and to synthesise the various *asānīd*.<sup>64</sup>

The majority of the Prophet's weapons have their own individual names: the three swords drawn from the armoury of the Banū Qaynuqā – one of the three Jewish tribes of Yathrib – are called *Qalaṭ*,<sup>65</sup> *Battār*,<sup>66</sup> and *al-Ḥatf*.<sup>67</sup> The two swords taken with the booty from the sanctuary of al-Son are *al-Mikhdam*,<sup>68</sup> and *Rasūb*,<sup>69</sup> and there is also *al-ʿAdhb*,<sup>70</sup> which was used in the battle of Badr. The Banū Qaynuqā armoury also housed three bows, named *al-Rawḥā*,<sup>71</sup> *al-Bayḍā*,<sup>72</sup> and *al-Ṣafrā*,<sup>73</sup> and three coats of mail: *al-Saʿdiyya*,<sup>74</sup> *Fidḍa*,<sup>75</sup> and *Dhāt al-Fuḍūl*.<sup>76</sup> This nominal census of the Prophet's weapons had several functions: first, for memory, because the name personalised the object by underlining the exceptional singularity of its manufacture, or its deadly aim.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the very fact of naming the object made of it something literally extraordinary. In synthesising the *asānīd* collected from the work of Ibn Saʿd, al-Ṭabarī generally presented the objects in groups of two or three in his chapters. We can suspect that this choice wasn't random, instead emanating from stylistic processes and aiming to provide a mnemonic device rather than a repository of historical precision. The second function of this presentation is linked to the reliquary potential, and possible magical and supernatural properties, of these weapons.

In a paper devoted to the Prophet's relics, Tayeb El-Hibri showed that there was a turning point in the development of historiography around them during the first decades of the third/ninth century, encouraged by the growing interest of the Abbasid caliphs, who relied on their kinship with Muḥammad to establish their legitimacy.<sup>78</sup> Tayeb El-Hibri devoted a passage to the famous

62 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 420.

63 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 421.

64 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, 1786–1788.

65 'Taken by force'.

66 'Very sharp'.

67 'The death'.

68 'Sharp'.

69 'Piercing'.

70 'Sharp'.

71 A place 60km from Medina.

72 'The white'.

73 'The yellow'.

74 A place near to Medina, famous for the quality of its metallurgy.

75 'Silver'.

76 Called this because it was very large.

77 For a translation of these names, see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume IX*.

78 El-Hibri, "The Abbasids and the Relics of the Prophet", 62–96.

sword *Dhū al-Faqār*,<sup>79</sup> obtained in spoils at the battle of Badr.<sup>80</sup> This sword, commonly represented with two pointed tips, was already mentioned in the *Sīra*, although Alfred Guillaume considers the passage in which this mention occurs to be an addition by Ibn Hishām, which would confirm that this type of tradition was not integrated into the biography of the Prophet until a very late date.<sup>81</sup> *Dhū al-Faqār* is also known for its magical properties. In the account given by al-Ṭabarī, the Prophet entrusts it to ‘Alī during the battle of Uḥud, and the sword puts ‘Alī into a warlike trance, giving him superhuman strength on the battlefield.<sup>82</sup> After Muḥammad’s death, ‘Alī inherited the sword, and it is said he will brandish it during the Last Judgement. In an article published in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, the scholar Jean Calmard underlined the importance of *Dhū al-Faqār* in medieval Shia literature, the magic sword being one of the *regalia* of ‘Alī, another sign of his legitimacy as successor of the Prophet.<sup>83</sup> The support that populations originating from Fars provided for the Abbasid revolution, as well as the vagueness maintained in reports of their support for the Alids, might have contributed to the development of this figure in the literature of the *maghāzī*. Generally speaking, *Dhū al-Faqār* is therefore a sign of authority, a symbol of the political heritage, and the conquests, of Muḥammad.

The anecdote of the magical shield, which is less familiar to historians, reminds those who know it that the Prophet is placed under the best auspices. In this short chapter, where only one tradition is reported by ‘Attāb b. Ziyād – ‘Abd Allāh b. Mubārak – ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Yazīd b. Jābir – Makḥūl, the Messenger of God expresses his hatred of the ram’s head (*rās kabsh*) depicted on one of the shields taken in spoils. One night, when no one is watching, Allāh makes the figure to which the Prophet had objected disappear.<sup>84</sup> The miracle reminds us that Muḥammad is indeed the chosen one and favourite of God, and that He also acts according to His good will. The story also contributes to the mystery surrounding the Prophet’s weapons and relics, underlining the supernatural that assists him in his every need.

Finally, we can note that some of these lists are dedicated to the mounts of the Prophet: his racehorses, mules and camels.<sup>85</sup> The presentation of his entire prestigious stable brings the Prophet closer to the way in which caliphs are represented, and tends to distance him from the figure of a more ascetic Prophet.

79 A famous sword with its point divided into two parts.

80 El-Hibri, “The Abbasids and the Relics of the Prophet”, 82–83.

81 Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 756.

82 al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, 1402.

83 Calmard, “*Dhū al-Faqār*”.

84 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 420, and al-Ṭabarī, 1787–1788.

85 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 421–425, and al-Ṭabarī, 1782–1786.



But to understand the importance of this type of addition in the biography of the Prophet, we need to return to a broadly comparative approach. Not surprisingly, the first books dealing with the art of war and *jihād* in Islam already included chapters that dealt with fighting on horseback and the importance of mounts. Above all, the noble (aristocratic and/or brave) fighter is associated with his mount, which distinguishes him socially from the infantrymen, in a common stereotype that was already to be found in pre-Islamic poetry such as the *Ayyām al-‘Arab*.<sup>86</sup> This association is found in a number of chapters in ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Šan‘ānī’s *Kitāb al-jihād* and in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Kitāb al-siyār*.<sup>87</sup>

What is more interesting is that this type of war literature relating to Muḥammad emerged between the very end of the second/eighth and the beginning of third/ninth century, when Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/797–98) wrote his *Kitāb al-siyār*, the first normative work of its kind, dealing with the rules and stereotypes of war according to new Islamic standards. ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba followed this trend in their respective *mušannafāt*, which confirm the integration of chapters of this type in major compilations, based on *ḥādīth*, between 210/820 and 230/840. As we have seen, this period corresponds to one of the high points in the struggle between the Abbasids and the Byzantine Empire, between the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) and that of al-Mu‘tašim (r. 833–842). The great *al-‘Awāšim* border defence policy launched by Hārūn al-Rashīd confirmed that the army, and the rules of war, were at the centre of his state’s concerns, reflecting the evolution of the geopolitical context. Although the figure of the Warrior-Prophet was already central in the *Sīra*, at this point Muḥammad’s authority began to spill over from the realm of narration and to support a normative approach to the rules of war in the various *kutub al-jihād* and the *kutub al-siyār* of the following century. This may explain why such chapters as these did not appear until a comparatively late date. It is not certain that the study of *asānīd* could allow us more precisely to establish the relationship between books of the rules of war and this type of chapter in the texts of Ibn Sa‘d and al-Ṭabarī. On the contrary, transmitters of the various *asānīd* only rarely met, even if this point deserves further study. However, the parallel emergence of these chapters in the biography of the Prophet in the *kutub al-jihād* and the *kutub al-siyār*, as well as the geopolitical context surrounding this historiography, make it likely that these traditions spread among traditionists during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Finally, we can note the presence of traditions relating to the weapons and mounts of the Prophet

86 ‘The Days of the Arabs’.

87 See, for instance, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Mušannaf*, 9313–9325, and Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Mušannaf*, 33109–33126.

in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*, written at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. By explicitly taking up traditions from the *Ṭabaqāt*, al-Ṭabarī participated in the establishment of important *topoi*: that is to say, of canonical representations of the Warrior-Prophet. The continuity of these traditions over more than a century shows that these stories had gained authority in the Islamic tradition.

## 5 Conclusion: The Warrior-Prophet in Historiography: A Character Competing with the Ṣaḥāba?

The diachronic perspective is an important approach to the study of the birth of historiography in the first three centuries of Islam. The many years that elapsed between the time of the first expeditions and their narration certainly favoured the rewriting of history. Within the scope of this military history, the character of a Warrior-Prophet emerged only gradually. Recovering the different stages, and the chronology, of the appearance of this figure in historiography is a difficult undertaking, and we can only sketch the main trends of this process. However, taking the *kutub al-maghāzī* into consideration, but also the *kutub al-jihād* and the *kutub al-siyar* that are included in the *muṣannafāt* by 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba, opened up new perspectives and allowed us to go back further in time. The comparison with classical sources shows that the story was not completely centred around the figure of the Prophet until a very late era, suggesting that there was a time when Muḥammad was only one character among many, and it was only afterwards that the story of his life and his expeditions became exclusive in historiography. This approach also encouraged us to touch on other topics. In his famous study on the formation of Islamic law and jurisprudence in the first centuries of the hijra, Joseph Schacht postulated a much-debated phenomenon, that of competition for authority among the great figures of Islam.<sup>88</sup> According to him, the various schools of law that were still taking shape until the third/ninth century led jurists and traditionists to refer first to the authority and *ḥādīth* of the Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*) – even if this made it necessary to manufacture them to order – and then to those of the Prophet. Very gradually, and passing through different stages, the authority of the Prophet became dominant and exclusive, a key element of the *sunna*. Putting aside the question of the authenticity of the traditions in question, statistics indicate that in the realm of historiography there may have been rivalries among the great figures of the beginnings of Islam. To ignore this phenomenon could lead to a risk of denying all tensions

88 Schacht, *The Origins of Muḥammadan Jurisprudence*.

in the construction of an Islamic military historiography, which would result in a very problematic understanding of the dynamics around the evolution of Muḥammad's authority in the Islamic tradition.<sup>89</sup> To pursue a comparative approach would lead to a better understanding of the role of *maghāzī* texts in the development of the *sunna*.

## Appendix

TABLE 2.1 Percentages of traditions mentioning Muḥammad (including various *asānīd*) in the *kutub al-maghāzī* or *ḥadīth* collections

Collection and traditionist	Number of traditions in the whole text ( <i>kitāb</i> )	Number of traditions mentioning Muḥammad in the text	Number of chapters ( <i>bāb</i> ) in the text	Number of chapters mentioning Muḥammad in the text	Percentage of traditions mentioning Muḥammad in the text	Percentage of chapters mentioning Muḥammad (at least once)
<i>Muṣannaf</i> of 'Abd al-Razzāq	147	91	31	27	61.9%	73%
<i>Muṣannaf</i> of Ibn Abī Shayba	579	319	47	47	55.1%	100%
<i>Ṣaḥīḥ</i> of al-Bukhārī	488	402	90	87	88.3%	96.6%

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89 On the issue of authority in the Islamic tradition, see Brockopp, "Theorizing Charismatic Authority in Early Islamic Law".

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