

Javier Garcia

Professor Sabra

History 145A

13 October 2022

### The Life of Muhammad

Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, one of the most prominent monotheistic religions emerged in the Western Arabian Peninsula, Islam. Its founder and prophet, Muhammad, through revelations given to him by God, spread God's word across the Arabian Peninsula, establishing the religion of Islam. However, much of Islam's early history, in particular Muhammad's life, is quite subjective to historians. Due to the lack of primary accounts during Muhammad's time, historians continuously struggle to develop an authentic notion of who Muhammad was and the early nature of his monotheistic movement. Most historians base their notions of Muhammad and the early years of his movement, on accounts that were written well after Muhammad's death, thus leaving many historians to ponder the authenticity of certain aspects of Muhammad's life, as well as the early nature of his movement. However, Ma'mar ibn Rāshid's, *The Expeditions*, a biography of Muhammad, is a rare primary account written not long after Muhammad's death that provides historians with crucial information on who Muhammad truly was and the authentic nature of his community and movement. Ultimately, in the excerpts of the biography, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's commanding, yet, benevolent relationship with his community, as well as the early Muslim community's evolving view of Muhammad as a divine figure, nonetheless, like many other accounts of Muhammad's life, his early community, and movement, certain factors such as bias and interpretation, may have influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid's text.

Throughout the excerpts of the biography, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's commanding, yet, benevolent relationship with his community. An instance in which Muhammad displays his commanding relationship is when he leads his community against the opposing pagan tribe of Mecca, the Quraysh. According to Ibn Rāshid, "They then went forth and, at a certain point on the journey, the Prophet said, "Khālid ibn al-Walīd is at al-Ghamīm with a troop of cavalry from the Quraysh serving as scouts, so take the path to the right" (29). Through his militaristic leadership, Muhammad developed a commanding relationship with his community. Additionally, Ibn Rāshid provides the Quraysh perspective specifically, 'Urwah ibn Mas'ūd al-Thaqafī, an emissary, who was preparing to come into conflict with Muhammad, in presenting Muhammad's commanding relationship with his community, "By God, I have never seen a king whose companions so revered him as the companions of Muhammad revere Muhammad" (33). In presenting 'Urwah's perspective, Ibn Rāshid demonstrates that not only did Muhammad's community acknowledge his commanding nature, but also their pagan rivals, the Quraysh, acknowledged Muhammad's commanding relationship as well. Ultimately, through Muhammad's commanding order and the Quraysh perspective, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's commanding relationship with his community.

Furthermore, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's benevolent relationship with his community. One instance in which Muhammad displays his benevolent relationship with his community is when he inquires, about tactical insight on how to handle the Quraysh forces he and his community are about to encounter, from one of his followers he sent to spy on the Quraysh. According to Ibn Rāshid, "The Prophet said, 'Lend me your counsel" (27). Muhammad, the Prophet of God, insists that he valued the opinion of his followers, those of whom idolized him, by asking them to lend him their tactical council, which demonstrates the

benevolence Muhammad had established within his community. Furthermore, the follower whom Muhammad had asked counsel for, was humbled, “They said, “The Messenger of God knows best, O Prophet of God!” (Ibn Rāshid 27). Another instance in which Muhammad displays his benevolent relationship with his community is when his followers were reluctant to follow his ritual commands of sacrificing a camel and shaving their heads. According to Ibn Rāshid, “When he had finished with the matter of the written agreement . . . his followers saw this, they stood up, sacrificed their camels, and each began shaving the head of the other, nearly killing each other out of remorse” (39). Rather than being frustrated by their reluctance, the Prophet of God partook in the ritual encouraging his followers to do the same, demonstrating the benevolence Muhammad had established within his community. Ultimately, another critical aspect of Muhammad’s relationship with his community was the benevolence he established, by valuing the opinion of those who idolized him and equally partaking in rituals with his followers.

Throughout the excerpts, Ibn Rāshid reveals the early Muslim community’s evolving view of Muhammad as a divine figure. In the text, Ibn Rāshid reveals that the early Muslim community viewed Muhammad as a militaristic, and political figure, “But we are ready to fight whoever stands between us and the Sacred House” (27). The community’s loyalty to Muhammad led them to initially develop a militaristic, and political view of Muhammad. However, through the excerpts, it is evident that Muhammad’s community evolved to view Muhammad as a true divine figure, “Listen, man! He is indeed the Messenger of God!” (Ibn Rāshid 39). The transformation of the early Muslim community from viewing Muhammad as a militaristic, and political figure to a divine figure reveals the success that Muhammad and his community achieved through their militaristic campaigns, shifting the early Muslim community’s view of Muhammad. According to Ibn Rāshid, ““The war between us and them has been a stalemate, I

said” (47). In the excerpt, Heraclius, a seer, and emperor, questions Abū Sufyān, who is described as being “the closest relative of this man who claims he is a prophet,” (Ibn Rashid 45), mentions that in battles with Muhammad and his community, they fared even compared to Abū Sufyān’s community, which reveals how the community came to shift their view of Muhammad, through every successful conflict, or stalemate, the community increasingly believed through the Prophet of God, God was on their side, leading the community to evolve their view of Muhammad as a divine figure, the Prophet of God.

However, certain factors such as bias and interpretation may have influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid’s text. An explicit example of how bias influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid’s text is, “When he reached the pool of al-Ashtāt . . . they’ve gathered some hired troops and several bands of men to oppose you” (27). It is evident from the excerpts, that Ibn Rāshid not only wrote the biography through bias toward Muhammad but to the extent of his community as well. The supporting evidence portrays Muhammad and his community as the protagonists, and the pagan tribe of Mecca, the Quraysh, as the antagonists. Thus, certain readers may be influenced by Ibn Rāshid’s bias to believe that Muhammad and his community were oppressed, and the Quraysh were the oppressors, however, upon a deep analysis of the Hdaybiya Agreement, and Ibn Rāshid’s text itself, one could develop an opposing perspective that Muhammad and his community were the true antagonists. Ibn Rāshid hints at the opposing perspective in his text where Muhammad threatens violence upon the Quraysh people and territory, “I will not hesitate to fight against them for the sake of this cause of mine” (29). Ultimately, the factor of bias may have influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid’s text since the excerpts project Muhammad and his community as the protagonists and the Quraysh as the antagonists.

In addition, another factor that may have influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid's text is interpretation. Throughout the excerpts, it is not only evident but a rationale as to why Ibn Rāshid did not base his biography of Muhammad entirely on his account, but rather on multiple accounts of others around the time of Muhammad. In the introduction section of Ibn Rāshid's biography, it is stated that "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" (XXI). Early Muslim tradition explains why the excerpts contain various accounts of others, rather than Ibn Rāshid's alone. However, valid questions come into play regarding Ibn Rāshid's interpretation of others' accounts in the construction of his text since various factors come into play. Did Ibn Rāshid potentially sensationalize any accounts of others? How well did the other sources remember their accounts since the biography was written after Muhammad's time? Ultimately, interpretation is another critical factor that may have influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid's text due to the various accounts of others.

To this end, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's commanding relationship with his community by proving a Quraysh perspective on Muhammad and his community, as well as providing an exemplary instance in which Muhammad demonstrates his commanding nature. Additionally, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's benevolent relationship with his community, through Muhammad's actions of selfness and piety. Ibn Rāshid also presents the early Muslim community's evolving view of Muhammad, which was initially viewed as a militaristic, and political figure, but evolved to a divine figure, through the success the community saw, which increasingly made them believe that Muhammad was the Prophet of God and that they had God on their side when it pertained to religious, political, and more importantly militaristic success against others who opposed the oneness of God, or to a lesser extent monotheism. However, the

pro-Muhammad and pro-Muslim community bias, as well as Ibn Rāshid's interpretation of other accounts, may have influenced the composition of the text. Ultimately, in the excerpts of the biography, Ibn Rāshid presents Muhammad's commanding, yet, benevolent relationship with his community, as well as the early Muslim community's evolving view of Muhammad as a divine figure, nonetheless, like many other accounts of Muhammad's life, his early community, and movement, certain factors such as bias and interpretation, may have influenced the composition of Ibn Rāshid's text.

Works Cited

Ibn Rāshid, Ma‘mar. *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muhammad*. New York

University Press, 2014. pp. XV-XXXVII, 27-49.

<https://gauchospace.ucsb.edu/courses/mod/resource/view.php?id=2606785>.

Accessed 6 October 2022.