

Abū ‘Umar Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Barr (368/978–463/1071)

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr was born in Cordoba and spent his entire life studying and teaching in Andalusia, including 23 years as a judge in Lisbon. Orphaned at age 12, he benefitted from his father’s personal library and respected reputation as a scholar. He is primarily remembered as a master traditionist (*ḥāfiẓ*) and an expert in the science of hadith transmitters (*‘ilm al-rijāl*). His expertise also extended, however, to other disciplines, such as law, history, Qur’ānic recitation, and genealogy. He played an instrumental role in the transmission of hadith books in Andalusia. During his lifetime, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr was regarded as a scholar of hadith and hadith transmitters *par excellence*, attracting students from far and wide to the point where students would brag about having acquired a chain of transmission from him. Although widely known as a scholar of Mālikī law, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr began his career as a Zāhirī, a now defunct school of law whose distinctive doctrine was based on a rejection of all methods of legal reasoning that justified departure from revelation’s plain sense. After he became convinced of the validity of legal analogy (*qiyās*), however, a doctrine the Zāhirīs rejected, he converted to Mālikism and authored highly regarded works of law within the Mālikī school, such as *al-Kāfi fī fiqh ahl al-Madīna*. His independent-mindedness, and his continued predisposition to favor hadith-based legal reasoning, however, is evidenced by his tendency to prefer at times opinions of other legal schools, particularly the relatively more hadith-friendly Shāfi‘īs.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s commentaries on the *Muwatta’* earned him unanimous recognition by posterity as a hadith scholar of the highest calibre. The most famous and in-depth of his works in this genre is *al-Tamhīd li-mā fī l-Muwatta’ min al-ma‘ānī wa-l-asānīd* (“The Introduction to the meanings and chains of transmission contained in the *Muwatta’*”), which in some editions reaches 26 volumes. The *Tamhīd* focuses only on the 853 prophetic reports of the *Muwatta’*. In it, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr remarks on the difficult and time-consuming nature of the study of chains of transmission. But because Mālik’s transmissions are authentic, he continues, one could save himself the exhaustion that comes with searching for reliable chains of transmissions by limiting himself to Mālik’s collection. After a lengthy introduction on the science of chains of transmission, the author justifies Mālik’s use of *mursal* reports (those omitting the name of the Companion who originally narrated the report from the Prophet) and defends their normativity when the individual closest in the chain to the Prophet is reliable. Additionally, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr comments on the chains of transmission in the *Muwatta’* and provides legal and doctrinal glosses on the hadiths. The *Tamhīd* was Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s (successful) attempt to establish the *Muwatta’*’s authenticity and canonical status alongside the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875). He did so by mustering parallel, uninterrupted chains of transmission for the truncated chains of transmission that Mālik provided in the *Muwatta’* in order to bolster confidence in those in the *Muwatta’* and demonstrate their authenticity. Ultimately, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr located complete chains of transmission for all but four hadiths cited in the *Muwatta’*, though Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) furnished complete chains for the remainder two centuries later. By virtue of these efforts, the 18th century Egyptian commentator on the *Muwatta’*, ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Bāqī al-Zurqānī (d. 1710) could say, “The truth is that [all the Prophetic reports in] the *Muwatta’* are *ṣaḥīḥ* [authentic] with no exceptions.”

The second of his commentaries on the *Muwatta’*, *al-Taqaṣṣī li-mā fī al-Muwatta’ min ḥadīth al-nabī* (“The deep investigation of the *Muwatta’*’s prophetic hadiths”) (a.k.a. *Tajrīd al-tamhīd*,

“The condensation of the *Tamhīd*”), also falls under the genre of hadith studies. It is a condensed version of the *Tamhīd* that is meant to be more accessible and used alongside it. In both the *Tamhīd* and the *Taqāṣṣī*, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr remarks that he relied on Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī’s recension of the *Muwaṭṭa’* because of the reverence in which Yaḥyā was held amongst Andalusian scholars, and due to his recension’s widespread circulation.

Al-Istidhkār li-madhāhib al-amṣār fī mā taḍammanahu al-Muwaṭṭa’ min ma ‘ānī al-ra’y wa-l-āthār (“Reciting the legal doctrines of the various cities concerning the legal contents of the *Muwaṭṭa’* and its legal precedents”) is Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s third commentary on the *Muwaṭṭa’*. It is a voluminous, encyclopedic work of comparative law organized according to Yaḥyā’s recension of the *Muwaṭṭa’*, and preserves thousands of legal opinions belonging to Companions, Successors, and other early Muslim jurists.

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