

The History of al-Ṭabarī

VOLUME VI

Muḥammad at Mecca



TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY
W. MONTGOMERY WATT AND M. V. McDONALD

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The sixth volume of the translation of al-Ṭabarī's *History* deals with the ancestors of Muhammad, with his own early life, and then with his prophetic mission up to the time of his Hijrah or emigration to Medina. The topics covered mean that this volume is of great importance both for the career of Muhammad himself and for the early history of Islam. Al-Ṭabarī was familiar with, and made use of, the main early source of these matters, the *Sirah* or life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishāq, a work which is still extant. Although his own treatment is briefer than that of Ibn Ishāq, it complements the latter in important ways by making use of other sources. Where Ibn Ishāq gave only the version of an event which he preferred, al-Ṭabarī includes any variants which he considered of value. Thus he mentions the dispute about the first male to become a Muslim—'Ali or Abu Bakr or Zayd—and has also several variant accounts of the call to be a prophet. He has much material, too, about the hostility toward Muhammad from many of the leading Meccans and their attempts to put pressure on his family to stop his preaching. The negotiations with the men of Medina which eventually led to the Hijrah are fully described, and there is then an account of how Muhammad escaped an assassination attempt and arrived safely in Medina. A concluding section discusses some chronological questions. This volume does not merely give a straightforward account of the earlier career of Muhammad and the beginnings of Islam, but also contains valuable source-material not easily accessible otherwise, or not accessible at all.

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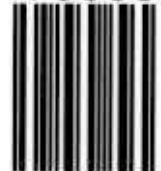
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The History of al-Tabarī
(Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)

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Then he passed Moses again, who said, "Go back to your Lord and ask him to lighten the burden further." This continued until he had gone back five times. Once more Moses said, "Go back to your Lord and ask him to lighten the burden," but the Messenger of God said, "I am not going back, although I do not wish to disobey you," for it had been put into his heart that he should not go back. God said, "My speech is not to be changed, and my decision and precept is not to be reversed, but he (Muḥammad) lightened the burden of prayer on my community to a tenth of what it was at first."¹²⁸

Anas: I never encountered any scent, not even the scent of a bride, more fragrant than the skin of the Messenger of God. I pressed my skin to his and smelt it.

The First Male to Believe in the Messenger of God

'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib

Abū Ja'far (al-Ṭabarī): There is a difference of opinion among the early scholars as to who after his wife Khadījah bt. Khuwaylid first followed the Messenger of God, believed in him, held true the message which he brought from God, and prayed with him. Some say that the first male to believe in the Messenger of God, pray with him, and hold the truth of the message which he brought from God was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

Among those who take this view, whose reports we have heard, are the following:

[1160] Ibn Humayd—Ibrāhīm b. al-Mukhtār—Shu'bah—Abū Balj—'Amr b. Maymūn—Ibn 'Abbās: The first to perform the prayer was 'Alī.

Zakariyyā b. Yaḥyā al-Ḍarīr—'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Baḥr—Sharīk b. 'Abdallah b. Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl—Jābir: The Prophet was commissioned as prophet on Monday, and 'Alī performed the prayer on Tuesday.

Ibn al-Muthannā—Muḥammad b. Ja'far—Shu'bah—'Amr b. Murrah—Abū Ḥamzah—Zayd b. Arqam: The first to accept Is-

¹²⁸. Literally, this runs: "he lightened the prayer for my community to a tenth." The translation adopted assumes that these words are a continuation of the speech of God, and seems to make best sense of "my"; but there are other possibilities.

lam with the Messenger of God was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. I mentioned this to al-Nakha'ī, and he denied it, saying, "Abū Bakr was the first to accept Islam."

Abū Kurayb—Wakī'—Shu'bah—'Amr b. Murrah—Abū Ḥamzah the *mawlā* of the Anṣār—Zayd b. Arqam: The first to accept Islam with the Messenger of God was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

Abu Kurayb—'Ubayd b. Sa'īd—Shu'bah—'Amr b. Murrah—Abū Ḥamzah, a man of the Anṣār—Zayd b. Arqam: The first to perform the prayer with the Messenger of God was 'Alī.

Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Tirmidhī—'Ubaydallāh b. Mūsā—al-'Alā'—al-Minhāl b. 'Amr—'Abbād b. 'Abdallāh: I heard 'Alī saying, "I am the servant of God and the brother of his Messenger, and I am the most righteous one (*al-ṣiddīq al-akbar*).¹²⁹ No one other than I can say this but a liar and an inventor of falsehoods. I performed the prayer with the Messenger of God seven years before other men.

Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd al-Muḥāribī—Sa'īd b. Khuthaym—Asad b. 'Abdah al-Baljī—Yaḥyā b. 'Afīf—'Afīf: During the Jāhiliyyah I came to Mecca and stayed with al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. When the sun came up and rose into the sky, while I was looking at the Ka'bah a young man came up and gazed at the sky. Then he turned to face the Ka'bah and stood facing it. Soon afterwards a youth came and stood on his right, and soon after that a woman came and stood behind them. The young man bowed, and the youth and woman bowed; then the young man stood erect, followed by the youth and the woman, and then the young man prostrated himself, and they did so with him. I said, "'Abbās, this is a weighty matter." "It is a weighty matter indeed," he said. "Do you know who this is?" "No", I said. "This is Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, my brother's son," he said. "Do you know who this is with him?" "No," I said. "This is 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, my brother's son," he said. "Do you know who this woman is who is behind them?" "No," I said. "This is Khadījah bt. Khuwaylid, my nephew's wife," he said "My nephew has told me that his Lord,¹³⁰ the Lord of Heaven, has commanded them to do what you see them doing. God's oath, I do not

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129. This is an implicit claim that 'Alī is superior to Abū Bakr, since "the righteous one" (*al-ṣiddīq*) is a kind of by-name regularly given to Abū Bakr by Sunnites.

130. Following the variant *rabbahu* instead of the *rabbaka* of the printed text.

know anyone on the face of the earth but these three who follow this religion."

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Abū Kurayb—Yūnus b. Bukayr—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Ash'ath al-Kindī, a Kūfan scholar—Ismā'īl b. Iyās b. 'Afīf—his father—his grandfather:¹³¹ I was a merchant, and I came during the pilgrimage and stayed with al-'Abbās. While we were with him, a man came out to pray and stood facing the Ka'bah. Then a woman came out and stood praying with him, followed by a youth who stood praying with him. I said, "'Abbās, what is this religion? I do not know what this religion is." He answered, "This is Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh, who claims that God has sent him as His Messenger with this (religion), and that the treasures of Chusroes and Caesar will be given to him by conquest. This woman is his wife Khadījah bt. Khuwaylid, who has believed in him, and this youth is his cousin 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, who has believed in him."

'Afīf: Would that I had believed in him that day, so that I had been the third.

[II63]

Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah b. al-Faḍl and 'Alī b. Mujāhid: (then) Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Ash'ath (Abū Ja'far (al-Ṭabari): elsewhere in my book the name is given as Yaḥyā b. al-Ash'ath)—Ismā'īl b. Iyās b. 'Afīf al-Kindī ('Afīf was the maternal halfbrother of al-Ash'ath b. Qays al-Kindī, and the son of his paternal uncle)—his father—his grandfather, 'Afīf: Al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib was a friend of mine. He used to go to the Yemen to buy perfume and sell it during the pilgrimage season. While I was staying with al-'Abbaṣ b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib at Minā there came to him a man in the prime of life who performed the ritual ablution thoroughly and then stood praying. Then a woman came out, performed the ablution, and stood praying. Then a youth just past the age of puberty came out, performed the ablution, and stood by his side praying. I said, "Whatever is this, 'Abbās" He replied, "This is my brother's son Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who claims that God has sent him as a messenger; this is my brother's son 'Alī b. Abī Tālib who has followed him in his religion, and this is Muḥammad's wife Khadījah bt. Khuwaylid who has followed him in his religion." After 'Afīf had become a

131. This and the following paragraph are omitted by Ibn Hishām. See Guillaume, p.113.

Muslim and Islam had become firmly rooted in his heart, he used to say, "Would that I had been a fourth."

Ibn Humayd—'Īsā b. Sawādah b. al-Ja'd—Muḥammad b. al-Munkadir, Rabī'ah b. Abī 'Abd al-Rahmān, Abū Ḥāzim al-Madanī and al-Kalbī: 'Alī was the first to accept Islam. According to al-Kalbī, he accepted Islam at the age of nine.

Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Ibn Ishāq:¹³² The first male to believe in the Messenger of God, to pray with him, and to accept the truth of the message he brought from God was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who at that time was ten years old.

One of the favors which God bestowed on 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was that the Messenger of God was his guardian before Islam.

Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—'Abdallaḥ b. Abī Najīh—Mujāhid b. Jabr Abū al-Ḥajjāj: A mark of God's favor to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his beneficence and benevolence towards him was the following. When Quraysh were afflicted by a severe drought, the Messenger of God, seeing that Abū Ṭālib had many dependents, said to his uncle al-'Abbās, who was one of the richest of the Banū Hāshim, "'Abbās, your brother Abū Ṭālib has many dependents, and you see how people are suffering from this drought. Come with me and let us lighten the burden of his dependents. I will take one of his sons and you take one, and we will look after them for him." Al-'Abbās agreed, and they went to Abū Ṭālib and said, "We wish to lighten the burden of your dependents until the hardship from which the people are suffering lifts."

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Abū Ṭālib said to them, "As long as you leave me 'Aqīl, do as you wish." The Messenger of God took 'Alī and made him a member of his household, and al-'Abbās did likewise with Ja'far. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib continued to live with the Messenger of God until the latter became a prophet, and then followed him, believed in him, and accepted the truth of his message. Ja'far remained with al-'Abbās until he (Ja'far) professed Islam and became financially independent of him.

Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq: Some scholars mention that when the time for prayer came, the Messenger of God would go out to the ravines of Mecca, accompanied by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, in order to conceal himself from his uncle Abū Ṭālib,

132. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 158-60.

his other uncles, and the rest of his clan. They would pray together there, and then as evening fell, would return. They continued in this fashion as long as God willed that they should. One day, however, Abū Ṭālib came across them as they were praying and said to the Messenger of God, "Nephew, what is this religion which I see you following?" He replied, "Uncle, this is the religion of God, of His angels, of His messengers and of our forefather Abraham," or words to that effect; "God has sent me as Messenger to His servants with this religion, and you, my uncle, are the most deserving person to whom I could give sincere advice and whom I could summon to right guidance, and you are the most deserving person to answer my call and assist me in this matter," or words to this effect. Abū Ṭālib replied, "Nephew, I cannot leave my religion and the religion of my forefathers and their practices, but, by God, as long as I live nothing unpleasant shall befall you."

[1165] Ibn Humayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq: They allege that he said to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, "My son, what is this religion which I see you practicing?" He replied, "Father, I believe in God and His Messenger. I accept the truth of the message which he has brought, and I pray to God with him." They also allege that Abū Ṭālib said "He calls you to nothing but good, so adhere to him."

Al-Ḥārith—Ibn Sa'd—Muḥammad b. 'Umar—Ibrāhīm b. Nāfi'—Ibn Abī Najīh—Mujāhid: 'Alī became a Muslim when he was ten years old.

Al-Ḥārith—Ibn Sa'd—al-Wāqidi: Our fellow scholars are agreed that 'Alī accepted Islam a year after the Messenger of God began his prophetic mission, and that he remained in Mecca for twelve years.

Abū Bakr

Others say that Abū Bakr was the first male to accept Islam.

Those who say this:

Sahl b. Mūsā al-Rāzī—'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maghrā,—Mujālid—al-Sha'bī: I said to Ibn 'Abbās, "Who was the first to accept Islam?" He answered, "Have you not heard the lines of Ḥassān b. Thābit,¹³³

If you call to mind trustworthy men to grieve for them,
mention your brother Abū Bakr and his deeds.

133. *Dīwān*, ed. Arafat, I:125.

The best of men, the most pious and the most just
after the Prophet, and the most faithful in fulfilling
what he undertook.

The second, the follower, may his tomb be praised,
and the first of men to believe in the prophets.

Sa'īd b. 'Anbasah al-Rāzī—al-Haytham b. 'Adī—Mujālid—al-Sha'bī—Ibn 'Abbās: A similar account. [1166]

Ibn Ḥumayd—Yaḥyā b. Wāḍiḥ—al-Haytham b. 'Adī—Mujālid—al-Sha'bī—Ibn 'Abbās: A similar account.

Baḥr b. Naṣr al-Khawlānī—'Abdallāh b. Wahb—Mu'awiyah b. Ṣāliḥ—Abū Yaḥyā and Ḍamrah b. Ḥabīb and Abū Ṭalhah—Abū Umānah al-Bāhilī—'Amr b. 'Abasah: I came to the Messenger of God when he was staying at 'Ukāẓ¹³⁴ and said, "O Messenger of God, who has followed you in this religion?" He replied, "Two men have followed me in it, a free man and a slave; Abū Bakr and Bilāl." Then I accepted Islam and reckoned myself at that time to be one quarter of those who believe in Islam.

Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Barqī—'Amr b. Abī Salamah—Ṣadaqah—Naṣr b. 'Alqamah—his brother—Ibn 'Ā'idh—Jubayr b. Nufayr: Both Abū Dharr and Ibn 'Abasah used to say, "I reckoned myself to be a quarter of those who believed in Islam, for no one had accepted Islam before me but the Prophet, Abū Bakr and Bilāl." Neither knew when the other accepted Islam.

Ibn Ḥumayd—Jarīr—Mughīrah—Ibrāhīm: The first to accept Islam was Abū Bakr.

Abū Kurayb—Wakī'—Shu'bah—'Amr b. Murrah—Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī: Abū Bakr was the first to accept Islam.

Others say that a number of people accepted Islam before Abū Bakr.

Those who say this: Ibn Ḥumayd—Kinānah b. Jabalah—Ibrāhīm b. Ṭahmān—al-Ḥajjāj b. al-Ḥajjāj—Qatādah—Sālim b. Abī al-Ja'd—Muḥammad b. Sa'd: I said to my father, "Was Abū Bakr the first of them to accept Islam?" He answered, "No, more than fifty people accepted Islam before him, but he was the best Muslim among us." [1167]

134. Site of an annual fair, lying between Nakhlah and al-Ṭā'if.

Zayd b. Hārithah

Others say that the first man to believe and follow the Prophet was Zayd b. Hārithah, his *mawlā*.

Those who say this:

Al-Hārith—Muḥammad b. Sa'd—al-Wāqidī—Ibn Abī Dhi'b: I asked al-Zuhrī who was the first person to accept Islam. He replied, "The first woman was Khadijah and the first man was Zayd b. Hārithah."

Al-Hārith—Muḥammad b. Sa'd—Muḥammad b. 'Umar—Mus'ab b. Thābit—Abū al-Aswad—Sulaymān b. Yasār: The first to accept Islam was Zayd b. Hārithah.

Al-Hārith—Muḥammad b. Sa'd—Muḥammad (that is Ibn 'Umar)—Rabī'ah b. 'Uthmān—'Imrān b. Abī Anas: A similar report.

'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Hakam—'Abd al-Malik b. Maslamah—Ibn Lahī'ah—Abū al-Aswad—'Urwah: The first to accept Islam was Zayd b. Hārithah.

*Ibn Ishāq's account*¹³⁵

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Ibn Ishāq's account, as transmitted by Ibn Humayd—Salamah, is as follows: Then Zayd b. Hārithah, the *mawlā* of the Messenger of God, accepted Islam. He was the first male to accept Islam and to pray after 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Then Abū Bakr b. Abī Quḥāfah al-Ṣiddīq accepted Islam. When he did so, he proclaimed this openly and summoned others to God and to his Messenger. He was well-liked among his tribe, popular and easy to get on with. He was also the most expert of Quraysh on the genealogy of the tribe and the best informed of them about their good and bad qualities. He was a merchant, upright and well-known, and, for various purposes, the men of his tribe used to come to him and associate with him because of his knowledge, his commercial skill, and the excellence

135. The passage from al-Wāqidī has not been located. That from Ibn Ishāq is Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 160. Zayd b. Hārithah had been captured in war as a boy and sold as a slave to Khadijah. When Muḥammad freed him, he would become his "client" (*mawlā*). Usually, however, he is called Muḥammad's "adoptive son," and is even said to have been named Zayd b. Muḥammad. This "adoption" was presumably not like that practiced in the West, but some kind of social usage about which we are not fully informed, perhaps due to the fact that Zayd chose to remain with Muḥammad and Khadijah. This question became important when Muḥammad married Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh after Zayd had divorced her; see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 282, 329-31.

of his company. He began to summon to Islam trustworthy members of his tribe who came and joined in his social gatherings. I have heard that 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Awf, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ and Ṭalḥah b. 'Ubaydallāh accepted Islam at his hands. When they responded to his summons, he took them to the Messenger of God, where they accepted Islam and joined in the prayer. These eight men were the first group to accept Islam, to pray, to accept the truth of his message, and to believe in the revelation which he brought from God. After that, people entered Islam in unbroken succession, both men and women, until Islam became a general topic of conversation in Mecca and everyone talked of it.

Al-Wāqidī's account

Al-Wāqidī's account, as transmitted by al-Hārith—Ibn Sa'd, is as follows: Our fellow scholars are agreed that the first of the people of the Qiblah to respond to the Messenger of God's call was Khadijah bt. Khuwaylid. After this, there is a difference of opinion among us as to which of three men, Abū Bakr, 'Alī, and Zayd b. Hārithah, was the first to accept Islam. Khālid b. Sa'īd b. al-'Ās accepted Islam with them and made a fifth. According to some Abū Dharr accepted Islam fourth or fifth, while 'Amr b. 'Abasah al-Sulamī accepted Islam fourth or fifth according to others. There is a difference of opinion among us as to which of these men accepted Islam first and there are many accounts concern- [1169] ing this. There are disagreements about the first three and about those whose names we have given after them.

Al-Hārith—Ibn Sa'd—Muḥammad b. 'Umar—Mus'ab b. Thābit—Abū al-Aswad Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Nawfal: Al-Zubayr became a Muslim after Abū Bakr and he was the fourth or fifth.

Ibn Ishāq: Khālid b. Sa'īd b. al-'Ās and his wife Humaynah bt. Khalaf b. As'ad b. 'Āmir b. Bayādah of Khuzā'ah became Muslims after a large number of people other than those whom I have mentioned by name as being early converts to Islam.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 164. It is not clear why Ṭabarī has selected these two names from a list of early Muslims given by Ibn Ishāq.