

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-Tabarī'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-Tabarī 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-Tabarī 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.

SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies
Said Amir Arjomand, Editor

SUNY
P R E S S
State University of
New York Press
www.sunypress.edu

ISBN 0-88706-707-7



9 780887 067075





Bibliotheca Persica

Edited by Ehsan Yar-Shater

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(Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)

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The preparation of this volume was made possible by a grant from the Division of Research Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency.

Published by

State University of New York Press, Albany

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Printed in the United States of America

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For information, address State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, N. Y. 12246

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Ṭabarī, 838?–923.

Muḥammad at Mecca

(The history of al-Ṭabarī=Ṭa'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk; v. 6) (SUNY series in Near Eastern studies) (Bibliotheca Persica)

Translation of extracts from: Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Muhammad, Prophet, d. 632. 2. Muslims—Saudi Arabia—Biography. I. Watt, W. Montgomery (William Montgomery)

II. McDonald, M. V. (Michael V.) III. Title. IV. Series:

Ṭabarī, 838?–923. Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk.

English; v. 6. V. Series: SUNY series in Near Eastern studies. VI. Series: Bibliotheca Persica (Albany, N.Y.)

DS 38.2.T 313 1985 vol. 6 [BP 77.4] 909'.1 s 87-17949

ISBN 0-88706-706-9

ISBN 0-88706-707-7 (pbk.)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Abī Waqqāṣ struck one of the polytheists with a camel's jawbone and split his head open. This was the first blood shed in the time of Islam.

[1170]

Abū Kurayb and Abū al-Sā'ib—Abū Mu'āwiyah—al-A'mash—'Amr b. Murrah—Sa'id b. Jubayr—Ibn 'Abbās: One day the Messenger of God mounted al-Ṣafā and called out, "Beware this morning!" Quraysh gathered around him and said, "What is the matter?" Then he said, "If I were to tell you that the enemy would come upon you this morning or this evening, would you believe me?" "Certainly," they replied. He said, "I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible doom." Then Abū Lahab said, "May you perish! Did you call us together for this?" Then God revealed: "The power of Abū Lahab will perish and he will perish" ... reciting to the end of the sūrah.¹⁴⁰

Abū Kurayb—Abū Usāmah—al-A'mash—'Amr b. Murrah—Sa'id b. Jubayr—Ibn 'Abbās: When God revealed the verse, "and warn your tribe of near kindred," the Messenger of God went out, mounted al-Ṣafā, and called out, "Beware this morning!" Some said, "Who is that calling out?" and others said, "It is Muḥammad." Then he said, "Banū so-and-so, Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Banū 'Abd Manāf!" They gathered round him, and he said, "If I were to tell you that horsemen were coming out at the foot of that mountain, would you believe me?" They replied, "We have never known you to tell a lie." Then he said, "I am 'a warner to you in the face of a terrible doom.'" Abū Lahab said, "May you perish! Did you only bring us together for this?" Then the following sūrah was revealed: "The power of Abū Lahab will perish, and he will perish ... " reciting to the end of the sūrah.

Ibn Humayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—'Abd al-Ghaffār b. al-Qāsim—al-Minhāl b. 'Amr—'Abdallāh b. al-Hārith b. Nawfal b. al-Hārith b. 'Abd al-Muttalib—'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās—'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib:¹⁴¹ When the verse "and warn your tribe of near kindred" was revealed to the Messenger of God, he called me and said to me, "'Alī, God has commanded me to warn my tribe of near

[1171]

140. Abū Lahab was the uncle of Muḥammad who succeeded Abū Ṭālib as chief of the clan of Hāshim, and then refused to continue to let Muḥammad have the protection of the clan. It was probably at that time that Sūrah III was revealed and not on the occasion described here. The verses quoted are 34:46 and 111:1-5.

141. This section is omitted by Ibn Hishām.

kindred. I was troubled by this, for I knew that when I broached the matter to them they would respond in a way which I would not like. I kept silent until Gabriel came to me and said, "Muḥammad, if you do not do what you are commanded, your Lord will punish you. So prepare a measure of wheat for us, add a leg of mutton to it, fill a large bowl of milk for us, and then assemble the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib for me so that I may speak to them and tell them what I have been commanded to tell them."

I did what he had told me to do and then called them to him. At that time they numbered forty men, more or less, including his uncles Abū Ṭālib, Ḥamzah, al-'Abbās, and Abū Lahab. When they had gathered together, he called on me to bring the food which I had prepared. I brought it, and when I put it down the Messenger of God took a piece of meat, broke it with his teeth, and threw it towards the dish. Then he said, "Take, in the name of God." They ate until they could eat no more, and yet the food was as it had been, except for where their hands had been. I swear by God, in whose hand 'Alī's soul rests, that a single man could have eaten the amount of food which I put before all of them. Then he said, "Give them something to drink," so I brought them that bowl and they drank from it until they had drunk their fill, and I swear by God that one man could have drunk that amount.¹⁴²

When the Messenger of God wanted to speak to them, Abū Lahab forestalled him and said, "Your host has long since bewitched you." Then they dispersed without the Messenger of God speaking to them. On the following day he said to me, 'Alī, this man forestalled me by saying what you heard him saying, so that the people dispersed before I could speak to them. Prepare the same food for us as you did yesterday, and assemble them here."

I did this, assembled them, and brought the food to them when he called me. He did as he had done the previous day, and they ate until they could eat no more. Then he said, "Bring the bowl," and they drank until they could drink no more. Then he spoke to them, saying, "Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I know of no young man among the Arabs who has brought his people something better than what I have brought to you. I bring you the best of this world

142. This is an example of the miracles invented for Muhammad by later Muslim scholars in order to refute the Christian argument that he could not be a prophet because he had performed no miracles.

and the next, for God has commanded me to summon you to him. Which of you will aid me in this matter, so that he will be my brother, my agent (*waṣī*) and my successor (*khalīfah*) among you?"

They all held back, and although I was the youngest and the most bleary-eyed,¹⁴³ pot-bellied, and spindly-legged of them, I said, "I will be your helper, Prophet of God." He put his hand on the back of my neck and said, "This is my brother, my agent, and my successor among you, so listen to him and obey him." They rose up laughing and saying to Abū Ṭālib, "He has commanded you to listen to your son and to obey him!"

[1173]

Zakariyyā' b. Yaḥyā al-Ḍarīr—'Affān b. Muslim—Abū 'Awānah—'Uthmān b. al-Mughīrah—Abū Ṣādiq—Rabī'ah b. Nājid: A man said to 'Alī, "Commander of the Faithful, how did you become the heir of your cousin to the exclusion of your paternal uncle?"¹⁴⁴ 'Alī said, "Ahem" three times until everybody craned their necks and pricked up their ears, and then said, "The Messenger of God assembled (or: invited) the whole of the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, including his own closest relatives, to eat a year-old lamb and to drink some milk.¹⁴⁵ He also prepared a quantity of wheat¹⁴⁶ for them, and they ate until they were full, while the food remained as it was, as though it had not been touched. Then he called for a drinking cup and they drank until they could drink no more, while the drink remained as though it had not been touched and they had not drunk.

"Then he said, 'Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I have been sent to all men in general and to you in particular. Now that you have seen what you have seen, which of you will swear an oath of allegiance to me to become my brother, my companion and my inheritor?' Not one of them rose up, so I stood before him, although I was the youngest there. He said. 'Sit down.' He repeated the words he had spoken three times, while I would rise up and would say to me, 'Sit down.' On the third occasion, he struck his hand on mine. In

143. The word *armaṣ* is literally "with eyes encrusted with matter."

144. This presumably refers to al-'Abbās, the ancestor of the 'Abbāsid dynasty.

145. Literally, "to drink a *farq*" which was a liquid measure used especially in al-Madinah.

146. Literally "a *mudd* of wheat," but it is impossible to say even approximately how much this was.

this way I became the heir of my cousin to the exclusion of my uncle."

[1174] Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—'Amr b. 'Ubayd—al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan: When the verse "and warn your tribe of near kindred" was revealed to the Messenger of God, he rose up in the Valley and said, "Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Banū 'Abd Manāf, Banū Quṣayy!" Then he named the various groups of Quraysh, clan by clan, until he had come to the last of them, and said, "I summon you to God and warn you of his punishment."

Al-Ḥārith—Ibn Sa'd—Muḥammad b. 'Umar—Jāriyah b. Abī 'Imrān—'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim—his father:¹⁴⁷ The Messenger of God was commanded to proclaim the divine message which he had received, to declare it publicly to the people, and to summon them to God.

147. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I:132.22-5.